

Rural youth attitudes towards immigrants in Finland

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Abstract

The aim of this study is to research the attitudes towards immigrants among rural Finnish second grade students. The study was carried out in Southern Ostrobothnia region which is strongly countryside and where the number of immigrants is the lowest in Finland. Also, the level of education in the region is the lowest in Finland. During the next decades, immigrants will be an important source of labour, since the population in Finland is getting older - faster than in any other European country. The data (n=275) was collected from colleges and upper secondary schools. The analysis showed that gender, parents level of education and the multicultural connections had an effect on persons attitudes towards immigrants. Youths' attitudes also varied towards different immigration groups and nationalities. Attitudes towards the immigration of children and labour for example, were more positive than attitudes towards unemployed migrants and refugees. In terms of nationalities, Western immigrants were more positively welcomed than immigrants from war zones and those from the crisis areas. Answers to the open-ended question in the end of the questionnaire showed that the attitudes towards immigration were particularly concerned with refugees and the policy of immigration. Open answers included both racist and negative statements as well as statements to helping refugees. The results of this study may be of use when the new refugee policies are implemented in near future. The increase in immigrant labour requires respect, cooperation and cultural tolerance. To stabilize the economy in Finland and to be able to work in the future, new, more tolerant attitudes are needed.

Keywords: youth, attitudes, immigrants, multiculturalism, Southern Ostrobothnia

Introduction

The Finnish immigration population has increased substantially during the last three decades. In 2020, the percentage of immigrants in Finland was 8 % which means 444 031 individuals [1]. Based on the estimations, the number of immigrants in Finland will increase to one million until the year 2050 [2].

Immigration provokes more and more public discussion in Finland and abroad [3]. To be able to live and work in the productive way, it is essential to understand, collaborate and respect individuals from other cultures. [2] Furthermore, during the prospective years Finland desperately needs new workers for the labour market. The increase in immigrant labour requires cooperation and cultural tolerance. Students are future workers. This is

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why it is essential to understand young peoples' perceptions toward immigrants among future workers in Finland.

The aim of this study is to analyze the attitudes towards immigrants among Finnish second grade students. We wanted to understand how the attitudes of Finnish youth vary between the groups and nationalities of immigrants. Secondly, we wanted to research the youth perceptions by researching how the Finnish youth speak about immigrants and immigration, if they have a free possibility for that.

The study is placed in South Ostrobothnia region for several reasons. To begin with, the absolute number of the immigrants is the smallest in the country. Secondly, the level of education in the study area of the South Ostrobothnia region is the lowest in Finnish provinces. The third fact is that the balance of recourses (labour and pensioners) in the South Ostrobothnia region is the worst in Finland. During the next decades, immigrants will be an important source of labour, since the population in Finland is getting older - faster than in any other European country [4,5].

For these reasons, it is probable that the number of the immigrants will increase in South Ostrobothnia region and, the workers who are now used to work or study with Finns must in near future get used to work with the people who come from the other cultures.

The global and national state of immigration

This study investigates attitudes. Attitude can be determined as "Learned, comparably permanent, positive or negative position toward a person, object or environment" [6]. Attitudes have an effect on the daily actions and they participate in the control of behavior and interpret of the environ-

ment. Attitudes also have an effect on how we behave in the situations of social interaction [7].

Global state of attitudes towards immigration

In the past, global events have kept media climate and global news in a state, which is not sympathetic toward immigration, for instance President Donald Trump's attempt to prevent illegal immigration with the wall in the borders of Mexico [8], Britain leaving the EU partially to control immigration and numerous terror attacks and asylum seekers arrival to Europe. [9-10]

When xenophobia in Europe has become more common, the support of the national parties that are against immigration, increases [5]. According to 2018 local report of the Police of Finland [11] xenophobia and the racist crimes have become common and critical attitudes towards non-European people have strengthened in Europe. Furthermore, it is usual that negative attitudes towards the non-European immigrants will increase when the number of immigrants increases [12,13].

National state of attitudes towards immigration

It has to be noted that in the Finnish context, men's attitudes towards immigration are on average more negative than those of women [1]. Among gender, other factors such as age, education, the place of residence, political conviction and the amount of immigrant connections have an effect on attitudes towards immigrants. In addition, prevalent social environment and atmosphere (such as economic depression and unemployment rates) have an effect on attitudes [1].

The youth studies have been criticized for the fact that the studies are mainly located in the urban settings. Countryside often plays a smaller role in the studies about youth [14]. The South Ostro-

bothnia region can be considered as an area, which is mostly agriculture dominated countryside with small cities, communities and villages [15]. The most of the studies overall in Finland settle in university cities or in big cities and accordingly countryside is left out. The immigrants in Finland are centered in the bigger cities where the services are easily available. Therefore, the young people in the remote areas may not be as much in touch with multicultural issues and with individuals from the other countries [16,17].

Furthermore, the amount of immigrants in Southern Ostrobothnia area is different in comparison with the rest of the Finnish immigration population. The number of immigrants in Southern Ostrobothnia is above 4000 people, comprising 2.3 % of the total population in the area. The comparable amount in Southwest Finland is 33 506 people (7.4 %) [1]. Culturally, immigrants from faraway cultures such as Somalians, are one of the biggest immigration nationalities in Finland but non-existent in Southern Ostrobothnia. Instead of humanitarian immigration countries, the immigrants in Southern Ostrobothnia are more likely to come from the neighbor countries of Finland [17,18]. Table 1.

Previous studies have shown that Finnish youth has more positive attitudes towards the immigration of the labour compared with the immigration of refugees [2]. We also know that young adults are standing more positively on the immigration of people from Western countries, people with higher education and people with better positions in work [2]. Moreover, integrating into another society - economically, socially, politically and culturally - is a long and slow process. Negative attitudes make it more difficult to integrate and get employed. For instance, Liebkind states that getting a job is often considered the most important factor for integration to the society [19]. Further on, Liebkind considers work as an environment that helps individual to create social contacts and engaging with the society as an equal citizen. Additionally, younger immigrants have their difficulties in integration and survival as social exclusion and school bullying are alarming internal security problems among the Finnish youth. It is easy to see that the experiences of discrimination are affecting on the well-being of many minority group members [19]. While the number of Finnish immigration population is getting bigger, we should focus on the two-way process of integration. The changing situation means the adaptation of the local citizens and the adaptation of the immigrant population. [19]

Table 1. The percentages of foreign people in some of the regions in Finland 2020 [17-18].

Area	N	%
Finland	444 031	8
South Ostrobothnia	4 868	2,5
Ostrobothnia	14 053	8
Helsinki metropolitan	253 766	14,9
Southwest Finland	38 932	8,1

The outline of the study is as follows. In the method and analysis section we present the survey that we used to collect data. We will also provide a short summary of the mixed method research design. In results section the results are stated. We perform a factor analysis and the content analysis of the open-ended question in the questionnaire. Finally section 5 gives concluding remarks.

Methods and analysis

This study discusses the youth attitudes towards immigrants. Based on the earlier Finnish studies of youth attitudes we designed a questionnaire Youth Attitudes Towards Immigrants (YATI) [2,20-24] The data was collected with Webropol software during the spring term 2018 (n=275) and analysed with the SPSS 27 software.

Overall, 16 schools were engaged in this study. Of the respondents (n=275), 69 % were upper secondary school students and 24 % secondary school 9th grade students (15 years). Additionally, 7 % of the participants were students from other second grade educational institutions. 58 % of the respondents were women (n=159) and 41 % men (n=111). About 1.5 % of the respondents reported their gender to be other than man or woman. The age distribution of the respondents was from 15 to 20 years. The demographic background regarding the nationality of the respondents was very homogeneous as 99 % of the respondents were Finnish-speaking Finns.

The YATI questionnaire consisted of three parts. In the first part, we collected the demographic information such as age, gender, and connections to other cultures, parents' education or native language. In the second part, there were 50 statements about immigrants and immigration. The statements were 5-scale Likert (I agree – I disagree). In part III (also Likert-scale), the questions

were about how willingly the respondent would accept the immigrants concerning their background, nationality or reasons for moving to another country. From the 50 statements three sum variables were formatted based on the factor analysis. These were immigration policy, social distance and prejudice. We used the sum variables to analyse the attitudes towards immigrants. Attitudes towards different immigrant groups were compared with the sum variables using independent samples t-test. The analyzed groups were based on demographical background questions such as gender, parents' level of education, individual's personal contacts with foreign people and grade.

At the end of the questionnaire, there was a single open-ended question: Regarding this questionnaire of immigrants or immigration, is there something else, you would like to say? The respondents could express themselves by answering anonymously and freely. Overall, 39 people (n= 39) responded to the open-ended question. From them, we included 21 answers in this analysis. We carried out this part of the analysis manually. Out of those respondents whose answers we analyzed in this paper, nine were women and 13 men. We used content analysis to research patterns in the written answers of the open-ended question. [25-26] This included reading and systematically coding the meaningful pieces of content. Here we call them meaning units. After carefully reading the texts, based on the meaning units we categorized the answers to four groups. These are presented in the results section. To understand the research findings better and more deeply we decided to use mixed methods research. Mixed methods research design is used when qualitative and quantitative research orientation are combined. This method enables broader perspective to analyze and understand the results. The qualitative data brings re-

spondents closer to the researcher and allows a broader review of experiences and emotions. [27]

Results

In this results section we provide the YATI Questionnaire results with the statistical analysis (4.1-4.5). We also provide some themed statements from the qualitative data to support and deepen the understanding of the phenomenon. In the end of section, we explain the qualitative analysis and the four categories formatted. The categories were: immigrants as victims; immigrants as threat; immigrants as consumers or as wasters of national resources and immigration in the media. We will explain each of the categories separately (4.6-4.9).

Attitudes towards immigration groups and nationalities

Based on the YATI Questionnaire answers, the youth attitudes varied depending on background of the immigration. Youth attitudes towards the immigration of children, marriage immigrants and labour were positive. Attitudes towards unemployed and refugees were more negative. Fig. 1.

When comparing attitudes towards different nationalities of immigrants, the comparison showed that youth attitudes towards immigrants from Western countries were positive; vice versa, negative towards those from war and crisis areas. In this study, youth attitudes were the most negative towards immigrants who moved from areas with humanitarian crises or from war areas such as Iran, Syria, Afghanistan or Somalia. Respectively, youth attitudes were the most positive towards immigrants from Britain, the USA, Sweden or Germany. Based on the results of this study, it seems that youth attitudes were more positive towards people who come from a culture similar to that of the respondent him or herself.

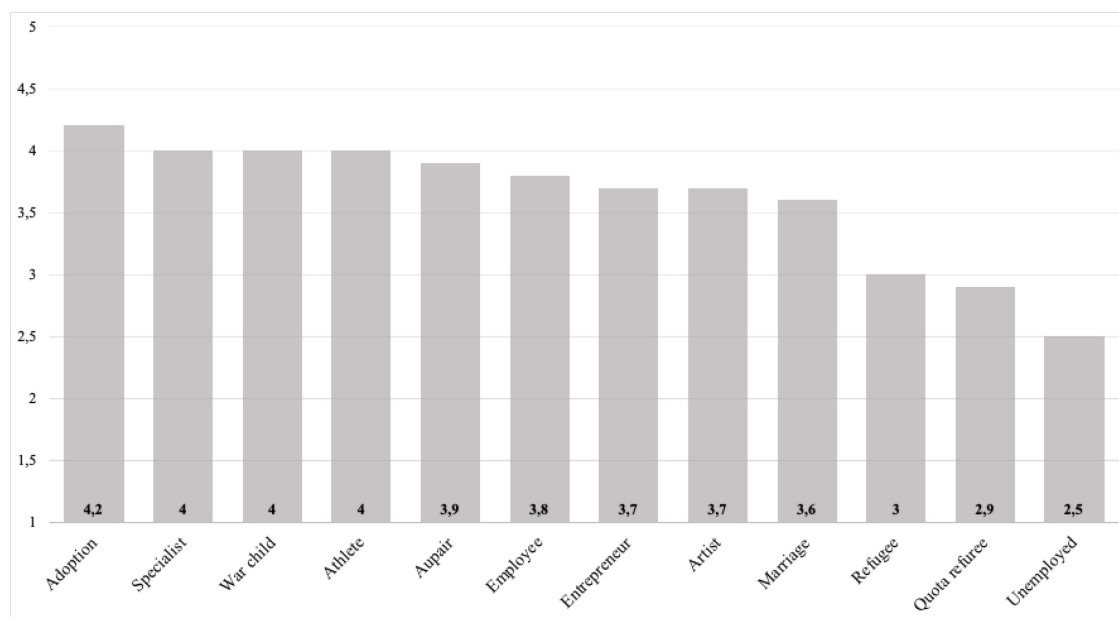


Figure 1. Attitudes towards different immigration groups.

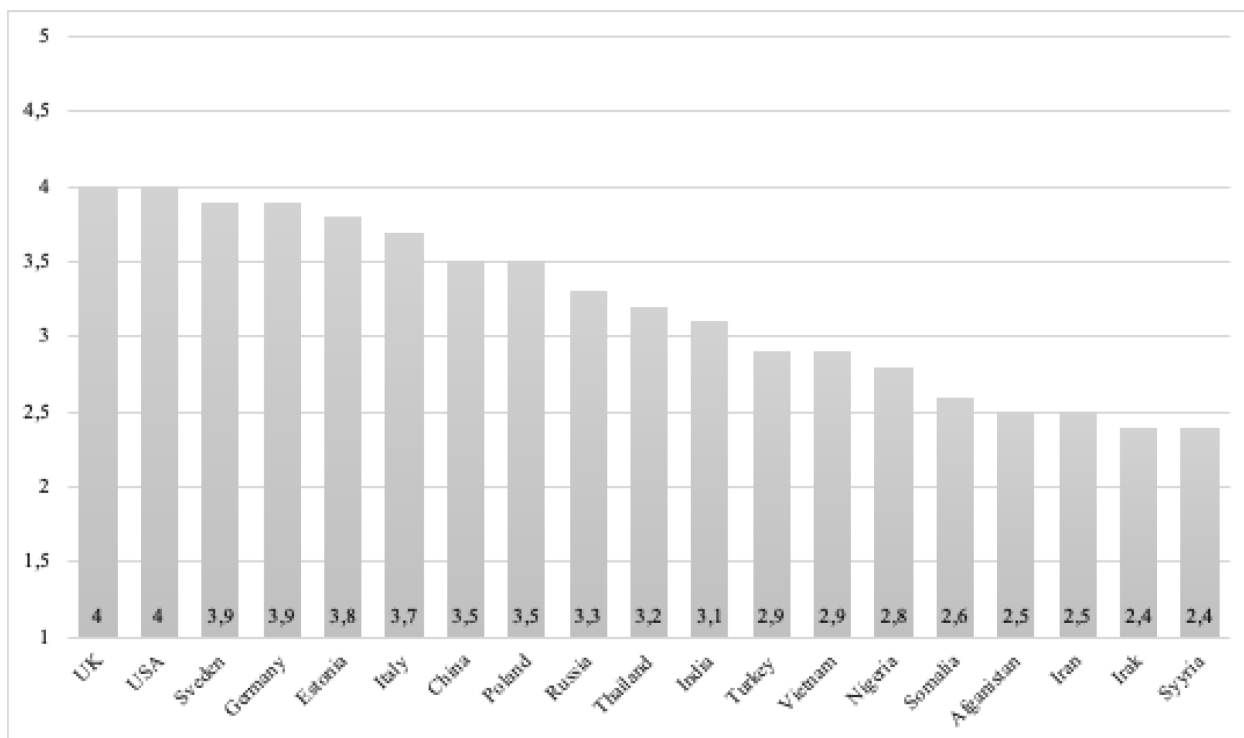


Figure 2. Youth attitudes towards nationalities.

In addition, we found a difference between attitudes towards refugees and labour in many answers. Overall, the speech about immigration could be considered as sorting people by culture, family situation or reasons for moving. 80 % (n=17) of the answers included some kind of statement of specific group of immigrants. Some of the answers in the open-ended question supported this finding:

“I would only take children or people with family but not men alone. If they want to live here they should learn the Finnish culture and go to services supporting employment” **Woman, 16, Upper Secondary School**

Attitudes toward immigration

From the 50 statements three sum variables were formatted based on the factor analysis. These were immigration policy, social distance and prejudice. The sum variable immigration policy, con-

tained statements about whether the immigration policy of Finland should be tightened or whether more or fewer asylum seekers or refugees should be admitted to Finland. In addition, the sum variable included statements such as “There are many asylum seekers who do not actually need it.” and “It is more important to help the Finnish poor than to refugees.” Another sum variable social distance included statements about how close relationships a young person thought he or she could establish with immigrants. The sum variable included questions such as “My friend’s skin color doesn’t matter to me” or “It would be good if marriages between foreigners and Finns became more common”. This sum variable was used to measure the social distance of young people to other groups. The statements of the third sum variable prejudice described prejudiced views towards immigration. The sum variable included statements such as “As a result of increased immigra-

tion, Finland has become a safer country of residence." and "Many asylum seekers come to Finland only to benefit from social benefits." The sum variables were used on analyzing the attitudes towards immigrants. Attitudes towards different immigrant groups were compared with the sum variables using independent samples t-test. The analyzed groups were based on demographical background questions such as gender, parents' level of education, individual's personal contacts with foreign people and grade.

When the attitudes were analyzed with three sum variables in the complete data, it could be seen that the attitudes varied towards different aspects of immigration. By observing the means, we could tell that the youth answered the most positively to questions about social distance. In other words, the youth took a positive view on making social contacts with the immigrants and people with multicultural background. Otherwise, the youth were more critical towards immigration policy. Based on this comparison the youth had more negative attitudes towards immigration policy than making social contacts with immigrants.

Gender and grade

Based on the results, it seems that the Finnish speaking young women's attitudes towards immigration were more positive than those of young men's. Other factors, such as level of education and parents' level of education (especially mothers') were linked to the attitudes toward immigration and immigrants. Children of highly educated mothers had more positive attitudes toward immigrants and immigration than those children, whose mothers did not have high education. In addition, it seemed that personal experiences or connections to multiculturalism had a positive effect on respondent's attitudes.

When investigating the gender differences, we found out that women's (n=158) attitudes were more positive than men's (n=108). (Table 3.) There was a statistically significant difference between men and women in all of the sum variables. The biggest difference between genders' attitudes was found from the sum variable of social distance. This means that women had more positive attitudes on making social relations with immigrants than men. There was also a statistically significant gender difference in how critical and prejudice the youth were towards immigrants.

Table 2. Sum variable means.

Sum variable	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Immigration policy	261	2.50	0.83
Social distance	266	3.66	0.99
Prejudice	259	2.70	0.95

Table 3. Comparing gender and grade groups with independent samples t-test.

Sum variable	Group	Mean	Std. Deviation	Test result	Sig.
Immigration Policy	Girls	2.67	0.75	t (202)= -3.79	<0.001
	Boys	2.27	0.87		
Social Distance	Girls	3.93	0.88	t (260)= -5.37	<0.001
	Boys	3.30	1.00		
Prejudice	Girls	2.91	0.91	t (253)= -4.06	<0.001
	Boys	2.44	0.93		
Immigration Policy	High sc.	2.43	0.82	t (240)= -1.25	0.088
	9 th grade	2.59	0.82		
Social Distance	High sc.	3.74	0.96	t (245)= 2.52	0.012
	9 th grade	3.39	1.00		
Prejudice	High sc.	2.66	0.91	t (238)= -0.305	0.761
	9 th grade	2.70	0.94		

Secondly, we compared the attitudes of 9th graders (n=61) and high school students (n=181). Based on the independent samples t-test there was a statistically significant difference between 9th graders and high school students in only one variable - social distance in youth attitudes toward immigration. By observing the means we can tell that high school students had more positive attitudes towards creating social contacts with foreign people. We can also tell that the high school students had more negative attitudes in the two different aspects. No other statistically significant differences were found regarding the other sum variables in this issue. (Table 3.)

The answers for the open-ended question supported this finding. Although the responses from both men and women included criticism towards immigration, men's attitudes were even more critical than those of women, as from 13 answers of men, 11 included criticism or negative attitudes towards immigration.

"I don't care where a person comes from or what is his occupation" **Woman, 20, Vocational School**

"I don't want to be a racist but my prejudices are not only what I've heard, but also what I have experienced" **Man, 20, Vocational School**

Parents level of education

Based on the earlier studies we know that parents' level of education also effects on children's attitudes [2]. The most common parents' level of education in this study was vocal education and additionally the studies in the university of applied sciences. 46 % of the respondents reported their father's level of education to be vocational education (n=135). 31 % of the respondents reported their mother's level of education to be vocational education (n=91). The youth, whose mothers had reached higher education, had more positive attitudes towards immigrants regarding all of the three sum variables. (Table 4.) Fathers' higher level of education had statistical significant difference regarding only the social distance variable.

Table 4. Comparing groups with parents' level of education with independent samples T-Test.

	Sum variable	Group	Mean	Std. Deviation	Test result	Sig.
Mothers' higher education	Immigration Policy	No	2.38	0.80	t (248) = 2.09	0.040
		Yes	2.60	0.83		
	Social Distance	No	3.48	1.02	t (253)=-3.18	0.002
		Yes	3.88	0.93		
	Prejudice	No	2.56	0.93	t (247)=-2.57	0.011
		Yes	2.86	0.92		
Fathers' higher Education	Immigration Policy	No	2.45	0.84	t (252)=1.181	0.230
		Yes	2.58	0.80		
	Social Distance	No	3.57	1.01	t (256)=-2.22	0.032
		Yes	3.85	0.94		
	Prejudice	No	2.65	0.96	t (250)= -1.195	0.228
		Yes	2.80	0.90		

According to this study, mothers' higher level of education had a positive effect on youth's attitudes towards immigrants. Fathers' higher level of education had a positive effect on only in how willing the youth were on making multicultural relationships (the social distance sum variable).

The effect of social relations

The idea of social distance was not only used for one of the study variables in this study but also in one of the measured aspects. Multicultural experiences and international contacts have a positive effect on attitudes towards immigrants [2]. We also know that living abroad has a positive effect on attitudes towards immigrants. [28,31]

The effect of social contacts was also measured in this study. Of all the respondents 30% reported that they had a person from multicultural background in their "inner circle" (for example family

and close friends). 54 % reported that they know a person with multicultural background from "outer circle" (such as school or hobbies). We wanted to segregate the inner and the outer social circle, as we consider that they represent different levels of social relationships.

The respondent who had a person with a multicultural background in their outer circle (n=146) had more positive attitudes towards immigrant in every measured variable, compared to those who did not have one (n=118). Interestingly, having a person with a multicultural background in their inner circle did not have a statistically significant difference on attitudes. Although by observing the means, we can tell that attitudes seemed to be more positive also in this group comparison (Table 5). According to this study, it seems that having a person with multicultural background in one's social life, has a positive effect on person's attitudes towards immigrants.

Table 5. Comparing the effect of social relations with independent samples T-Test (mc=multicultural).

Sum variable	Group	Mean	Std. Deviation	Test result	Sig.
<i>Having a friend with mc background</i>					
Immigration Policy	Yes	2.64	0.85	t (258)= 1.71	0.088
	No	2.44	0.82		
Social Distance	Yes	3.80	0.92	t (263)= 1.53	0.126
	No	3.60	1.02		
Prejudice	Yes	2.83	0.94	t (256)= 1.31	0.580
	No	2.66	0.95		
<i>Having a close person with mc background</i>					
Immigration Policy	Yes	2.60	0.82	t (257)= 2.35	0.020
	No	2.40	0.83		
Social Distance	Yes	3.88	0.87	t (225)= 3.87	0.001
	No	3.40	1.06		
Prejudice	Yes	2.84	0.95	t (255)= 2.43	0.016
	No	2.55	0.92		

Immigrants as victims

In the following four sections we explain the categories formatted in the content analysis. The first of them is seeing immigrants as victims. As Finnish studies show, youths' speech about immigration is often centered on seeing immigration through lack or scarcity. The youths' speech about immigrants or immigration has negative tones. It is ordinary that the subject is approached from the shortcoming point of view. Negative assumptions about immigration are common. Further on, in these statements, it is assumed that immigrants come from inadequate living conditions and are poor. In addition, in media, the concept of immigration is often attached to refugees - immigrants have a negative stigma of being victims. Even though the share of refugees in Finnish immigration population is small [23,25] half of the answers in this study included a mention of humanitarian moving and helping of refugees. Even though specific groups were not mentioned in the speech, the

respondents reported their assumptions of the inadequate living conditions of immigrants as well as a view where Finnish people would act as a helper.

"I think it is important to help those who are in need, but today's refugees have left their country only because they don't think it has a future. They see Finland as a country, which rose from bad conditions to a welfare state. They think Finland has a future unlike their own country, which has always been on war." **Man, 18, Upper Secondary School**

The respondent mentions "Those who need help" but still he questions their need for asylum. He mentions the war and further on he assumes that people want to move to Finland only to rise their standards of living.

"It has started to feel like most of the immigrants are not willing to respect Finnish people

and culture and are only here as economic refugees” **Man, 20, Vocational School**

The results of the qualitative study seem to strengthen the quantitative results as the young people described unemployed immigrants and refugees the most negatively.

Immigrants as consumers or as wasters of national resources (benefit or disappear)

The second group formatted in the content analysis was immigrants as consumers or as wasters of national resources. While some of the respondents saw the immigrants through the refugee status, the others were willing to provide help for the immigrants' survival in their new home country. The respondents did not provide this attitude pro bono, but accepting the refugee type immigrants to stay in Finland only under certain conditions. In this group, the respondents saw the immigrants either the consumers or wasters of national resources (n=6). The condition respondents provided was the idea of “to benefit the Finnish society or to disappear”. If one does not benefit the nation, he or she should disappear from the country.

The other condition was that if the immigrant wanted to stay in Finland, he or she should create social relations, adopt the society and start benefiting the Finnish nation. Correspondingly, the respondents wrote more respectively about immigrants who were working, learning Finnish culture and obeying laws and norms. These same topics are on the table of the media conversation around multiculturalism and immigration.

“I don't mind if you come here for work. However, if you come here to benefit from our resources you can disappear” **Man, 16, Upper Secondary School**

This type of answers described that immigrants should earn their place in the Finnish society by being productive, by working and by paying the taxes. This aspect is supported by the quantitative analysis where attitudes were more positive towards engineers, specialists and students.

“I welcome you to Finland if your aim is to learn Finnish culture, laws, norms and language and getting a job or education. It is ok for me as long as immigrants are not given any privileges and are treated the same way as Finns – In good and in bad. People in working age and ability to work as soon as possible to pay taxes, but no more mouths to feed” **Woman, 16, Upper Secondary School**

Concern about resources can be picked from the answers. The immigrants are principally welcome to Finland, but the condition is that we should not give the immigrants more than we give to our own citizens. It is hard for an immigrant to be employed in Finland because of the negative attitudes and also the assumption or reality of the lack of language skills. Some even have a theory of competition of resources that might induce prejudices and fear [28-30] between the immigrant groups.

Immigrants as threat

The third group categorized in the content analysis was based on threat. One third of the answers (n=7) was connected with security and safety. Immigrants were considered a threat to our national security or they were threatening or dangerous. In addition, concerns about crime, and willingness to follow Finnish laws as well as cultural norms rose from the answers.

“A more precise background check should be done for people who move from conflict areas. Also their integration should be cared of and we

should also look after their mental health to avoid radicalization” **Woman, 16, Upper Secondary School**

Some of the respondents mentioned the mental health of immigrants. The respondents were also reporting about their own prejudices and the risk they assumed immigrants would cause. In addition, the immigrants as a group were claimed with doing more crimes than the Finnish-speaking Finns who live permanently in Finland.

“I am the most willing to take children and woman. I have more negative attitudes towards older man who move alone because of the negative impression I have got” **Woman, 17, Upper Secondary School**

“You did not ask anything about the causes of extremism of Islam. Islamisation causes security risks, terrorist and no-go areas.” **Man, 18, Upper Secondary School**

Some of the answers contained the extremism and the hate speech. These respondents gave antagonistic, racist or nationalistic statements about immigrants and immigration.

“Finland belongs to Finns. When all of our own problems are solved, we can consider on helping others. We do not need any towelheads here raging with knives or blowing anybody up. Russkies can also stay on their side of the border” **Man, 18, Upper Secondary School**

“CLOSE THE BORDERS!!!” **Man, 16, Secondary School**

“On behalf of The White Finland!” **Man, 16, Secondary School**

The Finnish Social media and protest marchers are widely using this type of foregoing statements about immigrants and immigration. It is possible,

that a 16-years old teen does not understand what he is saying. In the answers, negative criticism was often directed to specific groups such as “unemployed”, nationalities “Ruskkies”, religion – Islam and gender and status “lonely men”. In addition, expression “White Finland” has a reference to skin color. As we know racism does not only include racist statements or discrimination on the grounds of race but also multicultural framing or discriminating [31-33].

Media’s impressions about immigration

The fourth group categorized in the content analysis was media’s impressions about immigration. Media from different aspects was mentioned in the answers (n=5). Concerning the media appearance, the attitudes were shown only toward selected parts of immigration; some of the themes are highlighted and some are not. Positive and neutral events are rarely newsworthy, so the negative publishing gets more attention. It seems that culturally distant cultures are more distinguishable both in the media and in the street scene and more likely to produce emotions, conversation and attention. A culture similar to ours disappears into the mass and does not pay attention. In addition, youth in this study talked about cultural differences and learning Finnish laws, norms and cultural confusion.

“I don’t know so much about immigration so I hope we would talk about it in school. I think media gives rather negative image about immigration” **Man, 16, Upper Secondary School**

“It is hard to get rid of immigrant resistance while media is exaggerating. In Facebook there are a lot of writings against immigrants” **Woman, 17, Upper Secondary School**

“National media has become politicized and informs about events unilaterally and untruthfully. For example, the disadvantages of immigration are being understated. Power elite only accepts tolerance towards different cultures. Nowadays patriotism has become racism and criticism is considered as hate speech.” **Man, 18, Upper Secondary School**

It is significant that youth have considered the influence of media on their attitudes and on their views of immigration. While the impact of media is constantly growing, it is demanding to teach people source critique and media literacy – an ability to interpret and understand media.

In general, only a few groups of immigrants were mentioned in the open-ended question answers even though different groups of immigrants were just presented and mentioned in the previous section of the YATI questionnaire. Based on the open answers, the respondents connected the concept of immigration to asylum seeking. Vice versa, some groups of immigrants were not at all mentioned in the open answers.

Conclusions

This paper investigated the attitudes towards immigrants among Finnish second grade students. The study was carried out in Southern Ostrobothnia region where the number of immigrants is the lowest in Finland. During the next decades, immigrants will be an important source of labour, since the population in our country is getting older - faster than in any other European country [2,4-5]. To gain a better understanding of youth attitudes, we collected the data (n=275) from colleges and upper secondary schools in Southern Ostrobothnia region during spring 2018. The youth attitudes varied toward different immigration groups and nationalities. Attitudes towards the immigration of

children and labour were more positive than the attitudes towards unemployed, migrants and refugees. In terms of nationalities, Western culture representatives, for instance immigrants from Europe or Scandinavia were more positively welcomed than immigrants from war zones and areas with the crisis were. This supports the earlier findings in the immigration attitude research area [2].

The attitudes towards immigration were particularly concerned with refugees and the policy of immigration. We used mixed methods research design to understand youth attitudes better. Answers to the open-ended question in the questionnaire included both racist and negative statements, but on the other hand also statements about helping refugees. Based on the content analysis and categorization of the texts in the open-ended question, four main categories were formulated. These categories were immigrants as victims; immigrants as threat; immigrants as consumers or as wasters of national resources; and immigration in the media. The results of this analysis showed some kind of “attitude shopping” as the respondents portrayed immigration only from one position: The respondents accepted immigration if it was beneficial for the receiving country. However, humanitarian immigration, for instance refugees or asylum seekers, that do not benefit directly the Finnish society, arouse negative attitudes and criticism. On the other hand, some of the respondents reported the idea of providing help for the immigrants.

Based on the findings of this study, the immigration discourse was somewhat one-sided: the respondents made comments on immigrants with labour or refugee status, but for instance, student immigrants were not mentioned at all. The media might have an influence on this.

Seeing Islam as a threat has become a more common view in the conversation about immigration. This may be one reason for more negative attitudes towards Islamic immigrants and nationalities. In addition, the familiarity of Western culture tradition, such as European or Scandinavian culture may have been the reason for more positive attitudes towards immigrants coming from those countries. In addition, the idea of cultural distance and the negative attitudes seem to accumulate in attitudes toward the certain immigration groups and these groups are reflected as victims, threat or resource users.

When analyzing the answers, it was worthwhile to consider, what were the themes the respondents did not report on. Interestingly, no one of the respondents reported about immigration purely as a positive phenomenon. The image of donating Finnish resources “free to the others” seems to be in connection with the negative attitudes. We did not find any comments such as “It is nice to get to know people from different cultures” or “I think immigration enriches our culture”. Based on this result, we conclude that the respondents presented a somewhat stereotypic image of the immigration. Interestingly, here all the results are based on anonymous answers and therefore we do not know exactly who the respondents were. One of the latest studies was about the resistant attitudes towards immigration. Based on the results of Mannerström et al. (2020) the resistance towards immigration was strongest in the highest and smallest income categories. Contrary to popular belief, the negative attitude towards immigration was the strongest among those who have gained the most of mental and financial well-being. More research is needed on this issue. [35] The results of this study indicate that mother’s level of education had a positive effect on youth attitudes toward immigration. Also, the social contacts seem to

enhance the positive attitudes among the youth. This sets new challenges for the society in the little villages and cities in Ostrobothnia. New forms of social interaction could be established, such as clubs or other free-time activities – not just for youth but also for parents and other adult population. This could be a solution to narrow the social distance and to learn how to respect. In the end, this may lead to situations where the new immigrant in Finland finds a new job among one of the many companies of the Ostrobothnian entrepreneurs, who desperately need new labour.

The future will bring economic challenges. Migration is and will be more in the future necessary to stabilize the economy. The results of this study raise some concerns about how benevolent and well-willingly the Finnish youth will welcome the immigrants especially in the rural areas such as Ostrobothnia region. The broader view of immigration is needed: Western world has moral responsibility to receive and integrate labour but also to integrate other immigrant groups. This challenges the schools and the media to teach multiculturalism, empathy and respect to young people. Moreover, the policy-makers need to know the power of media. The media influence may be two-fold: communication is easier as the digital devices are more available than earlier and English is the language of international communication worldwide. On the other hand, media may influence the youth attitudes toward immigration. When it comes to social media, we cannot be sure that this influencing is always positive.

Finally, during the reviewing process the immigration phenomenon has become state of the art. Even under the state of a global emergency, for instance spring 2020, the time when COVID-19 pandemic spread, multicultural questions and policies have been a highly topical matter. Like

other countries, Finnish government decided to close the borders of the country to slow down the spreading of COVID-19. This made position of refugees even more complex. The idea of giving refugees a privilege to cross the borders in a state when no one can move anywhere can increase negative reactions. In addition, it is possible that the attitudes towards immigrants are more negative during an economic depression. Now when we have faced one of the hardest economic depressions of our time, it is possible that we will face a

situation where the negative attitudes towards immigrants will get stronger than before.

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Conflict of interest

No conflict of interest to declare.

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