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The hidden admission agendas in Finnish primary teacher education in the 1990s, 2000s and 2010s

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ABSTRACT

Applicants' suitability for the teaching profession has been underlined in admissions to Finnish primary teacher education. Nevertheless, hidden agendas beyond teacher competence frameworks and attribute definitions have also influenced primary teacher admissions, particularly in the last three decades (the 1990s, 2000s and 2010s). This article investigates these agendas connected with the gender and age distribution of the admitted students, and illustrates how these agendas have led to admission reforms, the outcomes of which have usually been insufficient, unpredictable or even undesirable. It provides reinvigoration for the historical research of teacher education policy trends, insights into the gender segregation and age segregation of model citizenship and a more explicit articulation of the aims and visions of teacher education programmes in Finland.

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Introduction

The first teacher training seminar in Finland was founded in 1863 by the Lutheran pastor and scholar Uno Cygnaeus. He created the Jyväskylä Teacher Training Institute, in which the curriculum was influenced by Swiss and German educators and valued the role of practical pedagogical subjects and a strict Christian spirit in teacher education.¹ A century later, during the 1970s, Finnish teacher education was modernised and harmonised, teacher education departments were established in the universities, and consequently teacher education became a degree at Master's level. Although teacher education has, throughout the years, enjoyed rather unanimous public confidence and political acceptance nationally,² it took almost one and a half centuries from its establishment before Finnish teacher training managed to gain international attention. At the turn of the millennium the Finnish education system and teacher education in particular were placed on a pedestal due to the phenomenal success in large-scale international

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¹Kirsi Tirri, 'The Last 40 Years in Finnish Teacher Education', *Journal of Education for Teaching* 40, no. 5 (2014): 600–9.

²Björn Furuhausen, Janne Holmén and Janne Sääntti, 'The Ideal Teacher: Orientations of Teacher Education in Sweden and Finland after the Second World War', *History of Education* 48, no. 6 (2019): 784–805.

comparisons, such as the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), in which Finnish pupils have been scoring among the top countries in reading, mathematics, science and collaborative problem-solving from the very beginning.³

With its international reputation, scholars have directed their attention to Finnish teacher education and presented their interpretations of what makes it so successful. For example, high qualification requirements – including a Master's degree, a research-based approach adopted in every teacher education department to support teachers' ability to make educational decisions based on theoretical knowledge and rational arguments, and teaching training schools to help and guide student teachers to apply educational and didactic theory and practice – have usually been emphasised as success factors. In addition, the exceptional attractiveness of the teaching profession has been seen as a guarantee for the quality potential of prospective teachers: while many countries struggle with finding ways to attract young people to apply for teacher training, resulting in observed shortages of competent teachers in schools,⁴ in Finland teacher education programmes, such as primary and special education teacher programmes, have traditionally succeeded in attracting a large pool of applicants. For example, only 11% of applicants were admitted into primary teacher programmes during the 2010s.⁵

In Finland, the selection challenge in teacher education has been approached by an orientation that gives weight to applicants' suitability for the teaching profession. Through the years, everyone admitted to primary teacher training has, in one way or another, been assessed face-to-face by teacher educators in the entrance examinations. The tradition of a rigorous admissions process that highlights the assessments of non-cognitive attributes, which have usually been ignored in teacher training selections,⁶ has been credited in international comparisons of the best performing school systems.⁷ As Zeichner and Conklin note, teacher education programmes are often characterised by certain ideological or traditional conceptual orientations regarding the aims, content and/or structure of teacher training.⁸ Consequently, the trust in face-to-face assessments can be regarded as one of the orientations distinctive of Finnish teacher education.

Despite the general orientation, the actual methods for screening applicants have changed repeatedly over the decades. The lack of a comparable school certificate system in the early stage of the teacher seminar era required that applicants' knowledge and competencies in various school subjects needed to be measured with ad hoc exams. When the entrance examinations also included a medical examination, aiming not only to prevent the spread of illness and epidemics, but also to evaluate the applicant's posture

³Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], *Learning for Tomorrow's World: First Results from PISA 2003* (Paris: OECD Publishing, 2004); OECD, *PISA 2015 Results (Volume I): Excellence and Equity in Education* (Paris: OECD Publishing, 2016); OECD, *PISA 2015 Results (Volume V): Collaborative Problem Solving* (Paris: OECD Publishing, 2017).

⁴European Commission, *Teachers in Europe: Careers, Development and Well-Being* (Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2021), 29–30; OECD, *TALIS 2018 Results (Volume II): Teachers and School Leaders as Valued Professionals* (Paris: OECD Publishing, 2020), 76.

⁵University of Helsinki, 'Kasvatusalan valintayhteistyöverkosto: tilastoja [National Selection Cooperation Network in the Field of Education: Statistics]', <https://www.helsinki.fi/fi/verkostot/kasvatusalan-valintayhteistyoverkosto/hakeminen/tilastot> (accessed October 29, 2021).

⁶Robert M. Klassen and Lisa E. Kim, 'Selecting Teachers and Prospective Teachers: A Meta-Analysis', *Educational Research Review* 26 (2019): 32–51.

⁷For example, Michael Barber and Mona Mourshed, *How the World's Best Performing School Systems Come Out on Top* (London: McKinsey & Company, 2007), 17–19.

⁸Ken Zeichner and Hilary Conklin, 'Teacher Education Programs', in *Studying Teacher Education*, ed. Marilyn Cochran-Smith and Ken Zeichner (London: Lawrence Erlbaum, 2005), 646–7.

and physique, and an interview by the seminary rector, often based on the applicant's written life story, the examinations were lengthy, lasting for three to five days.⁹ Although the majority of subject exams were removed from the entrance examinations along with the rise in the overall quality of the education and certification system, singing and drawing exams, including memory-based and imaginary drawing, remained as mandatory components in the entrance examinations until the 1970s.¹⁰ The privileged position of art education subjects in teacher training selections has been regarded as deriving from two aspects. First, singing and drawing skills were seen as important to ensure the applicant's proper and sufficient cultural orientation, and second, they were considered useful for prospective teachers to illustrate their teaching and generate motivation for learning in various school subjects.¹¹ From the 1950s to the 1990s the primary teacher education entrance examinations were methodologically dominated by the demonstration lesson. Originally, the demonstration lessons were arranged as an imaginary classroom situation that lasted for 8–10 minutes, but in the 1970s the imaginary situation was turned into an authentic 10–15-minute teaching demonstration with actual pupils (usually third- and fourth-graders).¹²

Just like the methods for screening the applicants, the selection criteria and descriptions of the ideal candidate have also varied over the years. In the first teacher training seminar in 1863 applicants were expected to possess proper reading skills, faultless writing skills with mediocre cursive abilities, fair skills in four mathematical methods when calculating with integers and fractions, ability in drawing and singing, skills in handicrafts and knowledge of the Christian doctrine.¹³ Until the end of the 1950s, the ideal teacher applicant was characterised as reputable, precise, healthy and well-mannered but also musical and with good presentation skills, whereas in the 1970s and 1980s virtues such as extroversion and possessing suitable hobbies and interests were emphasised.¹⁴ From the 1990s onwards, wider and permissive criteria were provided for teacher educators to select suitable, motivated and educable applicants for primary teacher education.¹⁵ In the 2010s, suitability, motivation and educability were still the main attributes when teacher education departments explicitly described their objectives for the selections.¹⁶

In addition to the selection criteria for the ideal (student) teacher, more implicit agendas beyond the traditional teacher competence frameworks and attribute definitions have also influenced primary teacher admissions, particularly in the last three decades

⁹Risto Rinne, *Kansanopettaja mallikansalaisena: opettajuuden laajeneminen ja opettajuuteen rekrytoimismekanismit Suomessa 1851–1986 virallisen kuvausaineiston ilmaisemana* [Primary Teacher as a Model Citizen: The Expansion of Teaching and the Mechanisms for Recruiting for Teaching in Finland in 1851–1986 as Expressed by Official Description Material] (Turku: University of Turku, 1986), 142.

¹⁰Esko Kähkönen, *Opettajankoulutus Suomen koulunuudistuksessa v. 1958–1978: yleissivistävän koulun opettajien koulutuksen järjestelyt ja tavoitteet* [Teacher Training in the Finnish School Reform in 1958–1978: Arrangements and Objectives for the Training of General Education Teachers] (Oulu: University of Oulu, 1979), 115.

¹¹Rinne, *Kansanopettaja mallikansalaisena*, 165.

¹²Kähkönen, *Opettajankoulutus Suomen koulunuudistuksessa*, 115.

¹³Veli Nurmi, *Opettajankoulutuksen tähänastinen kehitys* [Development in Teacher Education to Date] (Helsinki: WSOY, 1979), 121.

¹⁴Rinne, *Kansanopettaja mallikansalaisena*, 205.

¹⁵Tuula Laes, *Tulevaa opettajaa tunnistamassa: opettajaksi soveltuvuuden arvioinnista* [Early Identification of a Future Teacher: On Assessment of Aptitude for Teaching] (Turku: University of Turku, 2005), 79–80.

¹⁶Ville Mankki, Marita Mäkinen and Pekka Räihä, 'Luokanopettajakoulutuksen opiskelijavalintakriteerit: köydenvetoa soveltuvasta hakijasta [Student Selection Criteria for Primary Teacher Education: Controversy Over a Suitable Applicant]', *Kasvatus* 49, no. 1 (2018): 36.

(the 1990s, 2000s and 2010s). In this article, we investigate these hidden admission agendas connected with the gender and age distribution of students admitted by analysing original documents, such as statements, acts, governmental programmes and proposals, newspaper articles and application guides. With this article, we provide reinvigoration for the historical research of teacher education policy trends that have, it is argued, been scarce,¹⁷ and illustrate the gender segregation as well as age segregation of model citizenship.¹⁸

The 1990s: the manhunt

A female majority in the teaching population is a common characteristic of the education sector globally. At all levels of education combined, more than two-thirds of teachers across OECD countries are women, and particularly in the early years of schooling the proportions of female teachers are very high.¹⁹ There is an equivalent situation in Finland: women have been the majority of primary teachers since 1875²⁰ and currently represent 80% of the teaching staff in primary education.²¹

As elsewhere, the gender monopolisation of the teaching profession has been seen as rather undesirable in Finland. For example, in a publication of the Finnish National Agency for Education it is stated that a bigger proportion of male teachers would be beneficial because the teacher community should resemble society and show pupils the equality between men and women.²² Even though the feminisation debate over the teaching profession has a long tradition in Finland, and has included opposing interests, claims of gender superiority and the distinguishing of skills and authority, in many cases the discussion has also included a strong, constructive tone with arguments in favour of gender equality and solidarity amongst teachers.²³

During the time of gender-separated seminars, women and men were almost equally represented in teacher training.²⁴ However, when departments were unified attempts were required to solve the biased gender balance of the teaching profession by modifying teacher training admission procedures. The most visible way to secure a satisfactory proportion of men in the teaching population was a gender quota that guaranteed 40% of degree places in primary teacher programmes for men.²⁵ However, in 1987 the Ministry of Education requested a statement by the Ombudsman for Equality on gender quotas in primary teacher education.²⁶ In the statement, the Ombudsman pointed out that ‘setting

¹⁷David Crook, ‘Teacher Education as a Field of Historical Research: Retrospect and Prospect’, *History of Education* 41, no. 1 (2012): 57–72.

¹⁸Rinne, *Kansanopettaja mallikansalaisena*, 59–60.

¹⁹OECD, *Education at a Glance 2021: OECD Indicators* (Paris: OECD Publishing, 2021), 404.

²⁰Rinne, *Kansanopettaja mallikansalaisena*, 63–7.

²¹OECD, *Education at a Glance 2021*, 404.

²²Timo Kumpulainen, ed. *Opettajat ja rehtorit Suomessa 2016* [Teachers and Principals in Finland 2016] (Helsinki: Finnish National Agency for Education, 2017), 42.

²³Marjo Nieminen, ‘Women Teachers and the Feminisation of the Teaching Profession in a Finnish Journal for Primary School Teachers (The Teacher), 1915–1920’, *Paedagogica Historica* 58, no. 1 (2020): 139–53.

²⁴Ibid.

²⁵Pekka Räihä, ‘Koskaan et muuttua saa! Luokanopettajakoulutuksen opiskelijavalintojen uudistamisen vaikeudesta [Never May You Change! On the Difficulty of Reforming Student Selection for Class Teacher Education Programmes]’ (PhD diss., University of Tampere, 2010), 45–6.

²⁶Ombudsman for Equality, *Lausunto kiintiöiden käytöstä (126/1987)* [Statement on Quotas (126/1987)] (Helsinki: Office of the Ombudsman for Equality, April 1987), 1.

up gender quotas in admissions is against the Act on Equality between Women and Men', because they place applicants 'in different positions based on their gender'.²⁷ Hence, quotas were removed from primary teacher admissions in the 1989 selections, which immediately cut the share of men admitted by half to 20%, which was in line with the proportion of male applicants.²⁸

Although gender quotas were removed for anti-discriminatory reasons, their removal caused criticism: for example, the chairman of the Trade Union of Education in Finland contested the decision, pointing out that a growing number of children were being raised without a father figure.²⁹ During the following years universities still requested permission to re-create a male quota for primary teacher selections, but the Equality Ombudsman attacked these plans.³⁰ The vision of re-establishing gender quotas in teacher education has come up from time to time in public discussion. For example, in 1996 the then minister of education Olli-Pekka Heinonen was concerned about the proportion of men in teaching and proposed re-creating quotas, particularly in those programmes in which men formed a clear minority.³¹ The most recent time when quotas were proposed by the authorities was in 2012, when a working committee on a programme of measures for educational equality suggested investigating whether the Constitution of Finland, Non-Discrimination Act and Act on Equality between Women and Men would somehow allow enhancing the admission of the 'underrepresented gender' into teacher education programmes by awarding extra selection points or establishing a gender quota.³² Interestingly, the physical education teacher programme (located in the University of Jyväskylä) has managed to retain gender quotas guaranteeing 50% of degree places for both men and women. However, in January 2020, the Ombudsman for Equality also declared the quotas illegitimate in selections for physical education teacher training.³³ The quotas were eventually removed from the selection criteria of the programme in January 2022.³⁴

After removing the gender quota in primary teacher training, how to get more men admitted seemed to become the most essential question in primary teacher selections. The 'manhunt' agenda can be observed particularly in the various attempts executed by

²⁷Ibid., 4; see also *Finlex Data Bank*, 'Act on Equality between Women and Men (609/1986)', https://finlex.fi/en/laki/kaannokset/1986/en19860609_20160915.pdf (accessed November 11, 2021).

²⁸Sakari Liimatainen, 'Opettajankoulutuksen valintayhteistyö [Selection Co-Operation in Teacher Education]', in *Opettajaksi soveltuvuuden moni-ilmeisyys: opiskelijavalinta valtakunnallisesti puntaroituna* [The Manifolddness of Teacher Suitability: Addressing Student Selection Nationally], ed. Pekka Rähä and Jouko Kari (Jyväskylä: University of Jyväskylä, 2002), 27.

²⁹'Koulutuspaikkojen lisäyksellä eroon opettajapulasta [Getting Rid of Teacher Shortages by Increasing the Degree Places]', *Etelä-Suomen Sanomat*, 25, August 11, 1988.

³⁰For example, Ombudsman for Equality, *Lausunto 27/59/92* [Statement 27/59/92] (Helsinki: Office of the Ombudsman for Equality, November 1992), 1.

³¹Heinonen toistaa mieskiintiöajatuksensa [Heinonen Repeats His Male Quota Idea]', *Helsingin Sanomat*, September 2, 1996, <https://www.hs.fi/kotimaa/art-2000003558007.html>.

³²Ministry of Education and Culture, *Ehdotus valtioneuvoston strategiaksi koulutuksellisen tasa-arvon edistämiseksi* [Proposal for a Government Strategy to Promote Equality in Education] (Helsinki: Ministry of Education and Culture, December 3, 2012), 46.

³³Ombudsman for Equality, *Sukupuolikiintiöt oppilasvalinnassa* [Gender Quotas in Student Selection] (Helsinki: Office of the Ombudsman for Equality, January 2020), <https://www.tasa-arvo.fi/-/sukupuolikiintiöt-oppilasvalinnassa-tas-217-2017-annettu-7-1-2020> (accessed November 2, 2021).

³⁴University of Jyväskylä, 'Liikuntatieteellinen tiedekunta poistaa sukupuolikiintiöt liikunnan opettajankoulutuksen valintaperusteista [The Faculty of Sport and Health Sciences Removes Gender Quotas from the Selection Criteria of the Physical Education Teacher Programme]', <https://www.jyu.fi/fi/ajankohtaista/arkisto/2022/01/liikuntatieteellinen-tiedekunta-poistaa-sukupuolikiintiöt-liikunnan-opettajankoulutuksen-valintaperusteista> (accessed April 21, 2022).

the joint selection working group in the 1990s. This group, consisting of teacher education departments' heads of study affairs, was liberated from the authority of the Ministry of Education in 1993 and after that it became possible for the working group independently to draw up the pre-selection criteria for primary teacher admissions and update them annually.³⁵ The chair of the working group at the time, Sakari Liimatainen, has stated that the main motive for many of the modifications of pre-selection scoring was precisely to enhance men's chances of selection for training.³⁶

In the first primary teacher selections according to the criteria created by the working committee, pre-selection points were awarded for completed or ongoing military service or non-military civilian service.³⁷ However, since the Act on Women's Voluntary Military Service was enacted in April 1995, the first women were able to enter voluntary military service in October 1995, completing their then eight-month service in June 1996 at the earliest.³⁸ Despite the opportunity provided, the number of women entering military service has been exceedingly low compared with men: for example, between 2000 and 2010 around 400 women entered military service annually, while the number of men fluctuated between 26,000 and 32,000.³⁹ The circumvention of the Act on Equality between Women and Men with points awarded for military service can therefore be considered rather audacious.

In addition, more subtle changes were made to the pre-selection scoring in pursuit of enhancing the position of men. For example, the applicant's personal hobby activities were removed from pre-selection grading in 1994⁴⁰ and points for experience in organising and supervising hobby activities for children and youth were abolished in 1996.⁴¹ Liimatainen explained that these removals were based on the observed advantage they had given to female applicants, who received higher scores in these categories, but also because they were troublesome and exceedingly laborious to verify in a reliable manner.⁴² At the end of the decade, extra pre-selection points started to be awarded for completion of the advanced syllabus in mathematics⁴³ and previous studies in the fields of technology and media,⁴⁴ while the weighting given to music and art diplomas was reduced and definitions were made stricter.⁴⁵ Despite the weighting of 'masculine features' in the pre-selection grading, the proportion of men in the entrance examinations (and among students admitted) for primary teacher training remained firmly under 20% throughout the 1990s.⁴⁶

The changes connected to the manhunt were not entirely restricted to the pre-selection phase. Rather, they also impacted on the reform that shifted the primary teacher entrance examinations from August to June in 1997.⁴⁷ The decision to prepone the

³⁵Liimatainen, 'Opettajankoulutuksen valintayhteistyö', 26.

³⁶Ibid., 30.

³⁷University of Tampere, *Valintaopas 1993* [Application Guide 1993] (Tampere: University of Tampere, 1993), 64.

³⁸*Finlex Data Bank*, 'Act on Women's Voluntary Military Service (1994/1995)', <https://www.finlex.fi/fi/laki/ajantasa/1995/19950194> (accessed December 7, 2021).

³⁹Statistics Finland, 'Conscription and International Crisis Management, 2000–2020', https://pxnet2.stat.fi/PXWeb/pxweb/en/StatFin/StatFin__kou__aseve/statfin_aseve_pxt_001.px/ (accessed November 11, 2021).

⁴⁰University of Tampere, *Valintaopas 1994* [Application Guide 1994] (Tampere: University of Tampere, 1994), 67.

⁴¹University of Tampere, *Valintaopas 1996* [Application Guide 1996] (Tampere: University of Tampere, 1996), 66.

⁴²Liimatainen, 'Opettajankoulutuksen valintayhteistyö', 28.

⁴³University of Tampere, *Valintaopas 1997* [Application Guide 1997] (Tampere: University of Tampere, 1997), 66.

⁴⁴University of Tampere, *Valintaopas 1998* [Application Guide 1998] (Tampere: University of Tampere, 1998), 66.

⁴⁵University of Tampere, *Valintaopas 1999* [Application Guide 1999] (Tampere: University of Tampere, 1999), 63.

⁴⁶Liimatainen, 'Opettajankoulutuksen valintayhteistyö', 30.

⁴⁷University of Tampere, *Valintaopas 1997*, 66.

entrance examinations was based on the aim of gaining a general competitive advantage among the applicants, men in particular, so that they would not run off to other, for example technological, fields before the selection process for primary teacher education had even begun.⁴⁸ The relatively small change in timing had, however, a major impact on the execution of and the methods used in entrance examinations: it practically ended the era of the demonstration lesson in primary teacher selections. As the summer holidays in Finnish basic education occur in June and July, the teacher education departments were not able to gather pupils from teacher training schools to participate in the demonstration lessons. The abandonment of the traditional method caused opposition in some teacher education departments: for example, in 2001 the University of Helsinki reintroduced demonstration lessons in their primary teacher selections one more time by arranging entrance examinations abnormally in May to pre-empt pupils' summer holidays.⁴⁹

The 2000s: attention to the fresh graduate

In addition to the biased gender balance, the other major demographic characteristic of primary teacher training is that instead of fresh general upper secondary school graduates, it is older and more experienced applicants who have usually been admitted into the programme. Nevertheless, this matter has not been considered categorically as a negative feature among teacher education departments: instead, the arduous admission process that usually requires multiple attempts to gain access to the programme have made the teaching profession look elusive, and, rhetorically, maturity and life experience gained have been considered beneficial for the individual intending to become a teacher.⁵⁰ In particular, work experience from schools has been valued as a clear indication of interest in and commitment to the field and the teaching profession.⁵¹

Already in the 1990s some attention was paid to the position of young applicants in admissions by the joint selection working group, which reacted to the weakened employment circumstances in the teaching field.⁵² For example, the maximum pre-selection score from experience working as an unqualified or substitute teacher was lowered and other work experience was removed from grading in 1994.⁵³ In 1995, the score awarded from previous studies was diminished and points from completed degrees were entirely removed from pre-selection grading.⁵⁴

Nevertheless, the relatively high age of students admitted and the poor position of fresh upper secondary school graduates were recognised more extensively at the beginning of the new millennium, when it became increasingly evident that the further the primary teacher admission process proceeded, the lower the proportion of newly matriculated applicants. In 2001–2005, the proportion of fresh graduates among all applicants

⁴⁸Jouko Kari, 'Sukupuolinäkökulma opettajan ammattiin [Gender Perspectives on the Teaching Profession]', in *Miehiä kouluun: taustaa ja keskustelua tasa-arvosta* [Men into School: Background and Debate on Equality], ed. Olli-Pekka Heinonen, Jouko Huttunen, Jouko Kari, Armi Mikkola and Mika Silvennoinen (Helsinki: WSOY), 38–9.

⁴⁹Räihä, 'Koskaan et muuttua saa!', 51–2.

⁵⁰Ibid., 96.

⁵¹Ministry of Education, *Opettajankoulutus – tietoa, taitoa, tulevaisuutta* [Teacher Education – Knowledge, Skill, Future] (Helsinki: Ministry of Education, 2006), 20.

⁵²Liimatainen, 'Opettajankoulutuksen valintayhteistyö', 28.

⁵³University of Tampere, *Valintaopas 1994*, 67.

⁵⁴University of Tampere, *Valintaopas 1995* [Application Guide 1995] (Tampere: University of Tampere, 1995), 63–4.

was almost a quarter, but their share among students admitted was just slightly over 10%.⁵⁵ In two teacher education departments the proportion of new graduates was less than 5% of the students admitted in 2005.⁵⁶

Once again, attention was focused on the pre-selection phase, albeit involving more intensive measures than previously, i.e. not confined to scoring adjustments. Instead, a unified national entrance examination in the field of education (the so-called VAKAVA exam) was developed and launched in 2007, particularly to improve the chances of newly matriculated applicants. A multiple-choice exam replaced the burdensome and complicated pre-selection system based on scoring accumulated from the matriculation examination, work experience as an unqualified teacher or a school assistant, military service and non-military civilian service, and studying educational science at open universities.⁵⁷ The extensive and demanding pre-selection procedure had become exceedingly heavy for both applicants and teacher education departments since gaining access to training was practically impossible without collecting additional selection points from work experience or studies in an open university.

The VAKAVA exam was open to all eligible applicants regardless of previous academic achievements, and those who were the most successful in the examination were selected for the second stage of selection (an aptitude test).⁵⁸ The cornerstone of the implementation of the new pre-selection was to equalise opportunities for preparation for the exam between fresh graduates and those who had already completed their matriculation examination earlier.⁵⁹ To this end, the collection of a few Finnish scholarly articles in the field of education serving as material for the exam, published both online and as a book, was not made available until after the matriculation exams were over, i.e. about a month before the VAKAVA exam. Therefore, applicants who had graduated from upper secondary school in preceding years were prevented from gaining an advantage by preparing themselves for the entrance exam at the same time as fresh graduates were still gearing up for their matriculation exam. The first material for the VAKAVA exam included five articles on topics such as problem-based learning, the reliability of qualitative research and child development in Rousseau's *Émile*.⁶⁰

The launch of the VAKAVA exam significantly increased the total number of applicants for primary teacher training.⁶¹ However, despite equalised preparation opportunities, the lack of newly matriculated applicants continued at the same level in the pre-selection stage.⁶² Apparently, estimates of the shortage of time were somewhat false and new upper secondary school graduates still seemed to be worn out by the matriculation exams: it was only in those VAKAVA exam items which were applied more than

⁵⁵Timo Kumpulainen and Seija Saari, eds., *Opettajat Suomessa 2005* [Teachers in Finland 2005] (Helsinki: Opetushallitus, 2005), 9. Between 2001 and 2005 the annual proportion of fresh upper secondary graduates among admitted students decreased from 13% to 10%.

⁵⁶Räihä, 'Koskaan et muuttua saa!', 103.

⁵⁷University of Tampere, *Valintaopas 2006* [Application Guide 2006] (Tampere: University of Tampere, 2006), 58–9.

⁵⁸University of Tampere, *Valintaopas 2007* [Application Guide 2007] (Tampere: University of Tampere, 2007), 75.

⁵⁹Pekka Räihä, 'Vakava-hankkeesta ei tullutkaan uuden ylioppilaan pelastajaa [The VAKAVA Project did not become a Saviour for the New Upper Secondary School Graduate]', *Kasvatus* 41, no. 3 (2010): 216.

⁶⁰Merja Hillilä, Pekka Räihä and Marjatta Bardy, eds., *Samalta viivalta: kasvatusalan valintayhteistyöhankkeen (VAKAVA) kirjallisen kokeen aineisto* [From the Same Line: The Material for the Written Examination of the Selection Cooperation Network in the Field of Education (VAKAVA)] (Jyväskylä: PS-kustannus, 2007).

⁶¹Timo Kumpulainen, ed., *Opettajat Suomessa 2008* [Teachers in Finland 2008] (Helsinki: Opetushallitus, 2005), 19–20.

⁶²Räihä, 'Vakava-hankkeesta', 217.

memory-based and detail-emphasising that newly matriculated applicants performed on the same level as other applicants.⁶³ Although the VAKAVA reform did not have the intended impact on pre-selection outcomes, the reform did, however, take a beneficial turn in selections since the proportion of graduates among students admitted increased significantly from 10% to 20%.⁶⁴ In explaining this, it has been considered that many teacher education departments independently decided to transfer matriculation exam grades that were previously used in pre-selection grading to final selection scoring, i.e. as additional points for the aptitude test score.⁶⁵ As an age-neutral instrument, the grades helped new graduates by diminishing the advantage that older applicants seemed to have in the interviews and group assignments in the aptitude test.

Nevertheless, it has been argued that the biggest changes derived from the VAKAVA reform actually took place outside teacher education. First, when pre-selection points were no longer awarded for working experience in schools, school rectors reported that recruitment of substitute teachers and school assistants became much more difficult.⁶⁶ Before the reform, those who considered applying for primary teacher education formed a reliable labour reserve for schools. Second, the VAKAVA reform caused a collapse in the popularity of educational sciences at the open universities. For example, at Jyväskylä Open University, the drop in educational sciences in 2007 was a thousand students and 16,500 study credits compared with the previous year.⁶⁷ The reduction in earlier studies was also observable among students admitted: in 2005, more than a quarter of the students admitted for primary teacher training at the University of Jyväskylä had completed intermediate studies before entering the programme, whereas three years later none of the students admitted had completed intermediate studies.⁶⁸

The 2010s: national cross-disciplinary rejuvenation efforts

The challenging admission process for new general upper secondary graduates was not restricted exclusively to teacher education. Instead, the slow transition to higher education has been acknowledged as a broader characteristic of the Finnish education system. The latest statistics indicate that the transition to higher education became even more involved during the 2010s, and that only 28% of new graduates began their studies in higher education without a delay.⁶⁹ Up to 27% of students entered higher education with a delay of more than two years after leaving their previous level of schooling; only in Sweden was the proportion of delayed entrants higher.⁷⁰

⁶³Ibid., 220.

⁶⁴Ibid., 216–17.

⁶⁵University of Tampere, *Valintaopas 2007*, 76. For example, in the University of Tampere final selection points were awarded also for mother tongue and mathematics.

⁶⁶Räihä, 'Koskaan et muuttua saa!', 108–15.

⁶⁷Jyväskylä Open University, *Avoimen yliopiston toimintakertomus vuodelta 2008* [The Annual Report of the Open University 2008] (Jyväskylä: Jyväskylä Open University, 2008), 2.

⁶⁸Räihä, 'Koskaan et muuttua saa!', 105–6.

⁶⁹Statistics Finland, 'Share of Passers of the Matriculation Examination Left Outside Further Studies Grew Further', https://www.stat.fi/til/khak/2018/khak_2018_2019-12-12_tie_001_en.html (accessed December 8, 2021).

⁷⁰Kristina Hauschildt and others, *Social and Economic Conditions of Student Life in Europe: EUROSTUDENT VII Synopsis of Indicators 2018–2021* (Bielefeld: wbv Media GmbH & Co. KG, 2021), 83–4.

From the perspective of the national economy, the slow transition to higher education is regarded to be detrimental. Consequently, several working groups drafted plans for a swifter and smoother transition to higher education⁷¹ and the facilitation of young people's transition into tertiary education was included in all government programmes in the 2010s.⁷² The rejuvenation objectives set in government programmes led to student admission reform in Finnish higher education, which has also had a significant impact on admission to primary teacher education.

The first phase of the reform came into effect in 2016, when universities and universities of applied sciences were obligated to create a quota for applicants who had not previously accepted a degree place in higher education.⁷³ In their proposal to Parliament in 2014, the government estimated that 'when a sufficient quantity of degree places is reserved for first-timers, they will be admitted to a greater extent'.⁷⁴ In primary teacher education, the agreed amount for the so-called first-timer quota has been 80% of the admitted applicants.⁷⁵ However, the first indications are that the quota has not had a visible impact on the admission results, since the majority of the applicants have been classified as first-timers during the first years of the quota.⁷⁶

As a second phase of the reform, higher education institutions committed to diminishing entrance examinations and increasing the weight of the matriculation exam certificate in admissions to the extent that by 2020 more than half of the student places were filled based on matriculation exam grades.⁷⁷ The change has been significant, as a few years earlier only 15% of degree places in universities were filled solely based on matriculation exam performance.⁷⁸ The aim of the so-called certificate-based selection is particularly to lighten the laborious and prolonged preparation for entrance examinations that was seen as decelerating the transition to higher education.⁷⁹ In some high-status disciplines, such as medicine and law, the competitive admissions and demanding preparation for entrance examinations have provided room for a shadow-education market and commercial preparatory courses.⁸⁰

⁷¹For example, Sakari Ahola, *Yhteishausta yhteisvalintaan. Yliopistojen opiskelijavalintojen kehittäminen. Selvitysmiehen loppuraportti* [From Joint Application to Joint Selection. Development of Student Selection in Universities. Investigator's Final Report] (Helsinki: Ministry of Education, 2004); Kari Sajavaara and others, *Yliopistojen opiskelijavalintojen arviointi* [Evaluation of Student Selection in Universities] (Helsinki: Edita Publishing, 2002).

⁷²Prime Minister's Office, *Programme of Prime Minister Jyrki Katainen's Government* (Helsinki: Prime Minister's Office, 2011), <https://vnk.fi/julkaisu?pubid=3606> (accessed April 2, 2021); Prime Minister's Office, *Finland, a Land of Solutions: Strategic Programme of Prime Minister Juha Sipilä's Government* (Helsinki: Prime Minister's Office, 2015), <https://vnk.fi/julkaisu?pubid=6407> (accessed April 2, 2021); Finnish Government, *Programme of Prime Minister Antti Rinne's Government: Inclusive and Competent Finland – A Socially, Economically and Ecologically Sustainable Society* (Helsinki: Finnish Government), <https://julkaisut.valtioneuvosto.fi/handle/10024/161664> (accessed April 2, 2021).

⁷³*Finlex Data Bank*, 'Universities Act (2009/558)', https://www.finlex.fi/en/laki/kaannokset/2009/en20090558_20160644.pdf (accessed November 3, 2021); *Finlex Data Bank*, 'Universities of Applied Sciences Act (932/2014)', https://www.finlex.fi/en/laki/kaannokset/2014/en20140932_20160563.pdf (accessed November 3, 2021).

⁷⁴Finnish Government, 'The Government's Proposal to Parliament to Amend the Universities Act and the Universities of Applied Sciences Act', <https://www.eduskunta.fi/valtiopaivaasiakirjat/HE+244/2014> (accessed April 2, 2021).

⁷⁵University of Tampere, *Valintaopas 2016* [Application Guide 2016] (Tampere: University of Tampere, 2016), 87.

⁷⁶Sakari Ahola, Rita Asplund and Pekka Vanhala, *Opiskelijavalinnat ja korkeakouluopintojen nopeuttaminen* [Student Selection and Acceleration of Higher Education Studies] (Helsinki: Prime Minister's Office, 2018), 7.

⁷⁷Ministry of Education and Culture, 'Korkeakoulujen opiskelijavalintojen kehittämisen toimenpiteet 2017–2020 [Measures for the Development of University Student Admissions 2017–2020]', <https://urly.fi/PxJ> (accessed November 4, 2021).

⁷⁸Ahola et al., *Opiskelijavalinnat ja korkeakouluopintojen nopeuttaminen*, 9.

⁷⁹Ministry of Education and Culture, 'Developing Student Admissions', <https://okm.fi/en/acceleration-of-transition-to-working-life> (accessed December 9, 2021).

⁸⁰Sonja Kosunen and others, 'Private Supplementary Tutoring and Socio-Economic Differences in Access to Higher Education', *Higher Education Policy* 34 (2021): 949–68.

In primary teacher education, certificate-based selection modified the pre-selection phase. Whereas in 2019 pre-selection was based purely on performance in the VAKAVA exam,⁸¹ in 2020 the majority (60%) of the places in the decisive aptitude test phase were filled based on matriculation exam grades.⁸² Scoring of the matriculation exam is based on two generic models.⁸³ Teacher education departments utilise the model in which pre-selection points are awarded from four matriculation exam grades: (1) mother tongue, and the grades that provide the best selection score in (2) mathematics, (3) humanities and sciences, and (4) foreign languages.⁸⁴

The matriculation exam scoring models have aroused much heated debate in Finland, because the models accentuate certain subjects by awarding a considerably higher score for those grades compared with others.⁸⁵ In particular, the emphasis given to the grade in the advanced mathematics syllabus has been widely criticised for forcing upper secondary students to study mathematics regardless of their wishes, interest or the field they want to pursue, thus weakening the mission of the general upper secondary school to provide extensive general knowledge, and preventing the recognition of the special needs and characteristics of educational sectors and disciplines.⁸⁶ On the other hand, unlike the first-timer quota, certificate-based selection, combined with the increase in the number of degree places, seems to have brought at least some relief to new upper secondary graduates: in 2020, the proportion of those continuing their studies immediately after upper secondary school increased by almost 10%.⁸⁷

The national requirements to lighten the entrance examinations have also forced a revision in the implementation of the VAKAVA exam: from 2020 onwards, the exam has been based on material provided in the exam instead of pre-material.⁸⁸ The removal of pre-material combined with the certificate-based selection reform will most likely change the student population in primary teacher education from at least one perspective. It can be assumed that success in the highly competitive selection tests required careful familiarisation with the educational articles used as pre-material in the exam. Also, the pre-selection system preceding the VAKAVA exam in practice forced applicants to accumulate extra points from educational science studies in open universities to gain admission. Therefore, for the first time in decades, students enter a primary teacher programme with no prior knowledge of educational science.

⁸¹Studyinfo, 'Luokanopettaja, kasvatustieteiden tutkinto-ohjelma, kasvatustieteen kandidaatti ja maisteri [Primary Teacher, the Degree Programme of Educational Sciences, Bachelor and Master of Arts (Education)]', <https://opintopolku.fi/app/#!/korkeakoulu/1.2.246.562.17.19708380258> (accessed May 5, 2019; site now discontinued).

⁸²Studyinfo, 'Luokanopettaja, kasvatustieteiden koulutus, kasvatustieteen kandidaatti ja maisteri [Primary Teacher, Educational Sciences, Bachelor and Master of Arts (Education)]', <https://opintopolku.fi/app/#!/korkeakoulu/1.2.246.562.17.52969217141> (accessed June 11, 2020; site now discontinued). The remaining 40% of aptitude test places were filled based on VAKAVA exam performance.

⁸³Studyinfo, 'Yliopistojen todistusvalinnan pisteytykset [Scoring in Certificate-based Selection in Universities]', <https://opintopolku.fi/wp/opo/korkeakoulujen-haku/mika-korkeakoulujen-opiskelijavalinnoissa-muuttuu-vuoteen-2020-menessa/yliopistojen-todistusvalinnat-2020/#kalops> (accessed December 9, 2021).

⁸⁴Ibid.

⁸⁵See Timo Holmström, 'Mielipide: yliopistojen todistusvalintaa ohjaava pisteytystyökalu on täysin epäonnistunut [Letter: The Scoring System Steering University Certificate-Based Selection is a Complete Failure]', *Helsingin Sanomat*, June 16, 2018, <https://www.hs.fi/mielipide/art-2000005721169.html> (accessed December 9, 2021).

⁸⁶Jarkko Lyytinen, 'Lian pitkä matematiikka [Too Advanced Mathematics]', *Helsingin Sanomat*, May 26, 2019, <https://www.hs.fi/sunnuntai/art-2000006117803.html> (accessed December 9, 2021).

⁸⁷Statistics Finland, 'Entrance to Further Studies by New Passers of the Matriculation Examination was Easier in 2020 than in the Year Before', https://www.stat.fi/til/khak/2020/khak_2020_2021-12-09_tie_001_en.html (accessed December 9, 2021).

⁸⁸Studyinfo, 'Luokanopettaja, kasvatustieteiden koulutus'.

In economics degree courses, initial observations have already been made that removing compulsory literature from the entrance examinations has significantly increased the number of failures in basic studies and therefore teaching staff have been forced to lower the requirements in their courses.⁸⁹ It is, of course, essential to reflect on whether it is reasonable to expect students to possess disciplinary knowledge before the start of their studies. On the other hand, the removal of the literature section from entrance examinations means that when a person has applied for the ‘wrong’ field, the error that used to be noticed when reading for the entrance examinations can now be spotted only after studies have already begun.

Conclusion

In this article, we have investigated and illustrated the hidden admission agendas in Finnish primary teacher education student selections during the 1990s, 2000s and 2010s and, thus, supported the more explicit articulation of the earlier aims and visions of teacher education programmes in Finland.⁹⁰ Although student selection practices in Finnish teacher education have been praised in international comparisons,⁹¹ we suggest that the outcomes of the agenda-driven reforms have usually been insufficient, unpredictable or even undesirable. Minor technical measures such as the adjustment of pre-selection scoring have not produced significant outcomes, and, thus, have been insufficient in solving the structural problems in Finnish teacher education or the teaching population. For example, the proportion of men in primary teacher education did not increase despite multiple attempts to adjust the pre-selection grading to support their admission in the 1990s. In hindsight, the obsessive and constant actions aiming to give men an advantage appear as a discriminatory activity. In the end, it is easy to say that the problem with biased gender distribution is a broader societal question connected to the willingness of men to apply for the educational sector and therefore too complex to be solved in the admission process in a sustainable way to secure the access of men to teacher training to the same extent as during the era of quotas.

Even in those cases where the objectives set for the reform have at least partially been fulfilled, the mechanism has been unpredictable. For example, the VAKAVA reform managed (by chance) to increase the proportion of fresh upper secondary school graduates in primary teacher education, not because it made the pre-selection phase more propitious for them, but because teacher education departments wanted to hold on tightly to the matriculation exam grades, and therefore included them in the final selection decision, where it turned out that these grades levelled the advantage gained in the aptitude test by more experienced applicants. The above reform caused the largest undesirable changes outside teacher education, i.e. in substitute teacher recruitment and open universities, as did certification-based selection later by unintentionally impacting study orientation and subject selection in the upper secondary school.

⁸⁹Pihla Loula, ‘Todistusvalinta aiheutti reuttamisaallon Vaasassa ja huonojen arvosanojen suman Turussa – nyt Helsingin yliopisto varautuu samaan [Certification-Based Selection Caused a Rash of Failures in Vaasa and a Sum of Bad Grades in Turku – Now the University of Helsinki is Preparing for the Same]’, *Helsingin Sanomat*, June 15, 2019, <https://www.hs.fi/kotimaa/art-2000006144044.html> (accessed December 9, 2021).

⁹⁰See Zeichner and Conklin, ‘Teacher Education Programs’, 702.

⁹¹For example, Barber and Mourshed, *Best Performing School Systems*, 17–19.

At the beginning of the 2020s, a new joint selection reform was carried out in Finnish teacher education that for the first time extended the long-lasting pre-selection collaboration between teacher education departments to the decisive stage of selection. The aim of the reform is to increase coherence and collaboration in student selection and to dismantle the structural obstacles to selecting the most suitable cohort for teacher education programmes.⁹² Based on the groundwork done in the *Student Selection to Teacher Education in Finland – Anticipatory Work for Future* project,⁹³ teacher education departments committed themselves to executing a uniform aptitude test from 2020 onwards. Before the reform, applicants for primary teacher education, for example, had been invited to the aptitude test held at one of the teacher education departments offering primary teacher training, even if the points earned in pre-selection were high enough to grant an invitation to multiple education departments. Thereby, applicants have been able to gain admission only to that department in which they have taken the aptitude test. With the uniform aptitude test applicants can gain admission to other teacher education departments and programmes, such as special education, early childhood education and care teacher programmes, if their selection score is not sufficient for their first choice.

Compared with the agendas addressed in this article, the aims of the latest reform have emphasised improving the quality, reliability and validity of the admission process instead of providing an advantage to certain demographic groups. Therefore, it can be stated that the development of teacher education admissions has been reversed and is now back on track: the (development of) teacher education admissions should be conducted with high regard for quality and professional suitability, because they are the only real hurdle to entering the teaching profession.

Nevertheless, due to the present *Zeitgeist*, this reform is not entirely free of efficiency or resource issues. For example, in 2018 individual teacher education departments utilised as many as three different aptitude test methods,⁹⁴ whereas the unified selections are based on only one method: Multiple Mini Interviews (MMI). In MMI applicants are interviewed in sequential stations, which all have their own assessor, structured theme and material when necessary.⁹⁵ Simplifying admissions by reducing the diversity of methods can be considered damaging, as the basic principle is that better selection decisions are made when using several complementary methods that provide additional information regarding the applicant.⁹⁶ In any case, it is with interest that we await and observe the intended, but particularly the unintended, impacts that the reform entails.

⁹²University of Turku, 'Opettajankoulutus siirtyy yhteisvalintaan keväällä 2020 – uusi soveltuvuuskoe yhdenmukainen kaikissa yliopistoissa [Teacher Education will Move to Joint Selection in Spring 2020 – New Aptitude Test is Uniform in All Universities]', news release, January 21, 2020, <https://www.utu.fi/fi/ajankohtaista/mediatiedote/opettajankoulutus-siirtyy-yhteisvalintaan-kevaalla-2020-uusi> (accessed December 9, 2021).

⁹³University of Turku, 'Student Selection to Teacher Education in Finland – Anticipatory Work for Future', <https://sites.utu.fi/ovet/en/> (accessed November 9, 2021).

⁹⁴Studyinfo, 'Luokanopettaja, kasvatustieteiden tutkinto-ohjelma, kasvatustieteen kandidaatti ja maisteri [Primary Teacher, the Degree Programme of Educational Sciences, Bachelor and Master of Arts (Education)]', <https://opinto.polku.fi/app/#!/korkeakoulu/1.2.246.562.17.19708380258> (accessed May 11, 2018; site now discontinued).

⁹⁵Julian Diaz Fraga and others, 'Reliability and Acceptability of a Five-Station Multiple Mini-Interview Model for Residency Program Recruitment', *Journal of Community Hospital Internal Medicine Perspectives* 3, no. 3–4 (2013), n.p. <https://doi.org//.10.3402jchimpv3i34.21362>.

⁹⁶Terry Bowles and others, 'Proposing a Comprehensive Model for Identifying Teaching Candidates', *Australian Educational Researcher* 41, no. 4 (2014): 365–80.

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No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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