

**How can the Icelandic primary school system meet the
needs of refugee children and support their learning and
development**

Anna Sigríður Sveinbjörnsdóttir



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Master of Philosophy in Special Needs Education
Department of Special Needs Education
Faculty of Educational Sciences

University of Oslo

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Abstract

The number of refugees arriving to Iceland over the past years has increased a lot, which has led to increased discussion in Iceland on how the country is managing to include refugee students in the school. The school can play an important role in helping the children to deal with their emotions and to establish meaningful connections in the new society, enabling and creating the children's sense of belonging. The study is a qualitative study based on the results of semi-structured interviews with children studying in Icelandic primary schools. The purpose of this study was to gain insight in how refugee children at primary level experience Icelandic schools. The main results of the study indicate that the children are happy at school, they feel like they have received good support at their school even though many of them struggle with certain topics, homework and learning the language. The results also show that children in welcoming classes are not as included with their Icelandic peers as the children in mainstream class and they seem to struggle more with establishing friendships with their Icelandic peers. However, many of the children in both groups had experienced bullying at school. The conclusion is that there is a need to change the structure of welcoming refugee children in Icelandic primary schools in order to make refugee children more included.

Key words: Refugee children, primary school, education, UN Convention on the Rights of the Child

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1 Introduction

The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), also known as the UN Refugee Agency, estimates that there are around 65.3 million people forcibly displaced around the world and among them 21.3 million are refugees, with half of this group under 18 years old. This means that one person in every 113 people on earth is either an asylum-seeker, internally displaced or a refugee (UNHCR, 2015). In less than 10 years, the number of child refugees under the UNHCR has more than doubled (Garin, Beise, Hug & You, 2016). Wars, persecution, violence, insecurity and poor living conditions are among the many reasons why people are driven away from their countries and in search for a better life for their families.

Children are always the first ones to be heavily affected by war, conflict, climate change and poverty (Garin et al., 2016). According to the European Commission's Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection department (ECHO) (ECHO Factsheet 2016), "*children are among the most vulnerable victims of conflict*" (p. 1) and according to Garin et al, (2016) the vulnerability is only getting worse. Not only do children go through a difficult process when they have to leave their home country but often with no or little idea why, nor for how long they will be gone for. These children are also at a greater risk of being abused or harmed. Many children experience extreme forms of abuse and deprivation when their lives are disrupted by the refugee experience (Garin et al., 2016; Yarrow, 2012) with countless numbers of children suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), with many suffering through the experiences of family separation, rape, abduction or trafficking. These experiences mark the children for life and reduce social stability and access to education (Yarrow, 2012).

Conflicts can have long-term psychosocial effects on children and it can be difficult for them to cope with the traumatic experiences (ECHO Factsheet, 2016). The school can play an invaluable role in helping the children deal with their emotions and to establish meaningful connections in the new society enabling and creating the children's sense of belonging (Bacáková & Closs, 2013). During the first years in the new country, the schools main role is to prepare the children for the new society, promote their wellbeing and help rebuild their

self-esteem in addition to providing them with a safe environment where they have the chance to interact with other children and establish new friendships (Pinson & Arnot, 2009).

The spotlight has mostly been on how Europe is going to manage the one million refugees and migrants who reached the European Union in 2015, while the majority of the people who have fled their homes are from developing countries in the global south. In contrast to other Scandinavian countries, Iceland has not been under the same pressure to take in refugees, mostly because of its geographical location. In 1956, Iceland ratified the United Nations Refugee Convention and in the same year received its first group of refugees. From 1956-2017, Iceland has accepted 645 quota refugees (Velferðarráðuneytið, n.da) and over the past two years, the number of refugees coming to the country has rapidly increased.

It states in the guidelines of the *Reception and Assistance of Refugees*, article 19, that teachers, as well as fellow students, should be educated about the culture of the refugees and the situation in their countries (Velferðarráðuneytið, 2013). Hanna Ragnarsdóttir.

(Hálfánardóttir, 2015) professor in Intercultural Studies, says that Icelandic teachers need more knowledge about cultural diversity; they have good knowledge about teaching but have no experience of teaching classes with students from different cultures. Similar cases of such problems have been seen in countries such as Czech Republic, a country which received their first refugees in 1990 but faced difficulties when teachers struggled to include refugee students into their mainstream curriculum. As such, refugee students in the Czech Republic are now classified as socially disadvantaged students and receive special needs education. (Bocáková & Closs, 2013) In the guidelines it additionally suggests that children should be taught in their native language and that they should be encouraged to maintain their native language and culture (Velferðarráðuneytið, 2013).

Many of the countries that have been receiving refugee children have been facing challenging situations on how to integrate these children in their schools. There have been several challenges in Britain related to schooling of refugee children. For example, refugee families with children have been placed in areas where no schools are located or the children have been sent to schools that have no resources to meet their educational needs and have little or no experience of receiving refugees (Pinson & Arnot, 2010). In Australia, a similar study investigating the experiences of former refugees when entering Australian high schools showed that many refugee children experienced difficulties in forming friendships, learning

the language and developing a sense of belonging. Many of the children felt excluded and isolated, they were laughed at, and felt ignored (Uptin, Wright & Harwood, 2013).

Over recent years there has been increased interest in Iceland on studying refugee families and their experiences of Icelandic society and schools (e.g Bjarnason, 2006; Ragnarsdóttir, 2007c), the views and experience of refugee children (Ottósdóttir & Wolimbwa, 2011) and how schools are adapting to an increasingly multicultural society with more diverse classes of children with different cultural backgrounds (e.g Jónsdóttir, 2005; Ragnarsdóttir 2007a). However, to date there is a gap in current research that primarily focuses on the refugee child's experience and perception of their new school, the school structure and their views on what and how improvements can be made. Preliminary research has shown that many refugee children in Icelandic schools have had trouble attaining Icelandic friends, they have tended to not participate in afterschool activities and many of them struggled with school since they thought the language was difficult to learn. Many students also reported they did not feel like they were part of the school community or the Icelandic community even if most of them said they were happy at school. Furthermore, many of the children had experience of being bullied at some point, mostly because of their language skills or race. This is similar to other international studies (e.g. Dreyden-Peterson, 2015; Fantino & Colack 2001) that have shown that children from a foreign origin tend to have lower self-esteem than their native peers because they do not feel like they are part of the school community. Several studies have shown that low self-esteem can lead to worse social and educational status (Bokáková & Closs, 2013; Kia-Keating & Ellis, 2007; Ottósdóttir & Wolimbwa, 2011).

When these children arrive at their final destination and start again in school it can be challenging but many refugee children have had gaps in their schooling since they often lack access to local schools while they stay in refugee camps. Some children might have had access to some kind of formal education when they are based in refugee camps but that is not always a good experience (Bacàková & Closs, 2013).

The schools are often the first point of contact refugee children get with other young people in the new country, and their first chance to create meaningful connections and gain a sense of belonging in the new society (Uptin, Wright & Harwood, 2012). The school can play a significant role in creating a respectful, welcoming environment and give the children their first chance of being part of the local community. Additionally, the school plays an important part in helping them to achieve a sense of belonging in the new society, as well as providing

the children an opportunity to develop their language skills, establish new friendships and give them opportunity to develop as normal children and youths. It is important to listen to the voices of the children to find out what could be done better when organizing the arrival of refugee children, both to make the schools more inclusive and better prepared and to help the children to become more engaged in social life/activities.

The main purpose of this study is to advance our knowledge of how refugee children at primary level experience Icelandic schools. The research is based on semi-structured interviews with children that study in primary schools in Iceland. It is assumed that the individuals themselves are best able to explain their wellbeing and circumstances and that children are active participants in their own lives. The study is therefore a contribution in improving our understanding of what is like to be a refugee child starting school in Iceland, and as a result will hopefully contribute to improvements in the integration process when including refugee children in mainstream Icelandic schools.

The research is divided into several chapters. First it will review the definitions and theoretical framework on the subject. Next the research design and methodology of the study will be explained. Thereafter the results of the research will be presented as well as discussions about them. Finally, the main implications of the research will be drawn together in the conclusion.

2 Definitions

There has been a great deal of confusion between who is considered a refugee and who is an asylum seeker. The following definitions provide a clear explanation on what is meant when using the terms ‘refugee’, ‘asylum seeker’ and ‘quota refugee’. In addition, the Icelandic quota system is clearly defined.

2.1 Refugee

After the Second World War, UNHCR was established to help millions of Europeans who had fled or lost their homes with the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees (UNHCR, 2011b; Rauði Krossinn, 2006). The purpose of the Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees is to provide individuals who do not receive protection from persecution in their home country the opportunity to seek protection in other countries (Rauði Krossinn, 2006). Since UNHCR was established, the number of refugees has increased significantly, due to major conflicts and natural disasters worldwide. Never in history has there been so many people forcibly displaced, due to war, conflicts and natural hazards with people forced to flee their homes due to their life and wellbeing in danger (O’Rourke, 2011). Even though refugees are a legally and constitutionally well-defined group of people, the label “refugee” involves diverse worlds of experience, but still it is not widely understood (Anderson, Hamilton, Moore, Loewen & Frater-Mathieson, 2004; Simich & Andermann, 2004).

In the Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees from 1951, a refugee is:

“Any person who is outside the country of his nationality, or if he does not have a nationality, the country of his former habitual residence because he has a well-founded fear of persecution by reason of his race, religion, nationality or political opinion and is unable or because of such fear unwilling to avail himself of the protection of the government of the country of his nationality, or if he has no nationality to return to the country of his former habitual residence”

The international community and individual nations have legal obligations to provide help to refugees under certain conditions but still refugees often face discrimination since they are not always trusted as individuals that deserve help from society. Fulfilling humanitarian obligations to refugees might be seen as a drain on the host countries resources, especially when that country is unprepared for forced migrants or if it regards some refugees as threats to its security. (Simich & Andermann, 2014).

2.2 Asylum seeker

There has been confusion regarding the difference of being an asylum seeker and a refugee. The term “asylum seeker” is usually reserved for a person who has sought international protection in another country and whose claim has not yet been evaluated. (BenDavid-Hadar, 2015; UNHCR, 2014). Since the Convention relating to the Status of Refugees in 1952, each nation has its own asylum system to decide if a person qualifies for international protection and gets the status of a refugee or not. If the system does not consider the person to be in danger or in need of international protection, the person must leave the country (BenDavid-Hadar, 2015; UNHCR, 2014).

The Icelandic interior ministry states “a person who requests asylum is defined as an asylum seeker until his/her application has been accepted by the authorities, by applying for asylum the person is asking the government for recognition of his/her status as a refugee” (Innanríkisráðuneytið, 2012, p.14).

2.3 Quota refugee

A quota refugee is an individual that has already fled their home country and obtained recognition of their position within UNHCR in another state but the person is not able to settle in the country nor return to his/her home country. UNHCR decides if there is a need to move these people to a third country and through UNHCR, quota refugees are invited by the

authorities of certain countries for international protection. The country that offers protectorate is often called the third country. The quota stands for the number of refugees that the state has decided to invite to the country.

When quota refugees come to Iceland there are two agreements concluded for the reception service, one with the municipality where the refugees will have residence and the other one is with the Icelandic Red Cross. The municipality and the Icelandic Red Cross collaborate and work together on how to help the refugees to settle in the new country, and soon after the arrival, the person gets the same rights as any other Icelandic. (Félagsráðgjafafélag Íslands, 2015).

2.3.1 The Icelandic quota system

Iceland has been part of UNHCR since 1996 but has received groups for resettlement since 1956. Iceland is among 27 countries that have made an agreement with UNHCR to receive groups of refugees every year, called quota refugees. The Icelandic Refugee Committee is responsible for the selection, admission and integration of refugees in Iceland with the cooperation of UNHCR. The Icelandic Red Cross represents UNHCR in Iceland. The Refugee Committee is comprised of members from the Ministry of the Interior, The Ministry of Welfare, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Icelandic Red Cross. (UNHCR 2011b; Rauði Krossinn, 2006).

Established in 1995, the main role of the Icelandic Refugee Board is to “make proposals to the government on an overall policy and structure for the reception of refugees, supervise the reception of refugees and give comments on individual matters as requested” (Velferðarráðuneytið, n.da).

The Ministry of Social Affairs makes an agreement with the Icelandic Red Cross and the local authority, regarding preparation and assistance during the first year for quota refugees. The local authorities organize a comprehensive program for the refugees for one year, in cooperation with The Red Cross and the Refugee Committee (Velferðarráðuneytið, n.da; Velferðarráðuneytið, n.db).

3 Theoretical framework

Here are the main definitions explained that are relevant to refugees in primary school age, the UN convention on the rights of the child, social integration and different school systems for asylum seekers in refugee camps and the effects fleeing can have on children and discussion of multicultural schools.

3.1 UN Convention on the Rights of the Child

“Refugee children are children first and foremost, and as children they need special attention.” (UNHCR, 1994)

Several definitions and conceptions exist of what a human right is but the global consensus is that human rights refer to freedom, justice and equality. The human rights are considered by most societies and should belong to all human beings, regardless of nationality, sex, ethnic origin, religion or any other status (BenDavid-Hadar, 2015; United Nations, 1948).

The Convention on the Rights of the Child that was adopted by the General Assembly of the UN in 1989 has two major principles; they are furtherance of the best interest of the child and non-discrimination. Children should have a guaranteed right to participate and give opinions, to exercise freedom of morality and to participate in the community life, through education, within the family and at school (UNESCO, 1995). Childhood is considered a special stage of life that entitles to special care and assistance, it is the time when the child should be fully prepared to live as an individual in society and also the time when children should enjoy the right to rest, play and engage in recreational activities (Carpeno & Feldman, 2015).

According to International and European laws, every child should have access to basic services that include healthcare, sanitation and education (UNICEF, 2016a). In 1989, the UN recognized the right to education of the children of refugees and asylum seekers in its Convention on the Rights of the Child (BenDavid-Hadar, 2015; Pinson, Arnot & Candappa., 2010). As it says in the Convention, every child should have equal access to educational opportunities, regardless of wealth or other factors. Education should nurture the development

of the child's personality, talents and mental and physical capabilities to their fullest potential. It also says that every child has the right to learn about their own cultural identity, language and values (Carpeno & Feldman, 2015). United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) have a duty to promote equality of opportunity and treatment for everybody in education and at the same time respect the diversity of national educational systems (UNESCO, 1960). Even though refugee children are probably the most vulnerable child groups in the world, their legal position has remained weak. The rights of refugees appears to be a field that has been hanging back in the development towards a growing acceptance of children as legal entities, the participation of children and children's right in general (Stang, 2012).

Children's rights should be independent of their status and circumstances. However, it is challenging with increased globalization. According to Pinson et al, (2010), globalization is the greatest threat for children in terms of their ability to access their rights under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), but millions of children have been forcibly displaced.

Arguably, education is one of the most important human rights and every child should have access to education, it enables children and youth to thrive. The right to the provision of quality education is an empowering one since it can help lift people out of poverty, improve their lives and give individuals the opportunity to participate fully in their communities. It is a nation shaping process with ongoing effect on economic and social changes, as well as its impact on sustainable development. Education can provide lifesaving knowledge and skills as well as psychosocial support to those affected by a crisis, helping to prepare them for a sustainable future (BenDavid-Hadar, 2015; United Nations, 1991). Education helps to reduce inequality and promotes gender equality, it empowers people to live more healthy and sustainable lives and it is an important key in both preventing conflict and rebuilding post-conflict societies (United Nations, n.d.).

3.2 Education on the run

With a rapidly growing number of forcibly displaced people, the demand for education grows while the resources in the countries that shelter them get worse. UNHCR has stated that

among the six million refugees of primary- and secondary school age, 3.7 million of these children do not have access to education and only 50 percent have access to primary education (UNHCR, 2016).

The youngest refugees face an uncertain future but UNHCR (2016) estimates that refugee children miss out three to four years of schooling because of forced displacement since most host countries do not have any formal legal or administrative laws for refugees accessing their national education system. It is challenging to run education programs in refugee camps since there are people from different places with different languages, cultures, traditions and religions (Yarrow, 2012). Quality education that provides personal capacity development as well as physical protection is not accessible for many of those children. Especially for those children with physical and cognitive disabilities or children that have been associated with armed forces being particularly vulnerable. (UNHCR, 2012a).

Little attention has been given on education in refugee camps and what kind of future these children will have (Yarrow, 2012). Children that are born in refugee camps are often not recognized as citizens and can become “stateless” and are in risk of losing the opportunity to education (Carpeno & Feldman, 2015). Refugee children lack access to education and in addition their educational achievements are seldom tracked through national monitoring systems, which leads to refugee children and youth becoming disadvantaged as well as their educational needs and achievements mostly remaining invisible (UNHCR, 2016).

Some schools have been able to divide the school day into shifts to be able to make more room for growing refugee students. However, the increased number of refugee students has grown so dramatically that there is not enough space for all the children. The Jordan Ministry of Education and UNICEF have worked together to provide formal education in the Za'tari refugee camp (the largest refugee camp in Jordan) but only 20 % of the boys and 14 % of the girls are attending school. Violence, harassment, verbal abuse and corporal punishment in the classroom by teachers and assistant teachers, insecurity about leaving the family for a few hours, language barriers, and crowded schools are a few of the many different reasons the children in the Za'tari camps mention when asked why they do not attend school. Even though the children report they want to attend school, different educational systems, transport costs, lack of funding to pay for textbooks and renovation of schools makes it difficult to encourage refugee students to attend the school. However, poverty, language, ethnicity and

gender also matter when it comes to whether or not the child has access to education in the host country (UNHCR, 2016; UNHCR, 2012; Schmidt, 2013)

3.3 Effects

Children and infants are usually the first ones to experience violence, diseases and malnutrition during wars, conflicts or environmental hazards. The lack of basic resources and the disruption of families, daily life and the community structure all pose a great risk to the physical and psychological well-being of refugee children (UNHCR, 1994). The well-being of the child is affected at all stages: before migration, during migration and after the final destination has been reached. The effects from fleeing can have serious effects on the physical, intellectual, psychosocial and cultural development of the person. The progress from when the decision is made to flee, up until when the individual has been granted refugee status and transferred to a safe place can take many years.

In the aftermath of a crisis and in search for solutions, the lack of daily life structure and loss of family or friends continues to harm children of all ages (UNHCR, 1994). The stay in transition camps can last for weeks up to many months and when a child experiences a lack of stability and safety and constant disruptions to familiar routines over months or years in the camps, it increases the risk of psychiatric morbidity, dysfunctional behavior patterns or incompetence in work, love or play (Frater-Mathieson, 2004). It usually takes a long time from the migrants claim to refugee status to the point where their case is closed. These long waiting times is hard for many people since they are particularly vulnerable with limited access to health care, social support, education or employment.

When refugees are forced to move due to being in situations where they fear for their lives, they often have little room for decision making when fleeing their homeland. Similarly, they usually have little chance of determining the country they wish to settle in (Parkins 2010). After they have fled their homes, many refugee children and their families need to live in refugee camps on a short-term or long-term basis. When they have been granted refugee status, according to the UNHCR, they will be provided protection in the receiving state where they will have to face a variety of new challenges. Many children lose their role models in a

refugee situation, the ones who contribute to the child's development of their identities and to their achievements of skills and values. The children's role in the family can also change where the child needs to take on responsibilities of an adult. Children are also in risk of "loosing" their culture and mother tongue when they come in contact with different cultures than their own (UNHCR, 1994).

Frater-Mathieson (2004) argues that the process of being forced to flee your home because of persecution or other dangerous events and the challenges of moving to new country is one of the most significant traumas and experiences of loss refugees face, and the one which dismantles the emotional, spiritual and physical connections with place. The process of displacement can have serious consequences on health of these children and research has shown that refugee children usually have worse mental health than local children. Diseases such as anxiety disorders, depression and traumatic stress order are common among refugee children that have lived with persistent stress, difficult conditions and/or experienced serious events (Reed, Fazel, Jones, Panter-Brick & Stein, 2012). However, not all young refugees will develop clinical symptoms as a result of trauma, but every refugee child will have experienced some degree of trauma in relation to their experiences of disrupted family, school and community life, multiple losses and the effects of war, as well as with respect to the ongoing and complex family reunification and resettlement issues they face in the new country (Frater-Mathieson, 2004).

Nevertheless, crises can have a serious impact on the subsequent development of a child throughout the life span, depending on the age of the child the crisis occurred (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). The experience of negative events can have a detrimental effect on the emotional and social development of the children as well as on their capacity to adapt to new conditions in a receiving state (Walsh, Este, Giurgiu & Krieg, 2011). For some children and young people the impact of these traumatic events can last over a lifetime, with symptoms manifesting at particular developmental stages or significant events in an individual's life (Frater-Mathieson, 2004). After a crisis, it is important that children get support from adults, not only for physical survival but also for their psychological and social well-being. Some refugee children that have spent a long time in the refugee camps can experience serious adaption problems when they finally leave the camps (UNHCR, 1994).

It is clear that forced migration has a wide impact on children and their families. Refugees are often seen as vulnerable and helpless persons, regardless of their home country or socio-

economic situation, with many refugees feeling that they are not seen as individuals, but as “the others” which underlines their vulnerability and helplessness (Olsen, El-Bialy, Mckelvie, Rauman & Brunger, 2016; Pinson et al., 2010). The power relations between the refugee and host countries can get so overwhelming that many migrants feel like they must accept the system as it is and just be thankful for what the new country can offer. Even when they experience that, they are not treated in the same way as other residents or being offered the same services as other residents (Olsen, et al., 2016; Jensdóttir, 2016).

How well people are able to achieve the task of successfully settling into a new place depends on several factors including pre-migration experiences, personal resources, social networks, contextual and cultural elements and potential ongoing stressors. Refugees will carry the effects and memories of pre-migration and trans-migrations experiences with them to the new home, where they will influence the individuals’ capacity to adapt to the new circumstances (Anderson, 2004b).

Children can however possess great strength and ability to adapt despite of difficult conditions as well as exhibiting a level of high resilience when dealing with difficulties. Many children have shown great abilities to recover from crisis, however it depends on the individual, their age and cognitive development as well as the severity of the crisis how the recovery process goes (Simich & Andermann, 2014). When providing support for the children after arriving to the new country it is important to not only focus on the clinical approaches but also on the social process, in order for the children to have the same resources to integrate with their peers and have equal opportunities to social participation (Stewart et al., 2008). In general, there are three things a child or adolescent needs for healthy psychological development; a sense of security, a supportive social network and opportunities to flourish and develop. However, the refugee experience can interfere with their psychological development because they lack the necessary foundation for safety and security to achieve emotional, cognitive and behavioral competence. For young people this can lead to delayed or complicated learning, cognitive – and identity development (Frater-Mathieson, 2004). It is the responsibility of the receiving countries to promote the right services and tools where the main aim is to make the process of adjusting to new country and participate in daily life as easy as possible. The attitude and understanding of the government on refugee children can act as an important foundation in order to provide effective services and adequate support for refugees (Stewart, et al., 2008; Watters 2008).

3.4 Multicultural schools

Societies around the world are developing more and more towards multicultural society and with increased globalization, no community can be independent or isolated (Ragnarsdóttir, 2007a; Ragnarsdóttir, 2007b). With increased migration waves and better communication technology, it is easier for people to receive and share up to date detailed and relevant information (BenDavid-Hadar, 2015).

In recent years, the word multiculturalism has been one of the fastest growing subject of research in Iceland. This can be considered a direct consequence of increased participation in the globalized contemporary process and the significant changes within Icelandic society. The term multiculturalism attempts to reflect positively on the increased diversity that characterizes the countries, and underlines that the society is composed of groups that come from different cultures. The term implies a certain recognition of this diversity and such recognition must be of particular importance within the school system (Loftsdóttir, 2007). With increased cultural diversity within education systems, the classrooms become more multicultural and multilingual where it is important to focus on building a bridge across the different cultural and linguistic pattern (Gundara, 2000a; Pinson, et al. 2010). It is a great challenge for the school community to understand and protect the values of diverse culture, language and traditions, and encourage the children to be proud of their background.

Even though some countries have experience in accommodating the special needs of refugee children, many education systems currently do not have special support systems in place to properly assist schools, refugee families and students in the process of adapting refugees to their new schools. It is important to know how to address their needs and how to create schools that are better prepared to meet their needs (Anderson, et al, 2004). Ragnarsdóttir (2007b) points out that Icelandic schools need to adapt to multiculturalism with focus on the diversity of students. The schools need to empower the minorities to participate in all school activities and improve marginalized students, but according to Ragnarsdóttir (2007d) it has been shown that many immigrant children are marginalized and they are generally not succeeding well in schools in various levels of the education system. The children are not thriving as individuals nor are they doing well in their studies. More countries seem to be dealing with the same issue but Australian research shows that non- Australians are more

likely to experience marginalization, educational disadvantage and fail school than their native peers (Rhea & Atkinson, 2010). However, it is important to note that some refugee populations may be marginalized not because they are struggling, but because they are beyond the levels of performance of the native students (Anderson et al., 2004).

Culture is an important factor for the development of each individual but participation in the society along with one's religion and language shapes cognitive development and way of thinking (Ragnarsdóttir, 2007b; Rogoff, 2003). Gundara (2000a; 2000b) argues for the importance of educating children about different values, especially in communities that are socially differentiated. However, it is not enough to teach them about different values but it is as important to implement and perform them in the school (Gundara, 2000b; Ragnarsdóttir, 2007a). As Ogbu (1995) points out, in many schools the main focus of multicultural education is on social integration, citizenships and raising the self-esteem rather than raising the academic achievement level of the minority groups.

4 Starting a new school

With the growing number of refugee children of school age around the world, refugee children are becoming an increasingly larger and more identifiable group in today's schools. However, research has shown that there has been generally little increase in educational or other specialized support for children that have experienced disrupted schooling (Anderson et al., 2004; Kanu, 2008; Pinson, et al., 2010). According to Pinson et al, (2010) there is also a research gap on education for refugee and asylum seekers children. Even though there is a great sociological interest in the role of education in relation to social discrimination and social exclusion there is very little attention given to education of one of the most socially and economically underprivileged and discriminated-against groups in the community (Pinson et al., 2010). The challenge of educating asylum seeking and refugee children is an issue for policy-makers and practitioners across Europe (Watters, 2011).

What children learn and how schools operate are matters that vary enormously from place to place and culture to culture. In some countries, schools are irreligious while in others religious authorities mostly manage them, the schools can be universal or limited to special group of children (Yarrow, 2012). The educational level of refugee children is highly variable - some children had the opportunity to go to school in their home country before they were forced to flee while others are born in refugee camps in a country that has little or no educational program for refugee children. Some refugee children might have had no formal education, language training or any experience with Western societies (Yarrow, 2012). Children with no former educational background are tremendously dependent on the school system for academic guidance, especially if their parents have had little or no exposure to formal education and may not be literate in any language (Yarrow, 2012). Various children coming from refugee camps might have never been in a formal classroom setting and it can feel very overwhelming to start school in a place where everything is different from what the child knows. The student might also lack basic literacy skills in his/her native language (Yarrow, 2012).

Several studies indicate that many young immigrants in Iceland are socially and educationally disadvantaged, and the school drop-out rate has been higher amongst migrants than among their Icelandic peers (Jónsson & Arnadóttir, 2012; Schubert, 2010). These students are often

facing learning difficulties and/or social difficulties at school. This group of students are often more vulnerable than other students, but many of them feel isolated from the rest of society since they do not share a similar culture, religion or language. Their parents often speak little or no Icelandic and often have little understanding of the society or Icelandic school system and are often less involved in school activities (Guðmundsdóttir, 2016; Loftsdóttir, 2007; Ragnarsdóttir, 2007c; Ragnarsdóttir, 2004a; Sigurðardóttir, 2005).

4.1 The primary school

The school system in Iceland is divided into four levels. The first level is preschool education, but laws define them as the first level of the educational system, providing education for children that have not reached six years of age. The second level is compulsory education, which is in a single structure system, that is primary and lower secondary education form a part of the same school level. The third level is upper secondary education, which is not compulsory but is open to anyone that has completed compulsory education has the right to enter a course of studies in an upper secondary school. The fourth and last level is higher education.

In Iceland, all children between the ages of six and sixteen years old are required to attend school. Parents do not pay for school attendance in normal compulsory schools or special needs schools. In the National Curriculum Guide for Pre-Schools, it is stated that preschools are for all children, all children have the same right to education regardless of race, residence, class, religion or disability, and all school activities should take into account the different personality, maturity, talent, ability and interest of the students. All children have the right to attend a school within their neighborhood, but they have the option of attending a different school if they choose so (Menntamálaráðuneytið, 2006).

After children have been awarded refugee status after the asylum process, they can go directly into the general education system and like other children they have the right to study at their neighborhood school. However, it is recommended that refugee children start in a so-called 'welcoming class' once they start their schooling. The schools that receive quota refugees should receive additional resources during the first year to be able to provide the required level of support for the students (Albertsdóttir, 2015).

All the schools have a reception plan they have to follow when they receive new students that have another mother tongue than Icelandic. The schools should adapt the program to each situation, but the number of foreign students in each school varies so each situation differs, but the reception plan for students with Icelandic as a second language should take into account their background, language skills and their skills in other fields (Alþingi, art. 17/2008; Reykjavíkurborg, n.d). Even though it is stated in Icelandic laws and in the Compulsory School Act that all children should have equal accessibility to education and the different needs of all children should be met, research has shown that many immigrant children have experienced difficulties at Icelandic schools (Hansen & Ragnarsdóttir, 2010). Icelandic preschools and compulsory schools are not all equally well prepared or equipped to receive immigrant children, however some schools have been developing policies and internal process concerning the new multicultural environment for teachers (Ragnarsdóttir, 2004b). The focus has however mainly been on teaching Icelandic to children as a second language, but there lacks a focus on including their culture, religion, first language and social issues.

It can be challenging for the school to help meet the academic needs of those students with immigrant backgrounds. Language barriers and cultural differences can make it more complicated and lead to difficulties in effective communication. Furthermore, if the student has experienced significant gaps in education, especially in basic skills such as language, arts, math and science, the commencement of schooling can be even more challenging (Yarrow, 2012).

4.1.1 Welcoming class

The welcoming class is intended for children who do not have sufficient skills in Icelandic to participate as a full-time student in the general mainstream class. The main aim of welcoming class is to give increased support to foreign students and to prepare them for studying in their home school. The main focus is usually on learning Icelandic, as a second language, as well as special support given in regard to the student's native language. The student should also get assistance in adjusting to Icelandic society, the student also learns cultural skills and about learning strategies (Lækjarskóli; n.d; Reykjavíkurborg, n.d.).

It states in the National Curriculum Guide for Pre-Schools, that schools should establish a welcoming class when they have eight or more multilingual students in a similar age group. It is important that the welcoming class is intertwined with other school activities, and there

should be consistency between the instructions provided in the welcoming class and other classes that the student is part of. Schools that have less than eight bilingual students in a similar age group and are not able to offer a welcoming class should cooperate with other schools or municipalities to establish a welcoming class. In some cases, it might be beneficial to use distance teaching or a freelance teacher. It is recommended that students in the younger classes study at their neighboring school with appropriate support (Menntamálaráðuneytið, 1997).

It depends on the group of children starting the school at the same time and their age, whether or not the refugee students can start at their local school or if they are placed in another school for a welcoming class during the first one to two years. In some schools, there has been an established 'special' welcoming class for new students in grades 5-10 who do not have Icelandic as a mother language. Initially upon arrival of the student, his academic status is evaluated and a decision is made on the duration in which the student will be enrolled in the welcoming class. It is assumed that students are in a welcoming class for one year before being ready to enroll into their mainstream class, but each case is different. Along with being in the reception department it is common that the children participate in special classes with their mainstream class, such as lists and sports. After the first year they will gradually attend lectures with their class but can still seek help from the welcoming class if needed (Lækjarskóli, n.d.; Reykjavíkurborg, n.d) The welcoming classes are developed in various ways depending on the schools.

It varies how this system works for children, some are doing well and others worse. The focus in this system is to educate foreign children so that they become active participants in Icelandic schools and society, whereas on the other hand they are viewed as a separate group that needs special assistance. One can ask if it is right to distinguish children of foreign origin in this way, from the start of their schooling and create two groups and in that way, create a position that can work against the foreign children in the long run. On the other hand, children of foreign origin often need additional support the first year of their schooling (Ragnarsdóttir, 2004a; Ragnarsdóttir, 2004b).

4.1.2 **Families & the school**

The school should ensure that these students and their parents receive counselling and access to information about the school and school activities (Ministry of Education, Science and

Culture, 2014). Prior research on Icelandic schools has shown that there is a lack of communication between the school and the home of the child (Jónsdóttir, 2005). Parents of refugee and immigrants children have less ability to assist their children to adjust to the local community and school since they often do not speak the local language as well as they lack knowledge of what assistance, schools or community service is available to them (Tran & Ragnarsdóttir, 2013). The parents often lack understanding on the structure of the school their children are studying at; they do not know which group level or class the children attend to or what kind of school they are studying at. The parents lack information about the quality level of the schools or what options their children have in terms of education. Since the parents often have little knowledge and/or are unable to access information about the school or the education system many children often end up to having to find out themselves where and what they can study (Muller, 2010). The schools have to ensure that the students and their parents receive information and advice about the school and school activities.

It can also be challenging for refugee students to join afterschool activities or apply for further education since they lack information of what is offered and they have limited people available to assist them (Sigurðardóttir, 2005). It has also been shown that young people with an immigrant background have less support from their families, they lack self-esteem and have difficulties in prioritising their life in order to fulfil their dreams (Tran & Ragnarsdóttir, 2013). It has been shown that parental involvement in education has a positive influence on students' performance and behaviour in schools (Hamilton, 2004).

4.2 Support from school and teachers

There is little literature available on the education of asylum seekers and refugee children, especially to raise awareness of teachers and schools (Pinson, et al., 2010). Teachers and other staff at the school can have a profound direct and indirect effect on children's social, emotional and cognitive development. The way in which children are spoken to, listened to, taught, disciplined and supported helps to shape their understanding of the world in which they live (Baginsky, 2008). In order to make meaningful assessment of the children's schoolwork it is important that teachers are aware of the history of the students and have

knowledge of the experiences and views the children have. (Kristinsdóttir, 2005; Robert & Locke, 2001).

Hauge (2004) argues that the school needs to adapt to the students, not the other way around. It can be complicated to teach in diverse classrooms and it is important that the school gives extra support when needed to ensure that the learning environment remains safe, inclusive and fair to everyone (UNHCR, 2016). Inclusive education is championed as a means to remove barriers, improve outcomes and remove discrimination (Lindsay, 2003). The teachers are responsible for the child's school day and thus, they need knowledge and insight into the child's life in their various cultural backgrounds. This requires the teachers to consider using different teaching strategies in relation to the child's education and development (Wold & Danielsen, 2006). The prior experiences refugee children have of education has a big impact on academic performance, psychosocial service needs and the sense of belonging in a new school. The knowledge about their prior experiences is important to be able to provide the support needed for the child (Dreyden-Peterson, 2015).

It is a challenge for the teacher to receive a new student that lacks the language to tell about their educational experiences and has no records of achievements from earlier schooling, such as statements of certificates that detail their prior education (Pinson, et al. 2010). Refugee students might also need additional help from the teacher, but many refugee students have a limited network of people that are able to help them with schoolwork (Roberts & Locke, 2011).

de Wal Pastoor, (2015) points out that it is important that teachers show an active interest in their students' academic development as well as their psychosocial well-being. The teachers and other school personnel have to be capable to help children deal with stress when they start in a new school (Elfdóttir, 2008). Roberts & Locke (2001) argue that the aim of teachers should be to help the student to build connections with other students and to integrate new content and skills within the lived experience of all students. With group work or thematic teaching where collaborative learning is in focus the refugee students get the opportunity to develop peer relationships.

Children that have experienced long periods of disrupted schooling may experience greater difficulties in adjusting to and integrating into a new society, whilst they might also be slower in learning academic concepts, skills and new language. (Kanu, 2008) Thomas and Collier

(1997) point out that students with interrupted schooling and traumatic experiences can be expected to take up to 10 years or more to reach up to their average levels of cognitive and academic language.

The school might be the first and only point of contact between the refugee child and the new community (Anderson, 2004a). The school provides everyday routines and a safe environment that is important for children that find themselves in a new situation where everything is new and unfamiliar. The schools are in a powerful position to influence positively on the lives of the students; schools have been identified as a potential source of resilience providing positive experiences with other people, where they may find a mentor, a teacher or another caring adult. Besides being able to provide good role models, education strengthens children's ability to master their new life situation as well as providing them skills to be independent and active participants in Icelandic society (Anderson, 2004a; de Wal Pastoor, 2012).

In order to be effective, the schools need to recognize that some of the children's responses are attempts to cope with stressful situations during the adaptation and the children rather need education and therapy rather than disciplinary measures (Anderson, 2004a).

Effective support entails knowledge of and sensitivity to the specific culture of the child whose needs can differ from those members of other cultural groups (Anderson, 2004a).

4.3 Social life and afterschool activities

The school plays a significant role in children's socialisation process (Yarrow, 2012).

According to Vygotsky (1978) theory on social development, social interaction is essential to precede development. All children have a need for interaction with their classmates but for refugee students it is very important since it gives them the opportunity to gain access to interpretations of the social and academic expectations of a school as well as a chance to practice their language skills in Icelandic (Roberts & Locke, 2001). Yarrow, (2012) claims that one of the biggest challenges a refugee child faces when arriving into new country is figuring out how to adapt to the new school environment. It is a big challenge to arrive in a new country where you have to learn a new language, make new friends and start a new school. However, it is not only the new student that has to adapt but also the school, teachers

and existing students also need to be informed and adapt (Yarrow, 2012). Schools are social places where children meet and play, it is a place where basic skills of literacy and numeracy are taught and they are also highly emotive symbols of a community's hope for the future (Yarrow, 2012).

Sports and other afterschool activities are also a great place for children to establish friendships providing them with an opportunity to be a part of a group. Sport activities promote social integration of different groups and can help in creating a feeling of being a part of the society. Besides having a positive impact on social value it also influences the wellbeing of the person (Georgsdóttir & Þórarinsdóttir, 2008; Þórlindsson, Valgeirsson & Vilhjálmsson, 1990).

One of the most important things for children is to have a friend and be able to establish friendships either through their school or after-school activities (Elfdóttir, 2010; Spicer, 2008). Without friends, children feel vulnerable and children in the research of Spicer (2008) reported that having friendships with school peers created some protection from bullying and harassment at school. Friendships reduce the feeling of being alone and helps the children to feel included (Spicer, 2008).

4.4 Learning a new language

Language is a social concept that is developed through social interactions and an important key to feeling like you belong within the society. It can be argued that language is the most powerful tool in the development of any human being (Pinson, et al., 2010; Ragnarsdóttir, 2007b; Vygotsky, 1978). The learning of a new language is a great challenge for many, and language barriers are often the main reason for why individuals have difficulties in adjusting to a society and building up social relations. The language is one of the most important roles in the task that refugees face in the process of resettling in new land. How well the refugee successfully adapts to their new environment can be measured in the extent to which they are successful in learning the local language (Loewen, 2004). In research that Sigurðardóttir, (2005) conducted it showed that young Vietnamese felt that their lack of Icelandic was the main reason for why they thought it was so difficult to adjust and build up a social network in Iceland. Refugee students are special in a way that they have typically experienced both

displacement and trauma and then they need to adapt to a new environment, frequently involving the simultaneous acquisition of a new language (Anderson et al., 2004).

According to the Compulsory School Act for Pre-Schools, students are encouraged to nurture their mother tongue, it is an advantage for anyone to be fluent in more than one language as well as it is also valuable for the society. Bilingual students with another mother tongue than Icelandic have the right to take classes in Icelandic as a second language, this is to support them as bilingual students as well as to support them to be active in Icelandic society. It is important that students that have a mother tongue other than Icelandic develop literacy, reading and writing skills to the same extent as other students (Alþingi, 2008). Language teaching is essential and has to be constant throughout the school years (Elíðóttir, 2010). Second language learners need to feel that their first language and culture are valued and respected. It is important to preserve their knowledge and skills in their own mother tongue and teaching children their own first language is equally necessary as this helps the child emotionally as well as educationally (Elíðóttir, 2010; Loewen, 2004).

4.5 Mental health

The school can assist refugee children in several ways, they can help the children to deal with the effects of traumatic experiences they have had in the past and recognize that some refugee children might have a greater need for therapeutic interventions than others (Anderson, 2004a). Refugee children have one thing in common, the traumatic separation from their homeland and multiple experiences of loss, which contribute to a complex psychological, emotional and social resettlement process (Anderson et al., 2004). The traumatic experiences that refugee children might have experienced both before and during the fleeing can have various influences on their mental health and school function. Due to these difficult experiences many children may suffer from anxiety, nightmares, sleeping problems or concentration difficulties (de Wal Pastoor, 2012). On top of that they struggle to preserve a sense of social and psychological stability at a time when there is a concurrent need to acquire a new language and adapt to a new culture, places these children at risk of developing learning difficulties, behavioral problems and psychological distress (Anderson et al., 2004).

Research have shown that it is common that children of foreign origin in Iceland, feel worse than other children their age, they tend to have less friends and have more chance of being left out or being bullied (Bjarnason, 2006; Rauði Krossinn, 2015). A research conducted in the United States on Somali refugees found that a greater sense of school belonging is associated with lower depression and higher self-efficacy, regardless of the level of past exposure to adversities.

It has well been shown that refugee children experience greater difficulties in shaping their self-esteem and self-awareness than other children. The great interference and resolution refugee children experience within their daily life and security can have adverse effects on their cognitive and social development which can result in a worsened self-image. Many refugee children perceive themselves as not part of their community in their home country, nor in the new country (Simich & Andermann, 2014).

Even though little can be done about prior experience, the knowledge of the refugee's pre-migration experiences and contexts will give a clearer picture of a particular child's at risk status, and what kind of support is needed (Anderson, 2004a). However it is clear that there is a strong relationship between the wellbeing of the students and the feeling of being included.

Children who are included and feel like they belong show more caring and compassion towards others as well as they feel safer and more secure. Inclusion also leads to better learning and mental health. Inclusion is a protective factor for children's mental health and wellbeing and children who experience exclusion are in greater risk of low self-esteem and poor mental health. (Kia-Keating & Ellis, 2007).

5 Research design and methodology

This study is a qualitative interview of seven refugees studying in Icelandic primary school. The research is about their experiences of being a refugee child studying in school in Iceland after being forcibly displaced. The reasons for why the researcher decided to interview only the students is that the researcher believes that the children themselves are the best ones to tell how the process of starting primary school in Iceland is as a refugee student. In this chapter, the outline of the research method and analytical tools will be presented, as well as ethical concerns and challenges will be addressed.

5.1 Research methods

After the research topic had been chosen and a decision was made regarding the setting, it became apparent that a qualitative approach was appropriate for this research. The purpose of qualitative research is to study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, and trying to understand the meanings people bring to them (Gall, Gall & Borg, 2007). This is done through examining people's history and experiences. The sample size is usually relatively small, from one person up to a group of people. Information can be obtained through observation, field work, interviews, questionnaires, texts and a researcher's impression (Gall, et al., 2007; Macions & Plummer, 2012).

The strength of using a qualitative method is the ability to produce culturally specific and contextually rich data, to elaborate descriptions of how the participants experience the research topics and to include the human side of the issue. The method provides the researcher an opportunity to change what the study will focus on and to adopt new data collection methods and frame new research questions. However, the disadvantage of using a qualitative method is that it is difficult to generalize the findings to other situations, although it is possible to make limited generalizations (Gall, et al., 2007).

Interviews come in several forms but they can be divided into three main groups, unstructured interviews, semi-structure interviews and structured interviews. In *unstructured interviews*, the interviewer does not have a set of questions and explores general topics though the interviewer leads the interview. There are no predetermined categories but the interview is open ended. Unstructured interviews aspire to achieve deep responses from the responders, it resembles more to a conversation rather than an interview.

Semi-structured interviews tend to be the most common form of interviews used in qualitative research. The interviewer has a set of questions but they are merely used as a guide and the interviewer has the latitude to explore new areas which arise within the interview.

Structured interviews are generally standardized interviews with predesigned sets of questions. The researcher has complete control over the interview. The responses from structured interviews are easily coded and analyzed since the questions are asked to each respondent in exactly the same order with not variation or fluctuation (Palaiologou, Needham & Male, 2016).

By choosing to use semi-structured interviews, the aim was to gain a better understanding of how the children experience and understand the process of starting a new school in Iceland, how they cope with learning a new language, getting to know new people and adapt to their new home. The reason for choosing semi-structured interviews instead of structured interviews or a questionnaire is that through semi-structured interviews it is possible to provide reasonably standard data across respondents, but of greater depth than can be done with structured interviews. In addition, the participant is more likely to express his/her feelings or thoughts in a relatively openly designed interview situation than in a structured interview or a questionnaire (Palaiologou, et al., 2016). Through semi-structured interviews the children had the opportunity to ask if they did not understand what they were asked about and the researcher had the opportunity to ask follow-up questions when there was need for more explanation (Gall, et al., 2007).

5.2 Data Collection

All the interviews were conducted in Iceland so before setting off to Iceland, e-mails were sent to several different towns and schools that are known to take in refugees in cooperation

with the state. Since there are not many quota refugees that come to Iceland every year, I was prepared that the sample size could be quite small but I did not expect it to take as long time as it did to gather the sample. The sample was purposive in a way that I needed children that arrived to Iceland as quota refugees and had been living in Iceland for less than three years. Purposive sampling is often used in qualitative research since it is possible to select the sample related to the study and the sample is then more likely to be “information rich” (Gall et al., 2007). It took several weeks and a lot of effort and help from different people to find a relevant sample for the research. Finally, with the help of members from the Icelandic Red Cross, recommendations from people working with refugees in Iceland and several teachers, the sample was selected through purposive sampling.

I sent out an introductory letter to the schools to ask for permission for conducting the study at their school, after the schools had approved the study, the schools contacted the parents of the children and got their permission to participate in the study. The study consisted of seven participants, two girls and six boys from three different schools. The children were in fifth to tenth class (age 10-16 years) when the interviews were conducted. The children had been living in Iceland from seven months up to two years and all of them had attended the same school since they arrived to Iceland.

5.3 Location of the research

The research was conducted in three different schools in Iceland, one in the south of Iceland, Hafnarfjordur and the other two located in the north of Iceland, Akureyri. The decision was made to carry out interviews in at least two different schools with different welcoming systems for refugee children. This decision was made to see if there was any difference in how the children felt about being included at the school. The two schools in Akureyri had the children placed in a mainstream class, two children in each school, while the third school had a special welcoming class where the other three studied. All the interviews were conducted in November 2016.

Seven children that had been living in Iceland from seven months up to two years, from the age 10-16 years were interviewed. The interviews were done as semi-structured interviews, where the children got the opportunity to share their thoughts and feelings whilst at the same time the researcher could ask follow-up questions when something was unclear or the

children brought up an interesting topic. In all of the interviews, there was an interpreter present to assist if something was unclear to the child or the interviewer.

5.3.1 Interviews

All the interviews were taken during school hours, at the school of each child. The interviews took place in Icelandic, English and in the child's native language, depending on the child. Some of the children preferred to speak Icelandic while others chose to do it in their native language and some children mixed between Icelandic and their native language. The researcher had no previous experience conducting interviews of this kind and at the beginning, it felt confusing to interview the children with an interpreter, especially when the language would switch back and forth. The first interviews got a bit confusing and interesting leads might have gotten lost. However, after a time it felt more comfortable and a lot of interesting information was gained through the interviews.

Since the participants were all under age, permission was gained both from the parents and the children themselves after getting permissions from the schools the children studied at. There were two interpreters that helped with translation when the children asked for it and notably both of the interpreters had worked closely with the children before. The researcher and professionals who worked with the children thought it would be easier for the children to explain their experiences and feelings to someone they could trust so the decision was made to use interpreters they knew instead of finding someone the children did not know.

Every interview started with the researcher explaining the study and the purpose of it for the participants. The participants were informed that they did not need to answer all the questions and they could stop at any time. The participants were well informed that the interviews would be recorded and only used by the researcher and deleted immediately after use (Gall, et al., 2007).

Each interview took from 15 minutes up to 30 minutes, depending on how open the children were. I chose to tape record the interviews and then transcribe them to be able to focus on the participant during the interview. Using tape recording also gave me the opportunity to return to the sources and check for the accuracy if something was unclear in the transcript. I was a bit skeptical that recording the interviews might affect the answers of the participants but all

the participants made clear they were comfortable with being recorded during the interview. The interviews were transcribed as soon as possible and notes were added during and after the interview.

5.3.1 Interviewing children

The discussion about conducting research with children have tended to focus on ethics, especially the issues of informed consent and confidentiality but ethical issues are often thought to be central difference between doing research with children or adults (Punch 2002). It was not long ago that children were mostly excluded from research since they were considered less experienced, lacking rationality and less qualified than adults. Because of their lack of social power and lack of relative maturity, they are often the ones affected the most by adverse circumstances. (Punch, 2002)

In recent years, this however has changed and children are seen more as active participants in their own lives that can provide significant information about their own experiences (Crivello, Camfield & Woodhead, 2009; Macionis & Plummeer, 2012). Interviewing children, gives the possibility to promote a holistic view of their experiences.

It can be challenging to undertake individual interviews with children to get them to talk and not get distracted but it rather depends on the skill of the adult facilitator than the children themselves (Crivello et al., 2009). Children are not used to expressing their views or being taken seriously by adults so it becomes a challenge on how to enable them to express their views to an adult researcher (Punch, 2002). Thus, it is important that the researcher is open minded, listens to them and shows them respect. The researcher has to have knowledge of how it is best to interact with children in order to collect data, according to their age (Punch, 2002).

5.4 Analysis of data

Before the interviews were conducted a questioner guide was formulated with the themes I had chosen in mind to ensure the coverage of issues I thought were important but also to allow flexibility to address individually initiated concerns throughout the interviewing process

(Palaiologou, et al. 2016). The teachers of the children did review the questions before I interviewed them, to ensure the questions were not going to reflect on things that might be uncomfortable or hurt the children in any way.

The interview guide was already set up in themes so I thought it would be the easiest way to transcribe the interviews and then code them according to the themes I had already chosen. Since I had never transcribed interviews before I was a bit unsure how the process would go and I definitely did not expect it to be so time consuming, especially since the interviews were all relatively brief. The diagnostic process of qualitative data is probably the most challenging part of the research work as Pirest, Roberts and Woods (2002) point out, but it can be very time consuming and can test the investigators attention and patience. As Hammersley (2012) points out, many decisions are made when transcribing audio records and there cannot be a single correct transcription. I tried to transcribe the records so they would make sense for me.

First, all the participants were given nick names to make a distinction between them, as well as maintaining their anonymity. The interviews were transcribed and coded the same day or a few days after the interviews but no data analysis was carried out until all the interviews had taken place in order to avoid imposing meaning or experience from one participants interview to the next (Seidman, 2006). Whilst listening to the records and transcribing the data, I took down some reflection notes and wrote down comments and thoughts (Richards, 2009). The interview guide focused on several different themes I was interested in, so I used topic coding in order to get information from different interviews gathered in one place (Richards, 2009). After all the interviews had been transcribed I took some time to read over the transcripts and tried to look out for similar topics or patterns and started to code (Bogdan & Biklen 1998; Palaiologou, et al., 2016). Before starting to analyze the data it is important to get familiar with the data. This involves going through the data multiple times, line by line, and focusing on the relevant things in the text and searching for patterns. The first part of analyzing the data would be to code the transcript line-by-line and look for similarities between the different interviews, identifying themes and concepts. (Palaiologou, et al, 2016; Pirest, et al., 2002) I used different colors to mark the themes and codes. The next step involved identifying and understanding the connections between the different themes as well as divide them into themes and sub-themes (Pirest, et al., 2002).

After coding the interviews there was a clear picture of each theme that helped to get an overview over the similarities and the dissimilarities of what the children said about the different topics. The final themes were as follows: start in a new school, mainstream and welcoming class, friends and social life and bullying and depression.

5.4.1 **Validity and reliability**

Validity and reliability are conceptualized as trustworthiness, rigor and quality in qualitative studies. Validity in interviewing pertains to the trustworthiness of the subjects reports and the quality of the interviewing itself. In qualitative research, trustworthiness and transferability are two of the main criteria. In order to ensure the quality of the interviewing in this study the questions were designed to be easy to understand, as well as interpreter was present in order to translate the questions if they were too difficult to understand (Ragnarsdóttir, 2007d; Palaologou, et al., 2016).

It is a common assumption that children lie or that they often cannot make a distinction between what is reality and what is unreal. However, both adults and children might lie to a researcher to avoid talking about painful subjects. They may want to tell the researcher what they think the researcher wants to hear, they may be ashamed of talking about a certain subject or they may simply want to create a favorable impression. Children are accustomed to trying to please adults and some may fear how the researcher will react to their response to a question (Punch, 2002). The place of the research may have also influenced the answers as the interviews were conducted at the school of the child, which may have added pressure to the child as they may have felt they were supposed to answer with the “right” answer (Punch, 2002). Even though the researcher made it clear there was no right or wrong answer, it was important they only answered what they felt or experienced.

The unequal power relations can influence the truth in social research but children are potentially more vulnerable to unequal power relationships as well as ethics can dominate debates about methodological concerns (Punch, 2002; Ragnarsdóttir, 2007d).

5.5 Ethical challenges

Many ethical issues and challenges can arise when conducting research with children and especially with a group of refugee children. Firstly, it can be very challenging to get access to them. During the start of this project, it seemed impossible to get access to these children but through good help from people working with refugees, teachers and other professionals, the ball started to roll and I got the opportunity to conduct the interviews. However, there is a chance that some of the respondents possibly participated against their will because of the obligation they or their parents feel towards their teachers or school.

According to the NSD guidelines, all audiotapes and transcripts were anonymous and all personal information deleted. The audiotapes were transcribed soon after the interviews took place and then deleted from all devices. Transcriptions were stored in a locked folder on the researcher's computer that only the researcher had access to.

Secondly, obtaining informed consent was required. This study was conducted in accordance with the principles of the Norwegian Centre For Research Data (NSD), the Icelandic Data Protection Authority and the guidelines of Akureyri as well as the schools that participated. The schools the children studied at were informed about the research as well as their teachers and parents. Since all the participants were under the age of 18, their guardians had to provide written approval for their participation in the research. All the guardians received written information about the research in their mother language, Persian or Arabic. The investigator contact details were included on the form in case the participants or their guardians had any questions regarding the research. In addition, the children got verbal information about the study from the translator in their mother tongue before we started the interviews. The participants were informed that their participation was voluntary both through the letter sent to their parents as well as the interpreter explaining it in their mother language before we started. It was explained that they could withdraw from the study at any time without any explanation, and that they were not required to answer all the questions if they did not feel so.

Lastly, it is important that the researcher is aware of different cultures, traditions and language barriers. The language barriers were one of the biggest challenges when undertaking interviews with the children, but the interpreters were a great help for both the researcher and

the children, even if it is to be expected that it had some effects on what was said or not said. Although the cultural differences sometimes seemed to be very different between the participants and the researcher, the researcher could easily understand many of the challenges, especially in relations to religion and language barriers.

6 Results

To start school in a new country, learning a new language and trying to make new friends is hard, specifically if you have had or little experience of school from before. The main results of the interviews are drawn together in four themes; the start in new school, mainstream and welcoming class, friends and social life and finally, bullying and depression

6.1 The start in new school

Refugee children that start school in a new country have varied diverse backgrounds, but they all have that one thing in common that they had to leave their home country for some reasons. The children come from different places with different histories but they all have to learn a new language and get to know their new country and different culture. The students that participated in this study, along with their families were all invited to come to Iceland through the Icelandic government and UNHCR. The students and their families came here in two separate groups with two years apart.

When they were asked about their arrival to Iceland and if it was a long time from their arrival and until they could start school, most of the children did not remember much from that time. However, they were all sure that they started attending school very soon after they arrived in Iceland. One of the boy said he attended school right after “*they had rested and been at the hospital*” but all the children required to go through a physical examination before they could start school, where they took blood tests and checked vaccinations among other things.

The four children that studied in Akureyri had a one-week information meeting in one of the schools after they arrived so that they could learn a little about the town, the language and the culture. It felt like the children were happy about being able to be with their family and familiar people and get to be acquainted with these things as a group.

All of the children were studying at the same school they started in when they came here and they were all quite satisfied with their school but many of them were struggling with the language, diverse subjects and their social life. Part of the reason for their difficulties could be

the fact that they all experienced interrupted schooling for shorter or longer periods of time, but very few host countries have any formal plan of how to deliver education to this group.

The four students studying in Akureyri said they had the opportunity to go to some kind of evening activities since they were not allowed to attend the local schools. Two of the children described how they attended informal night classes in the refugee camp where assistants facilitated activities for the children. Although this was not a replacement for a formal educational curriculum, it was the closest resemblance to what the term 'school' meant in the mind of the children;

“..They were, eh, not in school like other children in Lebanon, but still they were getting assistants... it was not allowed to let the children from Syria to be at school” - Anton

“It was not a school, like this normal school.. it was just night school.. like hobby’s but not real school” - Jón

Three of the children had different experiences during their stay in refugee camps but they said they had been able to attend some kind of formal school.

It is not only that the children have to adjust to a new home, language or culture but the weather conditions and the darkness in the winter and the daylight during the whole summer can be very difficult to adjust to. When the interviews were taken, the students from Akureyri had only been staying in Iceland for couple of months and they were experiencing their first winter in Iceland. The children felt it was difficult to get used to the darkness, it was especially difficult for many of them to get used to waking up in the morning when it still felt as if it was night when they went to school.

Jón; *“It is little difficult eh to attend because of the morning..”*

I; *“Tired?”*

Jón; *“snow and darkness”*

“.. it is just there, hard to wake up in the dark and snow” – Jón

6.2 Welcoming or Mainstream class

The children were attending three different schools where four of the children attended mainstream class and the other three attended a welcoming class combined with mainstream

classes. There was a large variation on how the children felt about this arrangement during their first years of schooling. The children who were attending a welcoming class commented that they would like to have had the possibility to spend more time in their mainstream class, they felt comfortable in their mainstream classes and had a greater opportunity to practice their language and communicate with other Icelandic children. Some of them wanted to have something to say about how much time they should spend with their mainstream class. When they were asked if they wanted to have more of a part within the mainstream classes and why they wanted this, the reasons were mainly due to a desire to learn more Icelandic, enhance the levels of interaction with the Icelandic children and gain the opportunity to establish more friendships.

“I have more communication with the Icelandic, more of them.. that is why I like to be with them” –Sara

“uu...yes sometimes.. yes sometimes I only want to study in class (mainstream class) not in welcoming class.” – Baldur

One of the children said that when he first started school in Iceland it had been good to start in a welcoming class, but now he felt like he was ready to attend only the mainstream class.

“uu... just okey where I am at the beginning... I now only want to be in class, not welcoming class” - Baldur

He went on saying that because of his lack of language skills in Icelandic he did not have the option to be more included in the mainstream classes, even if he believed his language skills would be improved by joining the mainstream class.

“because in class it is not easy... and I do not speak well Icelandic... and...” - Baldur

However even if the children in the welcoming class gave the expression that they preferred the mainstream classes, two of the students that were attending a mainstream class from the beginning said they would have liked to start their schooling a little more separate where they could have had the opportunity to learn Icelandic better before entering the mainstream class. All the students were quite happy with their school, they felt like they received good support from their school and the teachers and that their fellow students were very helpful.

6.2.1 Support in school

All of the children mentioned their teachers and their fellow students when they were asked about what kind of support they got at school. It seems like all of the students were happy with their teachers and that the teachers played an important role in how well the students felt at school.

“uuu my teachers were helping me and friends in class...” – Baldur

“Teachers... just everyone” - Anton

“They were assisting us, there, eh to learn Icelandic, it was a lot of effort put into that and I am in good things now... and also in mathematics I got a lot of support” -Geir

When the children were asked if they understood what takes place in the classroom most of the children felt that it was difficult to follow and understand the tuition, especially when the teachers or their peers spoke too fast. However, I got the feeling from all of the students that their teachers were very concerned that they did understand the material and that they were often asked if they understood the material. It was especially the children who studied in the mainstream classes that talked very openly about how easy it was to ask their teacher or fellow classmates to explain for them when they did not understand.

“...and if I eh... have difficulties to understand then I just ask.” - Anton

“The teachers ask often... if I need assistance, they a lot so...” –Geir

“Sometimes hard, sometimes understand everything but the teachers help me to understand, explain better for me” -Geir

The Red Cross provides each family one or more support families’, which assist the family in adapting to Icelandic society. The students in Akureyri also mentioned their support family when we talked about support and how helpful it was to be able to seek their help with homework and other things.

6.2.2 Participation in class

Everyone except one student claimed they participated in all the classes, swimming lessons and sports activities, but it was only the swimming classes the student had difficulties with.

The schools had offered the student private classes but the student still felt too uncomfortable to go. Even though the students were not used to swimming classes from before, most of them thought the sport and swimming classes were fun.

Overall, the students said they participated in all of the classes and generally liked all of their subjects even though at least half of the group said they experienced great difficulties with mathematic. Additionally, they all seemed to struggle with their homework. Almost all of the students had great difficulties with doing their homework and had limited opportunity to get any help from home since their parents did not understand the material.

“Because of the language then nobody here home can help ehh” – Geir

“No, my parents do not talk much Icelandic” – Baldur

Some of them said they tried to do their homework on their own with the help of fellow students and some of them said they could seek help from their support family or e-mail the teacher when they really struggled. Conversely, none of them sounded eager to do the homework since it was too hard and they said they often forgot to do it or gave up on it.

“It is sometimes if I have some tasks then I solve it, and sometimes I try practicing to read... but I am not efficient ehh” - Jón

“if nothing works with google translate then I ask few of my colleagues and they help me... sometimes I also get help from my support family... if nothing of this works then I just send e-mail to the teacher” – Jón

“emm... I do sometime but sometime I forget to open my bag” – Sara

Even though the children did not seem to be the biggest fans of homework and did not have much support at home, it was obvious in their answers that they all could seek help from their teachers if needed.

“(name of a teacher) help my sometime with my homework” - Sara

6.2.3 Language

Even though most of the children felt like they were doing well in learning the language many of them still felt like they needed more tutoring in Icelandic, but when they were asked if they had requested for it they did not feel so comfortable to ask for it.

In the classroom, they said they either asked the teacher to repeat or explain for them if they did not understand or asked their fellow peers to assist them. It felt like almost all the children got a lot of support from their fellow students, in class and with homework.

The children in the welcoming class were provided lessons in their mother tongue, but in either of the schools in Akureyri they were not. One of the students said he would like to learn it but he does not really see the point of learning it while he is living in Iceland.

Even though most of the children felt like they were learning Icelandic quite well and that they could understand a lot of what was going on in the classroom the language was one of the biggest hindrances to making new friends.

6.3 Social life

Although the children enjoyed school, many of them found it difficult to be acquainted with their Icelandic peers at the same time. It was particularly clear that the children in the welcoming class had experienced the feelings of being ‘outsiders’ and had more difficulties in being included in the group of their Icelandic peers. The children believed their Icelandic peers were not so interested in talking to foreigners.

“mm with us kids... do not talk much with foreigners” – Baldur

They experienced it to be very difficult to mix with the Icelandic children, yet with children from other nationalities they found it was easier to get along and establish new friendships.

“...they don’t speak much with foreigners.. they just don’t speak much...” -Baldur

Even though Baldur was the one who argued most for wanting to participate more in his mainstream class it seemed like he also experienced that he was “different” among the Icelandic students. During his attendance in the welcoming class he could communicate more with his fellow students but he explained that at times it was challenging with the Icelandic students:

Baldur; *“It was a little bit hard to mix up with them*

I; *“but that is the Icelandic one? Or the ones in welcoming class?”*

***Baldur**; “it is only Icelandic children, they act like this... they did not speak much with us... other nationalities, they have no problem”*

A lack of knowledge in Icelandic made communication between the refugee students and the Icelandic students difficult and it felt like some of the interviewed students experienced frustration at not being able to communicate clearly in Icelandic nor being able to interact with their Icelandic peers.

“Those one that I don’t understand the language I don’t get good communication with them. I don’t like that because I don’t know what is going on, those one I know the language I communicate very well” –Sara

As she continues, she believes it is probably easy to establish friendships with the local children if she only spoke better Icelandic.

“It can be easy to be friends with them... it is just the language of Icelandic that is the problem” –Sara

When the students in the mainstream classes were asked whether or not they had made any friends at school, the answers were all positive followed up with a smile.

“I took one month and then I had get to know completely all! – Anton

“Everybody are my friends” –Geir

The students in the welcoming class also seemed to have less contact with the local students than the children who were included in the mainstream classes. The students in the welcoming class said they almost never met with the children from their mainstream classes after school, they only met with the students who were also studying in welcoming class. The students in the mainstream classes however seemed to have more interaction with their fellow students, doing homework together or playing football.

All of the children except one participated in some kind of afterschool activities, some kind of sport, music classes or even both. The participant who did not attend any afterschool activities claimed however that she was interested in doing any sport activities or start working part time job. All the children agreed that their afterschool activities helped them to make friends and get to know other children outside of their class or school.

6.4 Bullying and depression

As mentioned before, all the children felt well at school however more than half of the group had experienced bullying from their classmates or other students at school. The children were not to open to talk about the bullying but the main reason for the bullying was their religion.

“There were some boys in 10th grade that were bullying a little because I am a Muslim... because of that” - Jón

The bullying had very negative effects on almost all of the children that experienced it, while one of the child said he just could not understand why he was being bullied. Baldur talked most openly about the bullying, it was obvious during the interview that the bullying had really affected him and his feelings towards the country and the people living in Iceland. He experienced a lot of mixed feelings towards the country, since he felt like the whole country was fighting with him.

“I didn’t feel bad about the school... I feel bad about Iceland” – Baldur

“Because when I come to Iceland... Iceland children start fighting with me, they start like attacking me... and then I didn’t like whole Iceland. - Baldur

When the children were asked if they had someone who they could talk to or seek advice from about bullying or their feelings most of them answered that they would rather want to deal with it themselves. However, some of the children had the courage to talk to someone, and a few of the children said that they had talked to their teachers and let them know about the bullying while others preferred not to talk about it and just waited for it to stop. One of the children that had sought help from the teacher said the bullying stopped, while the other one said it only reduced.

During this discussion, one of the students opened up and explained that she got so bad depression that she was not able to attend school for over a year. She explained that she was provided with help at the time, however it was not enough and she said she often experienced depression during the school day or at home. When she was asked if she could seek further

help or if she had someone she could seek advice from she says she has no one to talk with about such things and she rather chose to deal with these feelings on her own.

“I do not tell anybody... I just put it inside myself”

7 Discussion

The goal of this research is to gain insight in how refugee children experience starting primary school in Iceland. Even though they have nothing to compare with, the main results of the study indicate that the children are happy at school, they feel like they have received good support at their school even though many of them struggle with certain topics, homework and learning the language. The results show that children in welcoming classes are not as included with their Icelandic peers as the children in mainstream class and they seem to struggle more with establishing friendships with their Icelandic peers. However, it seems like both groups have experienced bullying at school which demonstrates that there is great need for much more awareness about the diversity of people in the schools and the community as whole.

7.1 The School

Access to school, as a place to learn and a place to be, is a crucial factor for giving refugee children the opportunity to develop and apply to their full learning potential when finding their place in Iceland (de Wal Pastoor, 2012). According to the National Curriculum Guide for Pre-School, the school is obligated to educate students in an effective manner, regardless of their abilities and facilities (Ministry of Science and Culture, 2014). As a guiding principle, addressing the concepts of democracy and human rights, the school should be a place where children feel safe and where they have the opportunity to develop as well as enjoy their childhood (Wold & Danielsen, 2006). The school can promote learning and development for young refugees by creating space for security, belonging and learning which will also help them to adapt to the Icelandic society. By trying to make the transition into the new school as easy as possible and by facilitating the development of social support networks it is possible to reduce the stress refugee children experience during the whole process of starting a new life in new country (Anderson, 2004a). It varied how much the children had missed out from school since some of them had the opportunity to attend some kind of formal education while the others only attended some kind of evening activities, but like mentioned before many host

countries do not have the resources or the capabilities to give access to formal education for refugee children.

All the children that participated in the study had the opportunity to start school soon after they arrived in Iceland, but it is recommended that children with a refugee background attend school with their peers as soon as possible (Tonheim et al., 2015). It was clear that all the students were satisfied with their school and the assistance they got from teachers and fellow classmates, but all of them had attended the same school from the beginning of their studies in Iceland.

For many of the children it was difficult to follow and understand what was happening in the classroom. Prior research on Icelandic teachers (Jónsdóttir, 2005) showed that the available study material does not seem sufficient to accommodate multicultural diversity of the students and teachers in Icelandic primary schools need to be better prepared to teach multicultural classes. The same study also showed that teachers in primary schools need greater support as well as counselling on how to educate children with an immigrant background. They also need to be better informed of the child's rights and educational needs (Jónsdóttir, 2005). This is in relation to what Ragnarsdóttir (2007b) points out in her paper, where she suggests that Icelandic schools need to adapt better to the diversity of the students and that the school structure is generally only relevant to a particular student group rather than others, and this creates inequality amongst the students (Nieto, 1999). However, even if the children struggled with some subjects they did express that their teachers were very helpful and they felt free to ask questions when something was unclear and it seemed like all the students had positive relationships with their teachers. Many of the children did for example mention how the teacher helped them in many different ways, which usually does not fall under their field of work.

However, even if the children felt they could seek assistance from their teachers and fellow peers it is important that the curriculum is accessible to all children. The curriculum has to be inclusive and suitable for all students, to be flexible and have room for cultural diversity (Gundara 2000). It is also important that the teachers are able to seek out and determine the specific needs of refugee students and have the opportunity to coordinate with other schools in order to exchange ideas (Gobbo, 2009). Pinson, et al., (2010) argue that there is often too much focus on the refugee child rather than on how the school can transform its values and culture.

Nieto (1991) believes that teachers have great effects on their students, their beliefs, values and attitudes that can decide in helping or hindering their learning. She believes that the success of the students starts with the teacher believing that their student can and will succeed despite their social inequities or other disadvantages they may struggle with. It is important that the teacher can acknowledge the weaknesses of the student but at the same time strengthen and encourage the child skills. However, this does not mean that requirements of the child should be reduced but rather adapted to his/her skills. When the focus is on what the child can master it has positive effects on the child's self-image and ego (Wold & Danielsen, 2006). The schools primary role is to give children general knowledge, develop and strengthen their social skills and facilitate their emotional development that can help provide the feeling of security and belonging. All children should have the same opportunities for equal participation in the society and therefore the school needs to be able to provide the child education according to the pupil's specific needs (Wold & Danielsen, 2006). The education system has an important role to play in developing inclusive society and sense of citizenship and belongingness (Gundara, 2000).

7.1.1 Participation in class & homework

Even though the children expressed their difficulties in some subjects as well as with the homework, they seemed to be eager to succeed at school and claimed they participated in almost all of the subjects, but it is common among refugee students to experience difficulties that can be difficult to overcome (de Wal Pastoor, 2015; del Wal Pastoor, 2012). Almost all of the children had great difficulties in completing the homework, many of them said they forgot or were just not motivated to do it. Ottósdóttir & Wolimbwa (2011), request that the school should ensure that refugee get assistance with the homework, especially the ones in the higher classes. Even if some of the students claimed they could get help from their classmates, support families or their teachers it would be less stressful and more motivating if they had organized assistance, such as an individual that could help them to work on their homework with.

7.1.2 Language

Many of the children felt that the language was hard to learn, however many of them commented that they felt like they understood a lot. However, almost all of them would like

to receive more classes in Icelandic. Some researchers have recommended that schools should provide refugee children more support and better facilitation of the local language as the language of instruction, both through special Icelandic language teaching and through bilingual teaching but at the same time support the students to maintain their mother language. (Pinson et al., 2010; de Wal Pastoor, 2012).

It can be stressful and difficult to be without a language in a new place, especially when it is the key to communication and access to the society is through the language (Elíðóttir, 2008; Georgsdóttir & Þórarinsdóttir, 2008). For refugee students to be able to participate actively in the classroom discussion they require linguistic and cognitive competence, but it also demands cultural knowledge which is often taken for granted (de Wal Pastoor, 2005). It has been a problem in Norway as well as other countries that refugee students are not completing their high school degree and the main reasons for that is language problems (de Wal Pastoor, 2012), but students with refugee background tend to be less likely to finish university degree (O'Rourke, 2011).

In a small place like Iceland, the children might be the only one in their school or age that speak their native language and in a situation like that it is easy to feel alone and vulnerable (Elíðóttir, 2008; Georgsdóttir & Þórarinsdóttir, 2008). Only three of the children were getting classes in their mother language, which also seem to have been an issue in past research done on immigrants in Iceland (e.g. Elíðóttir, 2008; Jónsdóttir, 2005; Jónsdóttir & Ingólfssdóttir, 2004). There is often lack of interest in the foreigners culture, traditions and religion and the experiences and knowledge these children bring with them to school is largely ignored (Elíðóttir, 2010; Jónsdóttir, 2005). According to Gunderson (2000) it is very important that teachers take an interest in students languages and cultures, or it will lead to them fail to learn but according to his study, there was a direct relationship between the success of the students in school and their cultural loss. Roberts and Locke (2001) also argue that the student will gain better sense of what they bring to school, it maintenance their self-respect and pride ethnic identity if the teacher takes an interest in the students background.

Jónsdóttir and Ingólfssdóttir (2004) conclude in their study that the Icelandic schools have not yet managed to incorporate the cultural background of immigrant students. The school system is not able to handle the different cultural background of migrated students, immigrant children are expected to leave their culture at home and Icelandic students miss the chance to get to know the different cultures of their migrated peers (Schubert, 2010).

7.2 Classroom system

What was interesting about this research is that the children that were studying in mainstream classes seemed to do better in establishing friendships with their Icelandic peers, but the main reason for that might be that they have a better chance in interacting with the Icelandic children since they spend most of the schooldays together. The children studying in the welcoming classes made it very clear that they wanted to be more involved with their mainstream classes, but it is also recommended in several studies that children with refugee background should participate in their mainstream class not too long after they start school (e.g. Rangarsdóttir, 2004b; Tonheim et al., 2015). In the welcoming class system, the children do have less opportunity to learn the native language as well as they have less opportunity to interact with their native peers than the children that study in their mainstream class (Tonheim, et al., 2015). The children in the welcoming classes claimed they felt good in their mainstream classes and they would like to have more say on how much they participated in their mainstream classes. They were sure they would have a better opportunity to communicate with the Icelandic students and establish some friendships with them and learn more Icelandic by being more included in the mainstream class.

Refugees that study in the mainstream classroom have a better opportunity to practice both comprehensible input and pushed output, even though the teachers may need to modify their discourse to provide more contextualized language for the students. However, it can be argued that immigrant students and refugees in particular might need time to realise their full potential before they are assigned to any particular program of study and therefore it is essential that the schools can provide welcoming classes while the children are taking their first steps in new county and school. Similarly, it is important to identify language training needs early, since proficiency in reading is key to all learning (Lowen, 2004).

However, it requires a lot of work and good planning to integrate refugee students in mainstream classes and for some students it can be overwhelming for children coming from difficult situations to start right away in a mainstream class. Additionally, the teachers working in the welcoming classes might have better experience in working with refugee children and therefore may be better prepared to support them. Since refugee children are a

very diverse group of children with different needs, it may not be possible to make one plan for all. Even though the students in the welcoming class were very eager to participate more in the mainstream class, two of the students studying in mainstream class did comment that they would like to have started their schooling a little more separated with more of a focus on learning the language. The children in the welcoming class also agreed that it was good to start their education in Iceland in the welcoming class. As Tonehim et al. (2015) points out it is not possible to integrate refugee children rapidly into the mainstream class without good planning, but good planning is maybe what the Icelandic school system should work on to be able to make refugee students more included in their mainstream classes.

As Ragnarsdóttir, (2004b) points out, if Icelandic schools are going to succeed in including refugee students in Icelandic primary schools, the ideology has to be based on gender equality and the diversity of the students. Trust and cooperation between the teachers of the children is also essential in order to provide the children the support they need. This has to be visible in the school culture, in education and tutoring, the curriculum, parental and community cooperation, if real achievement is to be made in multicultural education. (Ragnarsdóttir, 2004b).

Refugee students are, nevertheless a group of children and young people who have different predictions to succeed at school – in a society where education and academic competence are crucial to gain access to the labour market. In order for refugees to be able to achieve the greatest possible learning outcome from their education it is important that both the learning environment and the education facilities are adopted to the students' needs at each time (de Wal Pastoor, 2012). To be able to recreate the feeling of being 'normal' through participating in the school activities, creating new social networks and the feeling of being part of something, is what the school can provide to the refugee children. This will contribute to the feelings of security, inclusion and wellbeing (de Wal Pastoor, 2012).

7.3 Social life

The results of international and national studies show that education, schooling, social life and views of the teachers as well as other students have a great impact on the psychosocial welfare of refugee children (e.g Bjarnason, 2006; Bokáková & Closs, 2013; Ottósdóttir &

Wolimbwa, 2011). The schools are usually the first place refugee children have as an opportunity to socialize with other local children and practice their language skills. It has been shown that there is a direct link between the future well-being of the students and the process of adaption that takes place in school (Schubert, 2010). The school is one of the most important forums for refugee children to create social relationships, where the children have the opportunity to make friends, learn the language and gain knowledge about the community and the culture. If the school and the school environment are organized in a good way, it can be a health-promoting platform for children with a refugee background, which can support and promote mental health and psychosocial well-being by promoting security, predictability and understanding (Betancourt & Khan, 2008; Ottósdóttir & Wolimbwa, 2011).

It was interesting to see the difference of how the children in mainstream class seemed to be more included with their Icelandic peers than the children who studied at the welcoming class. The children in the welcoming class experienced that the local children “don’t speak much with foreigners” while in the mainstream class the students seemed to interact with everyone and be included in the class and as one boy explained if he had any friends at school, “everybody are my friends”. It seemed like the children studying in mainstream class were more included and “accepted” by their Icelandic peers. Past studies have shown that it is difficult for refugee children to gain “access” to the native children and that refugee children usually only have non-native friends. Previous studies have also shown that children with refugee or immigrant background feel as outsiders both in the classroom and outside of the classroom (e.g. Bocáková & Closs, 2013; Ottósdóttir & Wolimbwa, 2011; de Wal Pastoor, 2012). These previous results only seemed to fit with the group of children that studied in a welcoming class and only joined their mainstream classes for special classes. The other group had in fact native friends, even though it cannot be measured how close these friendships were.

However, part of both groups had experienced bullying at some time after they arrived in Iceland, although it varied how much the bullying affected their wellbeing. These findings reflect in many ways findings of other research, both in Icelandic and abroad., e.g. Warren, (2007) found that children and young people are more likely to be excluded from participating if they are refugees or asylum seekers and Ottósdóttir & Wolimbwa (2011) discovered that immigrants have trouble to make friends of Icelandic origin.

It is important that the refugee children get the opportunity to interact with their Icelandic peers, to form friendships and practice their language. The feeling to belong and have the possibility to participate is important for all children but may be especially crucial for children that have refugee background. (Fazel, 2015; Kia-Keating og Ellis, 2007). An Icelandic study has also shown that students of foreign origin have generally worse self-esteem than their Icelandic peers, as well as their educational success and social connections were generally worse than their fellow Icelandic students (Bjarnason, 2006). This could be related to that the children do not feel like they are part of the school community. A study of Fantino & Colack, (2001) showed that if the child experience and perceive that they are not part of the school community, it has negative impact on the self-image.

Several studies have also shown that refugee students consider that they learn a lot from interacting with their Icelandic peers, talk to them, play with them and study with them, but they find it very difficult to take the initiative or develop these interactions (e.g. Guðjónsdóttir & Karlsdóttir, 2010; Gunderson, 2000; Ragnarsdóttir, 2004a; Ragnarsdóttir, 2007b; Ragnarsdóttir, 2007c). Gunderson, (2000) requests that school personnel develop programs that allow and encourage immigrant students to communicate and interact with Icelandic speakers. This could also help the natives to learn more about multicultural differences and give them better understanding of other culture and traditions.

All of the children, except one of the participants, participated in some afterschool activities. The only one who did not, did however vocalise a desire to participate in some kind of after school activity but had some difficulties in knowing how to access it. It is rather unusual that so many of the children participated in afterschool activities, as other research has shown that immigrant children in Iceland rarely participate in such activities (e.g. Georgsdóttir & Þórarinsdóttir, 2008; Ottósdóttir & Wolimbwa, 2011). In prior research, the reasons for why immigrant children do not participate in organized sport or leisure activities is that immigrant children hang out mostly with other immigrants and some children did not want to participate since they had experienced bullying because of their origin (Georgsdóttir & Þórarinsdóttir, 2008). Lack of motivation from parents was also one of the reasons, but children and youths needed encouragement from their parents to join organized sports or hobbies, and if the parents are not aware of what is offered they are not capable/likely to encourage their children to join such activities (Ottósdóttir & Wolimbwa, 2011). It is known that participation in organized sports and hobbies can help in creating positive self-esteem and childhood

wellbeing (Georgsdóttir & Þórarinsdóttir, 2008; Þórlindsson, Valgeirsson & Vilhjálmsson, 1990).). In addition, after school activities are a great option to establish friendships with children outside of school (Georgsdóttir & Þórarinsdóttir, 2008).

7.4 School as a safe environment

The school has to be a safe environment where the children can flourish without being victimized, taunted, bullied or at worst, physically harmed so the children can learn and develop (Hamilton, 2004). More than half of the group in this study, had experienced some kind of bullying at the school, the reasons for the bullying were mainly because of the children's religion or their ethnicity. However, many of the children that had been bullied had talked to their teachers and according to the children, the teacher had done something about the bullying which made it either stop or it became reduced. However, the children were not always willing to talk about the bullying, as they thought by discussing it, it would only make it worse or that nobody would take action anyway. One of the boys preferred not to let anyone know about the bullying.

It seems like it is common that children of foreign origin experience more difficulties than their Icelandic peers, in terms of bullying and discrimination. Bjarnason, Jónsson, Ólafsson, Hjálmarsdóttir and Ólafsson (2006) found that teenagers with a foreign background are almost three times more likely to experience bullying than teenagers of Icelandic origin. The same research showed that teenagers with other ethnic background than Icelandic are two to three times more likely to have trouble in school and according to Hamilton (2004) refugee students that are integrated into schools have high potential that they will be targeted for bullying or racism. These results are in connection with what the newest PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment) results from 2015 that were published last April, showed. It was the first time PISA examined Icelandic students' well-being. The study was conducted in 72 countries around the world on 15 years old students. Native Icelandic students did very well in the study, but the result showed that Icelandic youths suffer less from bullying at school than their peers in other parts of the world. The results were however not so great for immigrant students as beyond performance in school, the results gave an indication of how well immigrant students are integrating into their new community, based on whether or not

and to what extent they feel they belong to their new surroundings. For 15-years old, one of the most important social environment platform is the school. Iceland was one of the ten countries where immigrant children experienced the greatest rejection from their native peers, also showing that immigrant children here are less likely to graduate than their native Icelanders are.

These results indicate that there is a lack of understanding and knowledge of different cultures and religions among Icelandic youths. It is important that the schools and the community educate children and adults about the different culture, traditions and religions. The schools need to adopt stricter policies, procedures and monitoring systems in order to ensure that refugees will not be subjected to bullying or racism. The way the media represents refugees and asylum seekers and refers to them as a “crisis” or “problem” leads to refugees and asylum seekers often being subjected to racial harassment. (Pinson, Arnot & Canappa, 2009). The society has to become more open minded and positive towards the diversity of people. Many people see refugees as a threat when they are in fact often great resource for the community. It is not enough to educate children in schools about multiculturalism if they hear everywhere else that “being different is bad”, as children learn to treat other people though the persons they are routinely engaged with. (Olsen, et al., 2016; Rogoff, 2003).

Other research conducted in Iceland confirms that there is a need to further study the attitude of the society towards integration of immigrants in Iceland. A study that was conducted on the attitudes of young people in 9th and 10th grade showed that negative attitudes towards immigrants appears to have increased from 1997 to 2003 as well as half of the participants in the study in 2003 believed there were too many immigrants living in Iceland (Sigfúsdóttir, Ásgeirsdóttir, Kristjánsson & Sigfússon, 2005). However, another research conducted in 2009-2010 did show that young Icelanders (14-18 years) have positive attitudes towards receiving refugees and that all countries should welcome refugees who flee from wars and attacks in their country of origin (Aðalbjarnadóttir, 2011).

One of the children in this study had experienced some serious depression and two others talked about difficulties about waking up in the morning. While this is a common feeling to have during the winter in Iceland it should be pointed out that no special emphasis was placed on if the children were suffering traumatic stress. However, school staff and others working with refugee children have to be aware of how the mental health of the children and know how to react if one is concerned of the wellbeing of the child. It is common that refugee

children suffer from traumatic stress, which can appear as sleep difficulty, mood episode, depression anxiety and/or depression. Refugee children are also at a higher risk than other children in developing mental health problems due to trauma history along with the social, cultural and linguistic challenges they face when they arrive in new country. But first and foremost, it is the extent of stress factors rather than one single factor in the adaption progress of refugee children that causes stress. (Majumder, O'Reilly, Karim & Vostanis 2014; Ottósdóttir & Wolimbwa, 2011; de Wal Pastoor, 2015).

7.5 Move forward

One may argue that education is the key to integrate refugees in Europe. As the paper has pointed out, there is lack of appropriate and sufficient support programs that target refugee students and especially refugee children who are war effected. This can impede the ability of refugee students to adjust quickly to their new environment as well as it can affect their learning abilities (Kanu, 2008). In recent years, there has been many changes in the Icelandic society and there has been a great increase of people from other ethnicities. It is important to focus on the inclusion of everybody so that all people can study, work and live together. (Jakobsdóttir, 2007). Integration or rather, inclusion of refugees is a two-way street that requires tremendous efforts by both the newcomers and the mainstream Icelanders to accommodate each other (Fantino & Colak, 2001).

Anderson (2004a) claims that schools either have the potential to be another risk factor or to become a resilience factor in the lives of refugee children. All schools should aim for becoming the resilience factor, where the refugee students have the chance to develop, make friends and feel included at the school as well as the community. There is a great need to develop sound strategies that address the needs of refugee children in Icelandic primary schools. Cole (1996) suggests that in order to build multicultural school communities that promotes a multicultural perspective and addresses the needs of refugees and their families, the school needs to offer a multicultural curriculum, integration of multicultural community services, translation services, Icelandic language courses as well as multicultural training for the teachers.

The teachers also need training in teaching Icelandic as a second language and education in how to help the children to adapt to new environment, whilst the schools have to consider how they welcome immigrants into the schools. School leaders and teachers should receive specific training on diversity, intercultural pedagogy and language development. The teachers need to be able to track the progress of the student and adjust the teaching to the child's needs. Education and information for students and teachers about the diversity is probably the most important factor in the whole process of including refugees into the school, but attitudes of the teachers, fellow students and the society is a major factor for how the refugee children adapt to the new community (Fantino & Colack, 2001). The school also needs to focus on making the school environment more suitable to meet the needs of the child (Hamilton, 2004). It is crucial that the schools have a critical and comprehensive approach to multicultural education which will provide a framework for rethinking school reform to provide a far more promising scenario for the effective learning of students (Nieto, 1999).

Even if this study did not focus on the relationship between the parents and the school it is however an important part in adjusting to a new school environment that the parents are involved and engaged. Parents need to be encouraged to participate at the school during the beginning in order to help the children feel secure. It also helps the parents to gain an understanding and knowledge of the Icelandic school system. Good communication and trust between home and school, cooperation between the teachers of the children and a good connection in-between the children are factors that promote success (Ragnarsdóttir, 2004b; Tonheim et al., 2015). However, according to previous research in Iceland, there is a lack of communication between the schools and parents (Jónsdóttir, 2005; Ragnarsdóttir, 2004a; Ragnarsdóttir, 2004b; Tran & Ragnarsdóttir, 2013).

The focus of the school structure and the support provided is often placed on immigrants in general and on multicultural education, and often there is no distinction between the different needs of refugees and immigrant children. The invisibility of the special support or needs that refugee children might require, works against their social and cultural adaptation. In addition, the attitudes of school staff and professionals in welfare services towards refugees are characterized by the idea that refugee children are mainly affected by a post-traumatic stress disorder. This can ignore the circumstances in which they might live, such as poverty, social isolation, prejudice, and insecure legal situation in the new country. Clearly, the attitude of professionals, staff within the schools, and the society as a whole must be based on a better

knowledge of their situation as it creates the basis for social and emotional support that refugee children need. (Bronstein & Montgomery, 2011; Rousseau, Measham & Nadeu, 2013; Taylor & Sidhu 2012).

The Icelandic education system needs to become more inclusive where all students get the same opportunities, regardless of their background. This could be done through promoting early childhood development and education programs whilst parents should be encouraged to become a bigger part of the education process. Remedial programs should be offered and teachers equipped with necessary tools to be able to provide support to students with multiple disadvantages. Refugee children and youth need targeted support when they enter the school system in the form of intensive language- and general induction programs that allow them to participate in mainstream classes as soon as possible and children dealing with war trauma need to be offered psychological support.

It is important to listen what children have to say, children are usually the ones who speak honestly and they should have the opportunity to express themselves about what is working and what can be done better in regards to preparing to welcome refugee students (Axelsdóttir, 2010). It is important that students feel welcome at school, and the school needs to be a place where they feel free to be themselves regardless of their ethnicity or beliefs.

Some refugee children come to new countries unaccompanied and some are trafficked but most of them have experienced and witnessed disturbing events. Some may have been separated from their family and these experiences can have a profound effect on children throughout their life's (Pinson, et al., 2010). However, children are highly resilient and many of them find ways to cope and move forward, by learning in school, playing sports, establishing friendships or through exploring their talents or skills. It is important to give former refugee children this opportunity (Simich & Andermann, 2014; UNHCR, 2012b).

The process of facilitation of refugee children's adaption into a new and unknown school system can be complicated and it requires intervention at multiple levels. How well the student will do and feel at school is influenced on several factors on how the school is organized and how teachers interact and support their students as well as how much the parents are involved with school activities. (Hamilton, 2004).

7.6 Study limitations and strengths

Looking back after finishing this study I realize there are several things I would have done differently. The process of conducting interviews with children is not easy and especially not with children with a completely different mother tongue and cultural background. However, it was a great learning process.

I think it would have helped the children to express themselves and talk about complicated or difficult things if I would have used photos, game cards or made them draw pictures like Crivello, et al (2009) recommends when taking interviews with children. The children were quite shy and lacked the right words to express themselves. It would probably have given deeper discussion if I had, had the time to get to know the children and vice versa, and maybe met with them two or three times, but due to a lack of time that was not an option. I did not expect it to be so complicated with using an interpreter, but it was the first time I have had to interview children as well the first time I used an interpreter to translate. Even though the interpreters were very helpful it always influences what is said or more important not said. I do argue however that using a translator that the children knew from before and had worked with them for some time was a great strength for this research. Since some of the children were shy in the beginning of the interviews and did lack skills in Icelandic to express themselves they seemed to feel comfortable explaining for the translator what they wanted to say. Furthermore, the translators knew the children very well and thus were able to encourage the children to talk when a difficult or complicated topic came up, such as bullying and depression.

The study sample was also not very large and the sample of the participants selected for the study was not randomly selected so the refugee school experiences may thus not be representative of the overall refugee population in Iceland. Second, the vast majority of the refugees interviewed were males, but different issues related to gender or religion may have arose if I have had more females included in the study.

What could have influenced the results of the differences between the children studying in welcoming class and mainstream class is that the children are living in very different places. It could be that the children in Akureyri have better access to establish friendships since the town is smaller and people in their community are more aware of who they are. All refugees coming to Iceland are provided support family from the Icelandic Red Cross during the first

year, and the children in Akureyri mentioned their families a lot during the interview, which indicated that they are close to their supportive families. Of course, it depends on people how the relationship between the families develops, but it looked like the children got a great assistance with schoolwork from them.

I got the feeling that the children studying in the countryside in mainstream classes had more support from their community, they were more social and engaged with their classmates as they understood and spoke very good Icelandic considering their short time in the country. However, it is difficult to say if it is because they live in a smaller community where people are more aware about each other or if it is because they started right from the beginning in their mainstream class. It could be the combination of both that helped them to be more included in their community.

8 Conclusion

The arrival of refugees in European countries affects millions of people each year and the number of refugees arriving to Iceland over the past years has increased a lot, which has led to increased discussion in Iceland on how the country is managing to include refugee students in the school. The publishing of the newest PISA results this year made it clear that there is a need for changes in the structure of welcoming refugee students as well as other immigrant students in Icelandic primary schools.

This study was an exploratory qualitative inquiry into how refugee children at primary level experience starting school in Iceland. It is clear after interviewing these children from different school systems that there is a need for further research on how refugee children are integrated and included in Icelandic primary schools. Is the welcoming system really helping the children to establish friendships and to feel included in the school community and the society, or is it reducing their abilities to be included amongst their Icelandic peers? Can the Icelandic school system find better solutions that support refugee children in learning the language, catch up with what they have missed out of their education but at the same time help them to be socially active with their native peers?

It has been shown that one of the most important things when refugee children are adapting to a new country is to be able to establish friendships with the local children and to feel included at the school and the community.

The school is an important place for children, it provides them structure and regularity of everyday life, predictability and security. At the school, children get the chance to meet children same age, get friends, have fun, laugh and play, and most important, they get opportunity to be children. In order to be able to support the child and make the child feel included it is important that the school show interest in the child's cultural background and mother language, by providing opportunities for the children to introduce their home countries and attend lectures on their mother language. The school needs to be able to provide education that is adapted to the child's needs and takes into account the cultural background and language skills. The school also needs to be able to provide their students protection against harassment and bullying.

Before I conducted my research, I was not aware that refugee children in Icelandic primary schools could enter mainstream classes without being in a welcoming class in any school. The results of the different experiences of children attending mainstream classes and those attending refugee welcoming classes has made me interested in looking deeper into the difference of the class system for new refugees in Iceland. Until now there has not been any comparative studies conducted on the different class system. More so, it would have been interesting to further study why there was such a high participation in afterschool activities among the children that participated in this study.

It is important that the schools can welcome refugee children in the best way possible when they start their education in Iceland. It is important that the children are provided the support and the resources they need in order to be children and develop in natural way. Refugee children and their families are great human resources for the small Icelandic community. The basis for health and well-being starts during childhood and therefore it is important to provide children support and security. The school should be a place of hope and affirmation for students of all background and situations.

I wish all the participants good future in Iceland!

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Appendix

Appendix I

Letter to parents/guardians

Dear receiver.

Reykjavík xx.xx.2016

I am a student at the University of Oslo where I am working on my final research in my master studies, on how refugee children experience the Icelandic schools. Interviews will be conducted with refugee children who have been in Iceland for 2-3 years to explore their experience of schools in the country. The aim of this study is to find out how refugee children experience the school in Iceland and lead to improvement in how schools in Iceland can better assist refugee children after they arrive in Iceland and give the students better support.

Your son / daughter has been chosen in the study sample and this is a letter sent after a contact in the study contact you recently and asked for permission to send this letter to you. In the coming days you will receive a call where you will be asked for permission for the participation of your son/daughter and to find time for the interview. It is estimated that the interview will take about 40 minutes.

Your son / daughter is not required to participate in the research or answer all the questions that appear in the interview. All the data will be handled after the rules of NSD (Persónuvernd) and no personal information will be used when the data will be processed.

If you want more information, feel free to contact
Anna Sigridur, s.844-0304 or annasigridur9@gmail.com

Many thanks in advance and wish of positive response

Anna Sigríður Sveinbjörnsdóttir

Appendix II

Letter to schools/others

Kæru viðtakendur

Ég er nemandi við Háskólann í Osló og stunda mastersnám í „Special needs education“ og vinn nú að mastersverkefni mínu sem fjallar um það hvernig flóttabörn upplifi að byrja í íslenskum grunnskólum. Ég hef fengið leyfi frá Persónuvernd til að taka viðtöl og mun fylgja reglum Persónuverndar.

Ég áætla að taka viðtöl við 4-6 börn á aldrinum 10-16 ára sem hafa verið á Íslandi í 2-3 ár. Ég vonast eftir að geta tekið viðtöl við minnsta kosti 2-3 börn úr grunnskólum úr Reykjavík og önnur 2-3 frá Hafnarfiði.

Viðtölin eru opin viðtöl þar sem ég styðst við spurningalista (sjá viðhengi) en börnunum er ekki skylt að svara öllum spurningum og getur verið að við förum betur í aðrar spurningar ef börnin hafa mikið að segja.

Ég vonast til að geta tekið viðtölin í október, eða mjög fljótlega eftir að leyfi foreldra hefur fengist. Viðtölin taka í kringum 40 mín til klukkutíma. Ef skólinn hefur tók á að leyfa viðtöl á skólatíma þá er það mjög hentugt, annars fara þau fram eftir skóla.

Ef spurningar vakna þá má endilega hafa samband við mig í gegnum síma, 844-0304 eða e.mail; annasigrídur9@gmail.com

Appendix III

Interview Guide

Before starting the school in Iceland

How old were you when you came to Iceland?

Did you receive any education before you came to Iceland?

How long did you need to wait before you could start school in Iceland after you arrived?

xx Was it difficult to wait before you could start school?

What was the most difficult part if it? (the waiting)

Did you start immediately in a regular class?

If yes; How was it?

If no; Would you have preferred to start right away in a regular class?

If Yes; Why?

If no; Why?

Did you get good support from your school when you started?

How did the school support you? (teachers/language/homework.. etc)

School

How do you feel at school?

How do you like to be at school?

Are you happy at school?

If no; Is there anything you would change?

Do you participate in all classes at school? (Sports/swimming)

If no; Why not?

Do you have favorite subject? / What is that? / Why not?

Do you feel excited before you go to the school in the morning?

Have you experienced bullying in school?

Have you experienced anxiety when you go to school?

If yes; Have you told someone about it? Do you get any support?

Do you feel like you get enough support in school? (with language, subjects, homework, social life)

Do you feel like you could seek help from your teacher?

If no; Why not?

Do you manage to do your homework?

Do you receive any help with homework?

Social life

How do you like your fellow students?

Was it easy to get to know the other children?

Do you have friends from your school?

If yes; Do you meet after school finish?

Do you participate in sports or other after school activities

If yes; which activities?

If no; Is there any reason why you do not take part in after school activities?

Language

Are you doing well in learning Icelandic?

Do you feel like you understand Icelandic well?

Do you feel like you understand everything that is said in the classroom?

Would you have liked to receive more assistance learning Icelandic?

Emotional health

How are you feeling? (happy, sad, lonely..)

Do you have someone that you can talk to, about your feelings?

