

PIRET VIIRPALU

Teachers' feelings of curriculum
ownership: Estonian schoolteachers
as curriculum developers and
curriculum users



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UNIVERSITY OF TARTU
Press

Institute of Education, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Tartu, Estonia

Dissertation is accepted for the commencement of the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Education on September 05, 2024, by the joint Doctoral Committee of the Institute of Education and Institute of Ecology and Earth Sciences for awarding doctoral degrees in education, University of Tartu.

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Commencement: Senate Hall of the University of Tartu, 18 Ülikooli Street,
Tartu, on October 31, 2024, at 2.00 p.m.

This study was supported by the EDUKO programme, by the Doctoral School of Educational Sciences funded by the European Social Fund, and by the Institutional Research Grant ‘Teachers’ professionalism and professionalism in changing context’, European Social Fund [TA7610], Estonian Research Council [IUT18-2].

ISSN 1406-1317 (print)
ISBN 978-9916-27-677-8 (print)
ISSN 2806-2434 (pdf)
ISBN 978-9916-27-678-5 (pdf)

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University of Tartu Press
www.tyk.ee

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

PISA	OECD's Programme for International Student Assessment
NC	National Curriculum
SC	School Curriculum
TIMSS	the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study – international comparative assessments of student achievement in mathematics and science

LIST OF ORIGINAL PUBLICATIONS

The dissertation is based on the following original publications, which are referenced in the text by their Roman numbers:

- I. **Viirpalu, P.**, Krull, E., & Mikser, R. (2014). Investigating Estonian Teachers' Expectations for the General Education Curriculum. *Journal of Teacher Education for Sustainability*, 16 (2), 54–70.
<https://doi.org/10.2478/jtes-2014-0011>
- II. **Viirpalu, P.**, Krull, E., & Mikser, R. (2022). Teachers' feelings of curriculum ownership: the Estonian case. *Journal of Baltic Studies*, 53 (3), 373–395. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01629778.2021.2001550>
- III. Mikser, R., **Viirpalu, P.**, & Krull, E. (2023). Reflection of teachers' feelings of curriculum ownership in their curriculum definitions: The example of Estonia. *The Curriculum Journal*, 34(4), 542–557.
<https://doi.org/10.1002/curj.217>

The author of the dissertation contributed to the publications as follows:

For Article I: participating in the development of the theoretical framework and methodology, formulating the research questions, developing a research instrument, analysing and reporting the data, writing the article as the main author, and being responsible for the manuscript of the article (being a corresponding author).

For Article II: participating in formulating the research question, developing the methodology (developing a research instrument, i.e. a written questionnaire, and making necessary modifications according to the results of the pilot study), collecting the data, analysing and reporting the data, writing the article as the main author, and being a corresponding author.

For Article III: participating in developing the theoretical framework and methodology, formulating the research questions, creating the coding manual to analyse teachers' curriculum definitions, analysing and reporting the data, writing the article as the second author, and being a corresponding author.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Research problem

As a result of political centralisation, modernisation and industrialisation, a fundamental shift occurred in many European countries and elsewhere across the Western cultural hemisphere in the early 19th century: education became generally, and more or less comprehensively, administered at the state level (Hopmann, 1990). This shift, in turn, brought about the need for the state-centralised management and administration of school curricula. This undertaking was characterised by distinctive political processes that Hopmann (ibid) has conceptualised as *compartmentalisation*, *licensing* and *segmentation* (see Mikser et al. 2016).

These three processes marked a certain reaction to the difficulties that emerged during the state-run curriculum development and administration. Hopmann (1990) highlighted the third of these processes – segmentation – as a reaction to the emerging recognition that a curriculum is a battlefield between different interest groups, each tending to complain that its interests have been undervalued. This conflict has variously been conceptualised in terms of such fundamental questions as: “Who owns the curriculum?” (Brady & Kennedy, 2014) and “Who decides?” (Westbury, 2008). *Segmentation* in this context means keeping different interest groups apart in different decision-making bodies to avoid or minimise overt confrontation (Hopmann, 1990; Mikser et al., 2016).

While the list of different interest groups in curriculum decision-making can be, in principle, endless, Westbury (2008) has conceptualised the major conflict and contestation emerging between *political*, *public* and *professional* interests. Westbury (ibid) emphasises that, in democratic societies, elected *political* authorities have the prerogative to make final determinations about the nature and provision of public services, including school curricula. On the other hand, teachers are the primary *professional* interest group who actually *use* the curriculum in the classroom, and upon whom it ultimately depends whether an externally mandated curriculum is implemented or rejected (e.g. Schwartz, 2006).

In Westbury’s terms, the key problem appears to be the balance between *political* curriculum regulation and the freedom and autonomy granted to teachers as *professionals* in curriculum decision-making.

Based on research conducted in numerous Western and Asian countries, Kennedy (2010, p. 15) argues that irrespective of the political system of a particular country, political authorities have always been keen to maintain control over the curriculum. Similar conclusions have been drawn from countries as diverse as Sweden (Lundahl, 2005) and China (Wong, 2006). Whilst formally glorifying teacher autonomy, local authorities and school principals often do not entrust curriculum development to teachers (Kennedy, ibid; see also Viirpalu et al., 2022). Therefore, seeking a balance between political and professional stakeholders has always resulted in tension.

However, over the last couple of decades, education and curriculum policies across the world have undergone a substantial turn from *input* regulation of the curriculum to steering with *outcomes* and students' quantifiable attainment data (Biesta, 2017; Lundgren, 2013; Nieveen & Kuiper, 2012; Priestley, 2011). Therefore, despite being officially granted a great degree of freedom and autonomy to accommodate curricula according to their local and personal needs, teachers in many countries experience disappointment and suppression caused by centrally imposed accountability systems (Jeong & Luschei, 2018; Lam & Yeung, 2010; Leat et al., 2013; Lundahl, 2005; Nieveen & Kuiper, 2012; Wong, 2008). As the primary professional group who use the curriculum, teachers have encountered almost unprecedented pressure regarding their curriculum freedom.

Like other Western countries, Estonia and other former socialist European countries have also struggled to find a balance between external curriculum regulation (whether at the state, municipality or school level) and teachers' freedom and autonomy in curriculum decision-making (Cerych, 1999; Mikser et al., 2016). These aspirations, of course, have been influenced by several specific background conditions resulting from the Soviet period and each country's more distant past.

Whereas the abandoning of the Soviet-type state-imposed, unitary and standardised curriculum policy was a relatively fast and easy process in the early 1990s, it turned out to be much more complicated to reconcile the need for a strong national curriculum policy and providing a feeling of curriculum autonomy, freedom and ownership for teachers (Mikser et al., 2016). Several difficulties and anomalies have emerged. On the one hand, teachers in these countries have been granted considerable autonomy in curricular decision-making since the early 1990s (Catlaks, 2003; Nagrockaitė, 2015; Zelvy, 2004; Zogla, 2001). On the other hand, previous research points to teachers' confused or even negative feelings about the freedom and autonomy officially granted to them in curricular matters (Erss et al., 2014; Kesküla et al., 2012; Mikser et al., 2016). Although teachers usually avoid overt resistance to curriculum changes and re-centralising reforms, they still feel alienated and distanced from the official curriculum: surprisingly so, considering that it claims to provide them with freedom, autonomy and inspiration (Erss et al., 2014).

Whereas teachers strongly identify with the subject syllabi, they tend to feel detached from the general part of the curriculum, which, however, is a core part of the document for reflecting upon broader educational issues (Mikser et al., 2016). Whereas teachers tend to prefer curricular autonomy in general terms, they still expect specific guidelines regarding more specific aims, methods and content of education (Tuul et al., 2015). Moreover, although teachers tend to prefer a curriculum compiled by internal practitioners rather than external experts, they express great satisfaction with the current national curriculum compiled by external experts (Tuul et al., *ibid*).

Altogether, the aim of engaging teachers as free and active participants in curriculum processes – explicitly proclaimed in the first National Curriculum documents for basic and upper secondary schools in 1996 – has not materialised

in practice (Mikser et al., 2016). This condition makes further curriculum development and implementation processes questionable and potentially ineffective because the primary professional group who *use* the curriculum – the teachers – tend to ignore or more or less explicitly reject the curriculum reforms.

The **problem** that this study aims to help solve can be defined on two levels:

- 1) There is a lack of knowledge about how teachers, as the primary users of the curriculum, feel about the teacher-curriculum relationship;
- 2) There is also a lack of proper quantitative research instruments to gain the necessary knowledge regarding teachers' feelings about their relationship with the curriculum.

1.2. Aim and research questions

The overall **aim** of this doctoral study includes two temporally consecutive components:

- 1) To develop a research instrument for exploring schoolteachers' feelings about their relationship with the curriculum (hereafter termed *teacher-curriculum relationship*) (Article I);
- 2) Applying the developed research instrument to determine Estonian schoolteachers' *feelings of curriculum ownership*. This construct is used for deliberation about the teacher-curriculum relationship and will be explained more specifically below in the thesis (Articles II and III).

The notion of the *teacher-curriculum relationship* can have many different meanings and priority settings, including teachers' pedagogical content knowledge, subject matter knowledge, beliefs, goals, experiences, perceptions and identity (e.g. Remillard, 2005). In this thesis, the meaning of the teacher-curriculum relationship is specified, focusing on teachers' rights, freedom, autonomy and agency to develop, change and accommodate curriculum according to their beliefs, understandings and needs.

Based on the aims of the dissertation, the following research questions were posed:

- 1) What are Estonian schoolteachers' views and expectations for the national and school curriculum development process and the current curriculum documents (Articles I and II)?
- 2) What is the state of Estonian schoolteachers' feelings of curriculum ownership as expressed in their roles as curriculum developers and users and as reflected in their definitions of the concept of a curriculum (Articles II and III)?

The doctoral thesis is organised and structured as follows:

The theoretical framework of the thesis provides the broader historical and sociological context of the problem of teacher-curriculum relationship and the main conceptualisations of this relationship. It also elaborates on *teachers' feelings of curriculum ownership*, which is the core concept developed and applied in this thesis. Then, an overview of recent international curriculum policy changes that have shaped teacher-curriculum relationships and teachers' feelings of their curriculum ownership in former socialist European countries and Estonia is provided. An overview of the conceptualisations of the teacher-curriculum relationship used to define the degrees of teachers' curriculum ownership is given, and the definitional issues of teachers' curriculum ownership are described.

The methodology chapter introduces the design and development of the data-gathering instrument (i.e. the written questionnaire), the development of the sample of respondents, data collection and analysis. The results chapter presents Estonian schoolteachers' views on the curriculum development process, their role in that process, the usefulness of the curriculum documents, expectations for curricular guidelines, and the distribution of the teachers' responses by the degree of curriculum ownership are introduced.

The study results, which answer the research questions, are discussed in the discussion chapter, along with suggestions for teacher preparation and curriculum policy formation.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1. Teacher-curriculum relationship: the historical context and conceptualisations

The issues of the teacher-curriculum relationship and its current state can be properly understood only within their broader historical and sociological context, taking into consideration the complexities of multiple political, public and professional concerns (Gundem & Sivesind, 1997; Hopmann, 1990; Westbury, 2008). Therefore, it is necessary to briefly describe the background of the current education policy landscape that shapes the teacher-curriculum relationship under investigation in this study.

Being loosely defined as how teachers are positioned in the process of curriculum development and implementation (Mikser et al., 2023), the general problem of the teacher-curriculum relationship is almost as old as formal education in the Western cultural space. As Hopmann, a leading curriculum theorist and historian in current continental curriculum research, has put it: ‘A curriculum develops when it is no longer self-evident what should be taught’ (Hopmann, 1999, p. 90).

Hopmann (ibid) adds that since antiquity, it has been recognised that education must be a public matter and therefore contestable. Since the Reformation, along with the formation and strengthening of nation-states, local and central political authorities have increasingly intervened in planning and framing schooling, including compiling curriculum guidelines (Hopmann, ibid). Usually, these guidelines, however, have only moderately, at best, impacted school daily practices, not least because teachers tended to ignore or resist them. Over the following centuries, and especially since the 19th century, the professionalisation and organisation of teachers led to constant confrontations between political authorities and teachers, the latter complaining that curricular issues are primarily pedagogical in nature and should, therefore, be left to pedagogical professionals (Hopmann, 1999). By the mid-19th century, the scene was clearly set for the continuing problems of the teacher-curriculum relationship (see also Hopmann, 1990).

An attempt to systematically describe different approaches to the teacher-curriculum relationship, even within the Western cultural space, is beyond the scope of this thesis. However, in parallel with the gradual formation of curriculum as a field of study in its own right, it became clear that the teacher-curriculum relationship is subject to different approaches, not only across different traditions, but the contribution of any single tradition or key figure has been subject to opposite interpretations even in recent discussions. For example, J. F. Bobbitt, whose book *The Curriculum* (1918) is widely regarded as pioneering curriculum research in the United States (Null, 2011; Schwartz, 2006), is commonly considered to represent a behavioural and technical-scientific approach (Ornstein & Hunkins, 2018). Schwartz (2006) ascribes to Bobbitt the idea that a good teacher accepts the authority of external curriculum developers and is willing to follow their instructions faithfully. On the other hand, De Paor (2021) criticises this

interpretation, arguing that Bobbitt instead urged teachers to emancipate themselves from a scripted curriculum and to act out of their deeply held beliefs in social justice and community activism.

In the 1960s and 1970s, curricular thinking and practice in many English-speaking countries turned to what is commonly referred to as the ‘teacher-proof curriculum’ (Eryaman & Riedler, 2010; Le Fevre et al., 2016; Pinar et al., 2008). This policy aimed at minimising teachers’ control over curriculum development and leaving the development process to specialised external experts to ensure that any teacher who used the curriculum would have the same results. The curricula developed according to this principle were well structured and equipped with detailed materials to prevent teachers’ interference in the learning process. The role of teachers and the local school community in curriculum planning was marginalised under the dominance of national educational administrators and external curriculum experts (Eryaman & Riedler, 2010).

In the 1970s and early 1980s, the state-authoritative and over-centralised ‘teacher-proof’ curriculum policy was replaced in many countries by ‘school-based curriculum development’ (Bolstad, 2004; Kennedy, 2010). A fundamental principle of this approach is that teachers should act as developers, rather than simply transmitters, of curricula (Bolstad, 2004). A classic definition of school-based curriculum development provided by Skilbeck (1984, p. 2) frames it as ‘...the planning, design, implementation and evaluation of a programme of students’ learnings by the educational institution of which those students are members.’ Concerning teachers, Marsh and others (1990) emphasise that their self-actualisation, motivation and sense of achievement are integrally bound up with curriculum decision-making and teachers’ professional lives. Accordingly, a redefinition of teachers’ roles includes their more active participation in determining educational directions. This aim, in turn, necessitates reconsidering teachers’ professional development, not least in terms of the necessary skills to perform a curriculum leadership role (Marsh et al., *ibid*).

The above context is necessary to comprehend the paradigmatic dimension of the neoliberal turn in education and curriculum policy: the focus of the next sub-chapter. Before that turn, it may have seemed that the teacher-curriculum relationship had passed through all imaginable forms and ways of justification. However, this impression was incorrect in light of educational changes starting in Western countries and more globally in the 1980s.

2.2. Recent international education and curriculum policy changes: a fundamental shift in the teacher-curriculum relationship

The fundamental shift in education and curriculum policy that underlies how the teacher-curriculum relationship is handled and understood in recent academic discussion can be summed up as '**neoliberal** restructuring' (Goodson, 2014, p. 775). Neoliberalism is often considered the dominant global discourse, constituting a homogenising world movement in education (Ball et al., 2012; Meyer et al., 1992).

Stemming from a doctrine of economic liberalisation and mainly led by the governments of the UK and the US, neoliberalism came into prominence in the early 1980s, proposing a specific reconfiguration of the relationship between the state and the market: education is a service and product like any other, to be traded in the marketplace (Erss et al., 2016; Goodson, 2014; Moree, 2013; Simola et al., 2013). Sometimes, this ideology is called the 'New Right' or 'Thatcherism' (Karlsen, 2000, 528).

Neoliberal restructuring has brought about the emergence of a new and fashionable vocabulary in the academic discussion of education and curriculum policy specifically. Obviously, the most widespread notions characterising the neoliberal turn are 'accountability' and 'standardisation'.

Standardisation, by definition, means bringing a phenomenon – in the current context, a curricular issue – into conformity with a standard to assure consistency and regularity (standardisation, 2024). In the neoliberal education and curriculum policy context, standardisation means putting a heavy emphasis on measuring students' learning outcomes through standardised tests and examination systems that are transparent and comparable across individual teachers, schools, school districts, countries and ultimately on the global scale (Erss et al., 2016; Viirpalu et al., 2022).

Accountability means a quality or state of being *accountable*, i.e. 'being the one who must meet an obligation or suffer the consequences for failing to do so' (accountable, 2024). However, as Perryman and others (2011) emphasise, accountability is an ambiguous term with many meanings and connotations. In neoliberal restructuring, accountability is closely related to standardisation, targeting the application of market principles to transform the public sector, including education (Wong, 2006). Referring to the English context, which has enormously contributed to the international spread of the neoliberal ideology, Perryman and colleagues (2011) refer to a constant stream of criticism that has led to public and political acceptance of the idea that teachers are in need of reform. Essentially, this has meant an increased monitoring and external surveillance of teachers' work: a practice that the authors call a 'sustained attack on the professionalism of teachers' (Perryman et al., 2011, p. 181). This practice has been claimed to counteract the education and curriculum policy that aims to enhance teacher professionalisation via educational decentralisation (Jeong & Luschei, 2018).

As many authors have noted, international comparative studies on students' learning outcomes – such as PISA and TIMSS – are explicit expressions of how the standardisation and accountability policies operate in combination to strengthen the impact of neoliberal ideology on how teachers' professionalism is politically and publicly constructed (Biesta, 2009; Jeong & Luschei, 2018; Simola et al., 2013). Goodson (2014) has summarised policy changes since the 1980s as a 'crisis of positionality'. He argues that, until then, educational reforms in much of the Western world were left to internal groups to initiate and define. Starting in the 1980s, educational change was primarily defined by external stakeholders and only after that was it negotiated with internal agents. Goodson (ibid) states that this shift has significantly increased the risk of internal change agents – such as teachers – becoming resistant and aloof to reform initiatives.

Decentralised centralism. The neoliberal standardising curriculum 'policy technologies' (see Perryman et al., 2011, p. 183) have been labelled in different ways, such as 'steering with outcomes' (Lundgren, 2013) or 'decentralised centralism' (Karlsen, 2000). The latter conceptualisation aptly expresses the substantial difference between how teachers were subjected to external control during the pre-neoliberal era of the 'teacher-proof curriculum' policy and the neoliberal era of standardisation and accountability. As noted above, external experts carefully prescribed the aims, content and methods of instruction for teachers in the teacher-proof curriculum (Eryaman & Riedel, 2010). This is why such a prescription can be defined as an *input regulation*. On the other hand, decentralised centralism aims to regulate teachers' work to the same degree – if not more – and how it operates in practice is precisely the opposite.

Karlsen (2000) claims that whereas the concept of decentralisation can have somewhat different meanings, it commonly refers to the relocation of a certain kind of power from the centre to the periphery. Karlsen also notes that by the time his article was published in 2000, decentralisation existed on the political agenda in many countries as a worldwide trend. However, the concept does not refer to *what* is relocated or transferred. Therefore, Karlsen (ibid) holds it necessary to distinguish between two types of decentralisation: decentralisation as *delegation* and decentralisation as *devolution*.

Karlsen says that *delegation* typically implies a transmission of tasks and administrative responsibilities to local authorities, while these tasks, responsibilities and functions themselves remain defined by the central authorities:

In this sense, the decentralisation of tasks does not necessarily mean a shift of power because the local agents generally are only given the role of executing decisions made at the central level (Karlsen 2000, p. 526).

Karlsen (ibid) adds that, on the other hand, central authorities can also be compelled to use delegation because it can be too difficult to control how local authorities actually execute these tasks.

According to Karlsen, decentralisation as devolution implies the transmission of real authority and responsibility from central to local authorities. Seen this

way, decentralisation is essentially connected with local autonomy and independence only when defined as *devolution*.

The obvious conclusion from Karlsen's distinction is that neoliberal standardisation and accountability imply overwhelming decentralisation in the sense of delegation and are, therefore, unsuitable for truly enhancing the teacher-curriculum relationship from teachers' point of view. This situation echoes Kennedy's (2010) observation mentioned above that irrespective of the policy rhetoric and the governmental system of a particular country, political authorities are keen to keep control of the curriculum in one way or another (on this argument, see Lundahl, 2005; Wong, 2006).

Indeed, evidence from many countries has demonstrated that the transformation from pre-neoliberal *input regulation* to neoliberal *output regulation* and decentralisation has actually increased teachers' workload, decreased their motivation, freedom and autonomy, and damaged their professional self-evaluation and identity. In Sweden, contrary to the policy rhetoric of reducing central control and giving teachers more responsibility and freedom to organise their work, teachers actually have experienced an increase in their workloads and growing external control over their daily work practice (Lundahl, 2005). Similar results have been reported from China, a very different policy context, where, despite the policy rhetoric of decentralisation, teachers reportedly still lack the professional autonomy to determine what they intend to teach (Wong, 2006). According to Lam and Yeung (2010), the situation is essentially the same in Hong Kong, which has had a recent history different from that of mainland China. Rather similarly, it is argued from the Australian context that despite the decentralisation rhetoric, teachers in general cannot contribute substantially to the construction of the basics of the school curriculum (Kirk & Macdonald, 2001). In Portugal, it has been noted that despite the overarching decentralisation rhetoric, curriculum policies are increasingly legitimised by market ideology, thus leaving teachers with the status of service providers, whose professional success is measured primarily in terms of their students' test outcomes (Teodoro & Estrela, 2010). Portuguese authors (*ibid*) also stress that much of this situation is due to the attention paid to the PISA results, a side-effect of which is growing external control over teachers' daily work practice.

It is outside the scope of this thesis to describe the teacher-curriculum relationship in a more detailed way or more systematically by country or regional contexts. However, these similar tendencies in curricular policies across such different countries are indicative of specific global trends in education and curriculum policy and educational decentralisation in particular. This is despite the dispute over the meaning of *globalisation* in education generally (see e.g. Rosenberg, 2005).

A detailed discussion of the meaning of globalisation aside, this thesis is relevant to delineate the course of education and curriculum policies in the former socialist European countries and Estonia in particular. The following sub-chapter of the thesis focuses on this context.

2.3. Education and curriculum policy development and the teacher-curriculum relationship in former socialist European countries

Although the curriculum reforms of the late 1980s are sometimes described as a homogenising world movement and more or less global (Ball et al., 2012; Meyer et al., 1992), the policy situation at the time in the socialist bloc of European countries led this region to take a somewhat different direction (Mikser & Goodson, 2020). In most ‘old’ Western countries, the prevalent argument in the reform rhetoric was economic efficiency. However, in the then-socialist European countries liberating themselves from Soviet domination, the prevalent argument was general freedom of choice, democracy, autonomy and genuine involvement of people in social decision-making, including curriculum policy (Mikser & Goodson, 2020). To comprehend the trajectories that first led the curriculum policy in this group of countries down a somewhat different path and later returned them more or less to the neoliberal mainstream policy, it is necessary to briefly review these nations’ previous educational and cultural backgrounds.

Despite the fact that these countries were occupied or dominated by the Soviet Union from 1945–1990, the former socialist European countries had rather diverse cultural histories, including the ‘Western’ models that influenced them. The Visegrad group of countries (Poland, the Czech Republic, Hungary and Slovakia) have remained close to the Roman Catholic and German-speaking Continental European (the one-time Austro-Hungarian) tradition. The countries of south-eastern Europe (Romania, Bulgaria and Albania) have been greatly influenced by the southern European Orthodox Christian tradition, and the Baltic states have been strongly influenced by the Scandinavian and German cultural traditions (Cerych, 1999; Kotásek, 1996). These different socio-political and cultural spaces in Europe have created very different backgrounds for the reception of neoliberal reforms (Goodson, 2010). In addition, some former socialist European countries were once parts of the Russian Empire and, therefore, experienced influences from the pre-Soviet Russian culture. Now, together with many other parts of the world, the former socialist European countries are experiencing growing influence from the English-speaking world (e.g. Kozma & Polonyi, 2004). Finally, some of these countries have been subject to strong influences from a particular neighbouring country representing a certain model of the ‘West’. For example, for Estonia, neighbouring Finland has been an example of a ‘capitalist’ country with a long-standing egalitarian tradition and, therefore, its ideas are radically different from the neoliberal ideas predominantly disseminated by the English-speaking countries. This condition allowed Estonian teachers to resist and, to some degree, to redirect some effects of the neoliberal curriculum policies (Mikser & Goodson, 2018).

Having enjoyed independence and a relative degree of democracy throughout all or at least a significant part of the period between the two world wars, most of

these countries fell under the dominance of the Soviet Union or Nazi Germany shortly before World War II. Whereas the first period of Soviet domination was generally characterised by extreme political oppression and an overwhelming denial of the previous national educational traditions, the de-Stalinisation process that started in the mid-1950s somewhat softened and diversified the social and educational policy landscape in these countries (Mincu, 2016). However, these changes did not effectively challenge the Soviet system as a whole (Mincu, *ibid*). Despite certain variations between the former socialist European countries and during different stages of the Soviet era, the common feature in these countries was that, up to the late 1980s, education policy was almost entirely controlled by central governments led by the Communist Party (Cerych, 1999; Ekiert & Ziblatt, 2013). Special institutions outside the schools typically compiled school curricula. These documents generally prescribed both curriculum content and teaching methods for teachers (Krull & Mikser, 2010; Pachociński, 1997). Teachers' curriculum autonomy, freedom and ownership were not considered important.

As is commonly argued, the collapse of the Soviet bloc in Europe in the late 1980s and early 1990s led to a rapid shift to market economies, democratic pluralism, decentralisation, democratisation, restructuring and de-ideologisation of social life and education: a group of changes that have been labelled the 'post-socialist education reform package' (Silova, 2010, p. 5). More specifically, in education the reforms symbolised the adoption of what was perceived at the time as Western educational values, including an emphasis on a student-centred approach, the introduction of new curriculum standards, the decentralisation of educational financing and governance, the privatisation of education, the liberalisation of textbook publishing, and several other substantial changes (Silova, *ibid*).

In terms of the teacher-curriculum relationship more specifically, the rhetoric of the reform in these countries emphasised teachers taking a more active role and becoming the main actors in curriculum reforms (Cerych, 1999; Erss et al., 2014; Kalin & Zuljan, 2007; Polyzoi & Černá, 2001). A significant decentralisation of the curriculum development process, however, turned out to be challenging, primarily because of a lack of the needed competence and experience among local and school actors, including teachers (Kallen, 1996; Olek, 1998; Polyzoi & Černá, 2001; Zogla, 2001). As Polyzoi & Černá (2001, p. 78) have put it in the Czech context, '... teachers preferred the centralised prescriptive curriculum, because it not only provided homogeneity and comparability across schools but also protected them from the risks inherent in making choices and expressing views.' Such readiness, however, in terms of competence, experience and material and time resources, is most necessary for enhancing teachers' autonomy, agency and ownership of curriculum decision-making. Obvious limitations in all of these areas constituted a severe challenge to the former socialist European countries in combining the need for a strong and well-articulated national curriculum with freedom of schools and teachers in curriculum decision-making (Cerych, 1999; Kallen, 1996).

2.4. Education and curriculum policy development and the teacher-curriculum relationship in Estonia

This sub-chapter describes the general trajectory of Estonia's curriculum policy, curriculum development process and curriculum documents. The sub-chapter also broadly outlines how the teacher-curriculum relationship has progressed in Estonia from the late Soviet period until the empirical research findings of the thesis were reported in the three journal articles. While sharing many essential characteristics under examination with the other former socialist European countries, certain specific items also deserve attention before introducing the empirical study.

Broadly speaking, Estonia had experienced a centralised curriculum long before the Soviet period. A unitary study plan for peasant schools was established in 1874, when Estonia was part of the Russian Empire (Erss et al., 2014). However, to a large degree, compulsory education at that time primarily served the ideological and educational interests of the Russian empire (Krull & Mikser, 2010). In reconstructing the presentation of cross-curricular ideas in the general parts of the Estonian national curricula since the first period of independence, Krull and Mikser (2010) considered the new curriculum for a six-year compulsory education programme, introduced in 1921, as the first step in the foundation of the Estonian tradition of developing and designing national curricula for general education. The same authors (*ibid*) also argued that before Estonia became occupied by the Soviet Union in 1940, the national curriculum documents were reconsidered and renewed three times. The authors emphasise that in general, the new curriculum documents were progressively more elaborate and better developed.

The Soviet period. During the Soviet period, school curricula in Estonia were modified many times in accordance with the needs and priorities of the time set by the Soviet authorities. The fluctuations reflected attitudes towards the relationship between general and vocational education, between the national (Estonian language) and Russian language, etc. (Krull & Mikser, 2010). In terms of the structure, however, all of the versions consisted of three separate documents: a) *a plan of instruction*, b) *subject programmes* and c) *a model plan of students' social (Communist) education* (Krull & Mikser, *ibid*).

The teacher-curriculum relationship in Estonia during the Soviet period generally followed the same regulations as in other European countries belonging to the Soviet bloc (Mikser & Goodson, 2020). Some authors have argued, and rightfully so, that the harsh conditions that Estonians in general, and educationalists in particular, suffered from during the Soviet period can be seen as *cultural trauma* (Rõuk et al., 2018). Rõuk and colleagues (*ibid*, 111) define *cultural trauma* as a complex of dysfunctional and disintegrative effects that major changes tend to have on society. Indeed, there is no doubt that the Estonian education system was seriously harmed and distorted by the Soviet regime and its institutions (Krull & Trasberg, 2006). However, as Rõuk and others (2018) argue, the experienced *cultural trauma* was not all-encompassing and, as the Soviet era progressed, the trauma was counterbalanced by increasing national and individual resilience by educationalists. Many special conditions for Estonian education

were carved out through intense debates with Moscow central authorities, and oppressive regulations were often ameliorated by nationally-minded local education officials (Rõuk et al., 2018). Teachers practised covert resistance by teaching national values via *hidden curricula* (Viirpalu et al., 2022), and patterns of covert resilience were relatively well developed by teachers by the end of the Soviet era (Läänemets, 1995).

Moreover, whereas field experts in each subject field compiled school subject syllabi in a special institution (the Estonian Research Institute of Educational Sciences), important issues were discussed with practising teachers, feedback was collected and, at times, publicly debated in the professional mass media (Maanso & Rebane, 1980; Sotter, 1980). At the implementation level, it was emphasised, even before Gorbachev's perestroika took effect in 1985, that school reform gave teachers complete freedom to decide about organisational and methodological matters, and that teachers were not compelled to wait for centralised instructions (Unt, 1985). In short, during the late Soviet period, teachers were already accustomed to working in conditions of a prescriptive curriculum accompanied by the rhetoric of teacher autonomy and sporadic opportunities for public discussion. However, there was a relatively clear division of rights and responsibilities between the politicians and the professionals in curriculum issues, at least in two regards. Firstly, leaving directly ideological issues aside, the subject issues were the domain of subject experts and not politicians. Secondly, recognising their limited freedom to deal with ideological and political issues, teachers generally acquired skills for developing and delivering their own *hidden curricula* to preserve and transmit Estonian national values, culture and identity, qualities that were generally not mentioned in the official curriculum documents (Krull & Trasberg, 2006; Läänemets, 1995).

The post-Soviet period. Generally, Estonia's political, social and cultural changes in the late 1980s and early 1990s were in line with those in other countries belonging to the Soviet bloc. An important landmark event for the Estonian teachers and other educationalists to openly express their opinions was The Estonian Teachers' Congress, held in April 1987. At that event, Estonian educators expressed their dissatisfaction with the totalitarian and over-centralised educational policies of the Soviet regime. They called for creating an Estonian education system based on humanist and democratic values and a new curriculum for general education that would take into account local needs (Krull & Trasberg, 2006; Viirpalu et al., 2022). The congress resulted in a boom in public meetings, seminars, round-tables and brainstorming sessions, whose ideas were ultimately summarised in the manifesto document 'Main principles for the reorganisation of public education in Estonia' (Kareda et al., 1989; see also Krull & Trasberg, 2006). Although the late Soviet centralised curricula were still officially in force, teachers in that relatively short period generally enjoyed an unprecedented, before or after, liberal atmosphere and extensive freedom of curriculum decision-making (Viirpalu et al., 2022). In some cases, the degree of freedom and indeterminacy even led to talk of 'confusion and anarchy at schools in terms of educational legislation, curricular regulations and work discipline' (Krull & Trasberg, 2006, p. 15). This

short but optimistic period is sometimes called the ‘window of opportunity’ (Mikser & Goodson, 2020, p. 41), a time of great freedom for schools and teachers where educators could unleash their creativity and experiment with new models of curriculum and pedagogy (Krull & Trasberg, 2006). A wide range of participants joined the discussions, which were actual bottom-up grass-roots activities (Viirpalu et al., 2022).

National curriculum documents. The extensive degree of freedom, accompanied by the decline of students’ learning outcomes (Krull & Trasberg, 2006), revealed the need for a stronger national curriculum policy, including national curriculum documents (already mentioned at the European level, see Kallen 1996).

After Estonia regained independence in 1991, the first attempts to introduce national curricula for general education were undertaken in 1992 (Unt & Läänemets, 1992) and 1993 (Unt & Läänemets, 1993). However, these documents were not granted official status (see Viirpalu et al., 2014). For a more detailed overview of these documents, see Krull and Mikser (2010).

It was not until 1996 that the first official national curriculum for basic and upper secondary education was introduced in re-independent Estonia and enacted as a government regulation (Erss et al., 2014; Mikser et al., 2023). This document officially declared teachers’ role as educational policymakers (Viirpalu et al., 2022; Mikser et al., 2023). Given the optimism at the time in democratic and broad-based curriculum decision-making, this goal seemed attractive and presumably achievable (Viirpalu et al., 2022). As with other stakeholders, teachers were engaged in national curriculum development decision-making bodies (Mikser et al., 2023). In addition, teachers were also declared to be primarily responsible for compiling the *school curriculum*: an official document of each school to be prepared by the school personnel, taking into account local needs and specific characteristics (Viirpalu et al., 2022).

In terms of **structure**, the 1996 national curriculum document was qualitatively different from the Soviet-type curriculum documents: it was no longer just a collection of subject syllabi but included two distinctive components: the *general part* and *subject syllabi*. In internationally recognisable terms, the general part was ‘a general policy curriculum document [...] denoting underlying principles and aims meant to be common to all schools as defined by central bodies and not a common core of factual knowledge and skills to be mastered by everyone’ (Gundem & Sivesind, 1997, p. 11). In terms of the typical components of a curriculum as distinguished by Eash (1991), the general part included the following: a) a framework of assumptions about the learner and society, b) aims and objectives (including cross-curricular topics), c) modes of transactions (including the concepts of learning and the learning environment), and d) overall evaluation principles (see also Erss et al., 2014). In addition, the 1996 document also introduced the concept of the school curriculum and defined the relationship between the national curriculum and school curriculum: the latter was aimed at specifying the national curriculum in terms of the needs negotiated with the local stakeholders (teachers, students and parents). It was assumed that by compiling

and implementing the school curriculum, schools would gain more freedom yet greater responsibility to the public, contributing to the further development of the national curriculum (Mikser et al., 2016).

Ironically, however, the **actual curriculum policy trajectories** did not converge with the teachers' new role proclaimed in the national curriculum documents. **Firstly**, schools and their teachers lacked the necessary competence and experience for curriculum work and were therefore unprepared for school-level curriculum decision-making because such preparation was regarded as unnecessary and was therefore missing in Soviet-era formal teacher education (Krull & Trasberg, 2006). **Secondly**, although teacher representatives were, formally at least, engaged in the national-level curriculum decision-making bodies, many complaints occurred on behalf of teacher representative bodies, school principals and educational researchers about how teachers were engaged in state curriculum commissions (Jõemaa, 1996; Läänemets, 1997; see also Mikser et al., 2016). Again, mainly due to a lack of previous experience, it had been left unspecified in curriculum policy regulations who should represent teachers in the national-level decision-making bodies and on what basis (Mikser et al., 2016). Therefore, the question was posed of whether the curriculum development process was democratic (Jõemaa, 1996). **Thirdly**, the Estonian educators themselves (Leesi, 1997; Mikk, 1997), as well as foreign experts, pointed to several shortcomings in the 1996 curriculum documents, primarily to a significant discrepancy between the innovative, modern and up-to-date general part, and the rigid and old-fashioned subject syllabi (Erss et al., 2016; Krull & Trasberg, 2006; Mikser et al., 2016).

Fourthly, and most importantly, the implementation of the 1996 national curriculum in the following year coincided with the enactment of the *state examination system* in Estonia. The public presentation of the students' examination results and subsequent symbolic ranking of the schools on that basis seriously restricted teachers' curricular freedom and their willingness to participate in curriculum development (Erss et al., 2014; 2016; Mikser et al., 2016). Erss and colleagues (2016) noted that teachers tended to see the narrowly focused state examinations as affecting their work significantly more than the curriculum. Likewise, Mikser and colleagues (2016) have observed that nearly all teachers of subjects other than art, music and physical education experience the pressure of state examinations as the main factor shaping the focus of their work. As Erss and colleagues (2014) contend, this tendency inclines teachers to narrow the curriculum down to a mere preparation for final exams.

From the teachers' point of view, the overall conclusion about the success of the initially proclaimed post-Soviet curriculum policy aspirations is rather pessimistic. As Erss and colleagues (2016, p. 593) have put it, 'The rhetoric of teacher autonomy in the Estonian curriculum of 1996, depicting teachers not only as curriculum makers but also as "educational policymakers", disappointingly was never implemented.' Likewise, Mikser and Goodson (2020) argue that the mere engagement of teacher representatives in elaborating and establishing curriculum regulations actually failed to provide teachers with the promised curriculum

ownership because the control practices maintained and reproduced the existing status structures right through the fundamental systemic reforms.

Subsequent versions of the national curriculum were introduced in 2002 and 2011, and the latter later underwent several revisions (Viirpalu et al., 2022). Although there are certain differences in details, these subsequent generations of the national curriculum documents are structured similarly, consisting of a general part, guidelines for compiling the school curriculum, and a block of sample subject syllabi. The essential qualities of the curriculum documents have remained essentially the same (Viirpalu et al., *ibid*).

The latest version for basic schools and gymnasia, effective since 2023 (already beyond the scope of this thesis), contains only competencies and learning outcomes, leaving the decisions about content to the teachers and schools. However, as Erss (2023) has noted, this raises new questions about the readiness and competence of teachers to take on new responsibilities for choosing content. As content-related suggestions and textbooks still have to be published, tensions will likely remain between curriculum standardisation and teacher autonomy (Erss, *ibid*).

In conclusion, the curriculum policy changes in the mid-to-late 1990s clearly indicate a more general shift and a gradual managerial takeover of education and curriculum discourse (Erss et al., 2016; Mikser & Goodson, 2020). The international, regional and national curriculum policy trajectories delineated above point to the need for a more thorough study of what happened with teachers' mindsets over the decades during which Estonia had its own national curricula for general education schools. It seems somewhat mysterious that, given the restrictive situation for teachers that followed the introduction of the first national curriculum in 1996, it has become possible to continue with the same kind of curriculum policy and curriculum documents. Together with her colleagues, the author of the thesis has expressed this situation in the first article as follows:

It is curious that throughout the period since the first version of the Estonian national curriculum was introduced, its main components, including the guidelines for compiling school curricula, have remained essentially the same and have not moved significantly towards greater school and teacher autonomy. How is it possible that these unchanged principles satisfy the expectations of the educational authorities responsible for curriculum development, as well as the expectations of schoolteachers? Are teachers still used to a top-down way of thinking? One of the main goals of the current research is to obtain answers to these questions (Viirpalu et al., 2014, p. 57).

In the general terms used in this study, the concerns described above are about the nature of the *teacher-curriculum relationship*. In the next chapter, the author of the thesis provides an overview of how this relationship has been conceptualised by different theorists and how these theorists have described different degrees of freedom, autonomy and ownership that teachers can have in regard to curriculum. The author also clarifies the meaning and connotation of the term *ownership* and explains why this is preferred as a key concept in the thesis.

2.5. Conceptualisations of the teacher-curriculum relationship: the basis for defining the degrees of teachers' curriculum ownership

The global, regional and national curriculum policy trajectories described above have attracted growing attention to the teacher-curriculum relationship in terms of teachers' rights, freedom, autonomy and agency to develop, change and accommodate curricula according to their own beliefs, understandings and needs. However, as a subject of theoretical concern, the teacher-curriculum relationship did not first emerge in the context of the neoliberal turn but was developed several decades before and gradually evolved through the global movement of standardisation and accountability in education. As Alkan and Priestley (2019) remind us, Dewey, an iconic educational thinker, emphasised teachers' active involvement in curriculum-making in the 1930s. Indeed, Dewey stated that 'teachers are the agents through which knowledge and skills are communicated and rules of conduct enforced' (Dewey, 1938, p. 18). Likewise, Alkan and Priestley (ibid) emphasise that Schwab, an eminent curriculum theorist, claimed teachers deserved more ownership over curriculum decision-making in his famous essay published in 1970 (see Schwab 1970/2013). Indeed, Schwab called for freeing 'real teachers' from excessive 'theoretical representations' (Schwab 1970/2013, p. 612).

As the conceptualisation of the teacher-curriculum relationship has been a relatively long-term and gradual process, it is unsurprising that conceptions vary in terms of the vocabulary and emphases on different aspects of this relationship. For example, this study has highlighted a small number of well-known previous conceptualisations of the teacher-curriculum relationship that, by using somewhat different vocabulary, have scaled this relationship by different degrees to which teachers have the right, freedom, autonomy and agency to develop, change and accommodate curriculum according to their own beliefs, understandings and needs. The author of the thesis and the other participants in the study have analysed and synthesised these conceptualisations and applied them to the data analysis process to elucidate different degrees of teachers' feelings of curriculum ownership.

This sub-chapter introduces these previous conceptualisations and then presents how they were analysed and synthesised to conduct an empirical study on teachers' feelings of curriculum ownership by their definitions of the notion of curriculum. **Hewitt (2006): 'adoption' vs 'adaptation' orientation.** For analytical purposes, described in more detail below, the research group was primarily interested in conceptualisations that describe differences in the teacher-curriculum relationship as a matter of degree and approach rather than as a binary (Mikser et al., 2023). However, it is useful to have some conceptualisation presented as a binary opposition to exemplify the two possible extremes of this relationship. Hewitt (2006) has distinguished between *curriculum adoption* and *curriculum adaptation* orientations in teachers. According to him, *curriculum adoption* orientation means accepting a curriculum as it has been produced and implementing it without

planning or making any changes. The *curriculum adaptation* orientation, on the other hand, means changing the pre-planned curriculum before, during or after implementation to adjust or adapt it to fit circumstances. According to Hewitt (ibid), the adaptation orientation usually implies intentional actions at the classroom, school and teacher levels. Hewitt (ibid) further contends that adoption and adaptation orientations often tend to be confused in curriculum development practice.

The other conceptualisations used in this study imply that the teacher- curriculum relationship is a continuum or spectrum rather than binary. Such an approach provided the study participants with an opportunity for a more nuanced analysis of the phenomenon under observation instead of being merely limited to ‘all-or-nothing’ situations. The conceptualisations presented as continua allowed researchers to better compare the differences in authors’ implications about what teachers’ curricular ownership would ideally look like (Mikser et al., 2023). For the purposes of this study, three well-cited continuous conceptualisations will suffice and will be introduced below, authored by Ben-Peretz (1990), Snyder et al. (1992) and Croll et al. (1994).

Ben-Peretz (1990): teachers as ‘transmitters’, ‘implementation influencers’ or ‘user-developers’ of curricula. Ben-Peretz (1990) distinguishes between three possible roles of teachers in curriculum implementation.

- a) According to the *transmitter*’s role, teachers merely transmit curricular ideas presented in ‘teacher-proof’ materials developed by specialists outside the classroom. Ben-Peretz (ibid) contends that such a perspective may cause teachers, particularly those with relatively little experience, to feel restricted in planning and implementing any changes: they may simply not perceive themselves as allowed to do so.
- b) According to the second perspective, teachers can be considered to have a significant influence on the implementation of curricular ideas. Implementation-oriented strategies can help teachers understand curricular innovations that are necessary according to this view. Ben-Peretz (ibid) noted the potential of workshops and other kinds of training activities through which teachers may be ‘converted’ to the ideas and practices planned in the curriculum materials to be implemented in the classroom.
- c) The third perspective assumes teachers take the role of full partners in curriculum development. Relying on Connelly (1972), Ben-Peretz (ibid) calls this role of teachers ‘user-developers’. According to this perspective, teachers adapt and shape curriculum materials to fit their own purposes and for specific situations. Ben-Peretz also stressed the multiplicity of possible goals so that, depending on the specific circumstances, the teacher can fully interpret and use the potential of the curriculum materials, and choose from an array of possible alternatives.

Ben-Peretz (ibid) advocated for the third perspective, i.e. seeing teachers as full partners in the curriculum development process.

Snyder and colleagues (1992): *fidelity, mutual adaptation and enactment.* Like Ben-Peretz, Snyder and colleagues (1992) also proposed a three-level classification of the teacher-curriculum relationship. They distinguished between three different perspectives in curriculum implementation research – *fidelity, mutual adaptation and enactment.*

According to these authors, the fidelity perspective is the initial and most extensively documented approach in curriculum implementation research. In this case, the intent is to determine the degree to which curriculum innovation is implemented and to which the actual implementation corresponds to the intended or planned one. The fidelity approach confines the curriculum to ‘a course of study, a textbook series, a guide, and a set of teacher plans’ (Snyder et al., 1992, p. 427). According to these authors, such a definition of a curriculum has certain implications for curriculum knowledge and curriculum change, but also for the role of teachers. From the *fidelity perspective, curriculum knowledge* is defined by external experts who determine what teachers should teach. Curriculum change follows a linear and systematic progression from the centre to the periphery, excluding any active role for teachers other than delivery. A combination of these factors results in teachers being relegated to the role of curriculum transmitters (Snyder et al., ibid).

The *mutual adaptation perspective* represents a midpoint between the *fidelity perspective* and its polar opposite, the *curriculum enactment perspective*. This midpoint perspective has been defined as a ‘process whereby adjustments in a curriculum are made by curriculum developers and those who use it in the school or classroom context’ (Snyder et al., 1992, p. 410). This perspective involves conversations between teachers and external developers to introduce the adaptation approach necessary to match a curriculum to local contexts. As the *mutual adaptation perspective* can also be considered a variation of the *fidelity* approach, *curriculum knowledge* still primarily resides in the outside expert, who develops the curriculum to be adapted by teachers to local contexts. However, those professionals who work from what the authors call a ‘purer’ mutual adaptation perspective (rather than from the fidelity variation) respect both the external source of curriculum knowledge and that which resides in practitioners, as a group, or as individuals. On the other hand, *curriculum change* becomes more flexible through mutual adaptations. The teacher becomes more active in shaping the curriculum to meet the demands of the local context. For those with an underlying fidelity orientation, this role is pragmatically necessitated but must be contained within certain parameters if curriculum integrity is to be maintained. For those with a ‘purer’ mutual adaptation approach, the role of teachers becomes more central because their input in shaping the curriculum is required if the curriculum is to be successfully implemented in particular settings (Snyder et al., ibid).

From the third perspective – the *curriculum enactment perspective* – a curriculum is viewed as a complex of educational experiences jointly created by students

and teachers. The externally created curricular materials and programmed instructional strategies at the heart of the fidelity and mutual adaptation perspectives are seen as tools for students and teachers to use as they construct the enacted experience of the classroom. From the enactment perspective, the role of the teacher is to develop the curriculum with her students to offer students positive educational experiences (Snyder et al., *ibid*). Curriculum knowledge is no longer a product but an ongoing construction of the experiences that have been enacted. Accordingly, teachers act as creators rather than just as receivers of the curriculum knowledge (Snyder et al., 1992).

Croll and colleagues (1994): four role models of teachers in educational policy and change. Croll and colleagues (1994) proposed four models to describe the relationship between teachers and educational policy. Whereas these models are not limited to teacher-curriculum relationships but are concerned with teachers' relationship with educational policy more generally, a strong link exists and has significant implications for teacher-curriculum relationships specifically.

The first model defines teachers as *partners in education policymaking*; in this case, teachers, just like other stakeholders in the policy-making process, are actively engaged and contribute at all policy levels. The authors see this model as expressing a pluralist view of political processes and assuming a significant degree of teacher autonomy. While this model does not exclude conflict between different stakeholder groups, it seeks agreement rather than domination and holds that all parties have the right to participate in political processes (Croll et al., *ibid*).

The second model defines teachers as *implementers of education policy*, with education policy-making and policy implementation sharply distinguished from each other. This model serves as the opposite of the previous *teachers-as-partners* model, leaving teachers with the role of passively implementing education policy decisions made elsewhere. The external guidelines prepared at the policy level are intended to directly inform teachers about what should be done and allow them to get the necessary training to do it. Whenever there are problems with policy implementation, they are seen as being caused by deficient school management or by the lack of teachers' capabilities.

The third model defines teachers as potential *opponents of education policy*. This model resembles the previous one in the sense that it also recognises the gap between policymakers and practitioners. Yet, it distinctively regards this gap not as a normal state of affairs but as a matter of political conflict. This model puts teachers in a position of resistance and opposition to the imposed education policy developments. Sometimes, teachers justify the resistance in terms of benefits for their students.

The fourth model defines teachers as *policymakers in practice*, in which individual teachers can affect policy developments by independent actions resulting from the realities of practical teaching situations. The underlying assumption of this model is that professional practices, such as teaching, necessarily involve policy implications that ultimately amount to policy creation. This model does not see teachers as mechanistically implementing externally imposed policy

decisions; neither does it see teachers as necessarily resisting or transforming policy. In this model, Croll and colleagues (ibid) regard the practitioners' policy-making activity as not resulting from their conscious choice but from the nature of the teaching activity itself. However, the effect on policymaking can be immense and systematic when individual professionals in similar situations start acting in similar ways, ultimately resulting in the redirection of policy initiatives. Crucially, in the context of the problem setting in this thesis, Croll and colleagues (ibid) point out that teachers are inevitably involved in the practical determination of policy, which is why teachers should be treated as partners and not as implementers if policy changes are really expected to materialise.

2.6. Teachers' curriculum ownership: definitional issues

The many previous conceptualisations of power issues in teacher-curriculum relationships – including those introduced in the previous sub-chapter – involve different keywords, such as *autonomy*, *agency*, *freedom* or *ownership* (see e.g. Erss 2018 for an analysis of the concepts of *autonomy* and *agency* in curricular issues). The concept of *ownership* has clearly emerged in studies on the teacher-curriculum relationship (Elizondo-Montemayor, 2008; Kirk & MacDonald, 2001; Pietarinen et al., 2017), yet it has not been sufficiently defined (Mikser et al., 2023). Therefore, to consider whether it was reasonable and justified to apply the emergent concept of ownership as a key concept in the study, it was necessary to define it as precisely as possible.

Firstly, examining a dictionary definition of 'ownership' was necessary. In the Merriam-Webster dictionary, 'ownership' is defined as 'the state, relation, or fact of being an owner' (owner, 2024)). However, this concise definition turned out not to be heuristically productive. Therefore, the author and her colleagues turned to research literature to find a more thorough and detailed definition. Based on the research literature, the concept of *ownership* turned out to be heuristically promising in two essential respects.

Firstly, the research group found it most constructive to proceed from the *psychological* definition of ownership, presented by Pierce and colleagues as follows:

We conceptually define psychological ownership as the state in which individuals feel as though the target of ownership or a piece of that target is "theirs" (i.e., "It is *mine*!") (Pierce et al., 2003, p. 86; see also Mikser et al., 2016; Mikser et al., 2023; Viirpalu et al., 2022).

Accordingly, teachers' feeling of curriculum ownership can be understood as teachers' psychological state of feeling that curriculum decision-making and implementation essentially belong to them (Mikser et al., 2023).

At a general level, this concern resembles what was expressed in many previous considerations of teacher-curriculum relationships. However, on closer inspection,

this definition opens up a perspective that, as far as the research team was aware, has not been explicitly covered in previous studies: the substantial analytical difference between the *legal* and *psychological* connotations of the notion of ownership. Ideally, these two aspects of ownership converge; convergence is possible but can't be taken for granted in practical situations. Pierce and colleagues (2003, p. 87) have explained the relationship between the two as follows:

Although possibly related, legal and psychological ownership differ in some significant ways. For example, legal ownership is recognised foremost by society, and hence the rights that come with ownership are specified and protected by the legal system. In contrast, psychological ownership is recognised foremost by the individual who holds this feeling. Consequently, it is the individual who manifests the felt rights associated with psychological ownership. Furthermore, psychological ownership can exist in the absence of legal ownership [...].

In these terms, the studies that underlie this thesis (and are presented in articles II and III) examine the potential mismatch between teachers' legal and psychological curriculum ownership, focusing on the latter. To express the analytical difference between the two aspects and to accentuate the focus on the psychological aspect, it turned out to be useful to add the notion of *feelings* to the key concept of *ownership*, which is why the more detailed expression 'teachers' feelings of curriculum ownership' is used throughout the thesis (Mikser et al., 2023; Viirpalu et al., 2022).

Another linguistic aspect that deserves attention in this connection is that, throughout the thesis, the singular form (*feeling* of ownership) denotes the *presence* of this psychological state. In contrast, the plural form (*feelings*) is used to denote all possible degrees of its presence or absence (Mikser et al., 2023).

The *second* aspect from which the concept of ownership turned out to be heuristically promising – and already present in the previous literature on teachers' ownership in the teacher-curriculum relationship – was its definition in the context of curriculum reform as an essentially *political* process and in relation to other stakeholders in that process (Kirk & MacDonald, 2001; Pietarinen et al., 2017; see also Mikser et al., 2023). As Kirk and MacDonald (2001, p. 557) maintain: 'Where teachers are positioned within the curriculum reform process lies at the heart of the issues of teachers' ownership of curriculum innovations.'

The definition of teachers' *ownership* as a politically determined quality is not necessarily different from how, for example the concepts of *teacher autonomy* or *teacher agency* are defined. Indeed, as Erss (2018, p. 244) notes, both autonomy and agency can be used to manipulate the political discourse in such a way as to legitimise teachers' increased workload. The same may well apply to teachers' ownership. However, in combination with the distinction between *legal* and *psychological*, the political aspect of ownership clearly indicates the focus on the question of whether the legal ownership that is recognised and protected by *society* and its legal system is also recognised by the *individual* involved (see the vocabulary of Pierce and colleagues in the definition provided above).

Following from the two essential aspects of the concept of ownership described above, i.e. from the distinction between the *legal* and the *psychological* and from ownership being a *political* issue, the research group defined the concept of *teachers' feeling of curriculum ownership* as follows:

... teachers' feeling of curriculum ownership can be understood as teachers' psychological state of feeling that curriculum decision-making and implementation essentially belongs to them (Mikser et al., 2023, p. 543).

This construction is central to the two main studies underlying the thesis, presented in Articles II and III.

2.7. Different degrees of teachers' feelings of curriculum ownership: combining the conceptualisations of the teacher-curriculum relationship

The somewhat unconventional strategy of the third and final study underlying this thesis (Mikser et al., 2023) makes it possible to place this chapter in either the theory or the methodology section of the thesis. This is because the methodological decisions for the empirical study were made based on the theoretical synthesis conducted by the research group from the above-described conceptualisations of the teacher-curriculum relationship. Given the assumed significance of the theoretical contribution and the article structure accepted by the journal (ibid), the author of the thesis decided to include this sub-chapter in the theoretical section of the doctoral thesis.

The above-described conceptualisations of the teacher-curriculum relationship form a useful heuristic framework for studying teachers' curriculum ownership (Mikser et al., 2023). Cooperative deliberation on these conceptualisations and the synthesis of their components led the research group to build up a three-degree hierarchy to express, analyse and describe teachers' feelings of curriculum ownership, which were applied to the qualitative content analysis. This process, however, was neither linear nor mechanical.

This sub-chapter describes the process of deriving the different degrees of teachers' feelings of curriculum ownership from the above-described conceptualisations and the outcomes used for the data analysis in the third empirical study (Mikser et al., ibid).

With the leading contribution of the author of the thesis, the research group sought to consensually divide the respondents of the main study into three categories according to the degree to which they expressed a feeling of curriculum ownership:

- (a) a low feeling of curriculum ownership
- (b) a moderate feeling of curriculum ownership
- (c) a high feeling of curriculum ownership

Each of the three categories was characterised by a combination of essentials derived from the above-described conceptualisations of the teacher-curriculum relationship. Although these conceptualisations were generally built up hierarchically, ranging from a (or an almost) complete lack of feeling of ownership to a high degree of ownership, characteristics occurred that allowed different or even potentially contradictory interpretations.

Altogether, it turned out to be relatively easy to agree about a complete lack of, or *low* feeling of curriculum ownership. Essentially, all of the described conceptualisations, albeit using different terms, included a category involving a low degree of teachers' feeling of curriculum ownership (i.e. in the adoption, transmitter, fidelity and implementer models). In this situation, a teacher has no active role in curriculum development, not even in adjusting, modifying or accommodating curriculum to the classroom (Mikser et al., 2023).

However, it was much more difficult and contestable to determine and to distinguish between a *moderate* or a *high* degree of feeling of ownership. Among many possible responses, the research group detected some definite aspects in which the possibility of alternative interpretations was detected.

Firstly, one could claim that the model of teachers as *policy-makers-in-practice* (Croll et al., 1994) could be considered either because this model represents a moderate ownership or a high ownership group. The research group consensually defined this model as belonging to the moderate ownership category because it does not reach the level of that in the *teachers as partners in the education policymaking* model (Mikser et al., 2023, 548).

Secondly, a problem occurred in interpreting teachers' feelings of curriculum ownership that arises from the model of *teachers as opponents* (Croll et al., 1994). As can be easily imagined, the relationship between resistance and ownership can be interpreted in different, even opposite, ways. On the one hand, resistance can arise from the feeling of low ownership. On the other hand, resistance can also result from a high feeling of ownership in teachers' curricular practices. This situation mainly occurred with more experienced teachers, whose fundamental principles and values had usually been shaped decades before. Goodson and colleagues (2006, p. 44) have expressed this case as follows: 'Understanding resistance to change as a process of fulfilling, preserving, and protecting the missions and memories of one's generation draws attention to a positive sense of what teachers are fighting for [...], rather than merely what they are opposed to or against.'

Overall, the problem of resistance could not be completely solved in this study, and the research group decided not to consider it as a category of its own because its complex relationship with ownership would need a separate study (Mikser et al., 2023).

Yet another conceptual complexity arose from how the notion of *implementation* was used by the different authors whose conceptualisations of teacher-curriculum relationship were introduced above. Whereas Ben-Peretz (1990) and Snyder et al. (1992) used *implementation* as the overriding concept in their conceptualisations, for Croll et al. (1994), 'teachers as implementers' only served to

mark a complete separation between policymakers and teachers. Rather than being just a philological issue, this approach refers to substantial differences in where teachers are positioned in the curriculum process (e.g. Kirk & MacDonald, 2001). In their classifications, Hewitt (2006), Ben-Peretz (1990) and Snyder et al. (1992) prioritised teachers' rights and commitments to adjust curriculum for their specific conditions. This approach allows the interpretation that teachers' freedom in the classroom is not only necessary but nearly essential for their curriculum ownership. The distinctive and most important quality of the conceptualisation of Croll et al. (1994) is apparent from their model of *teachers as partners* in education policymaking, which accentuates teachers' contribution, along with that of other stakeholders, to 'policymaking at all levels' (Croll et al., 1994, p. 334). In that case, a mere *implementation* is not a sufficient condition for teachers' feeling of curriculum ownership.

Keeping all of these complexities in mind and relying on the above-described conceptualisations of the teacher-curriculum relationship, the research group consensually distinguished among three different degrees of teachers' feelings of curriculum ownership, all presented in the final article (Mikser et al., 2023):

- a) *low ownership*: the curriculum is seen as a prescriptive document and mandatory guideline. At least four items in the conceptualisations can be interpreted as expressing teachers' low feeling of curriculum ownership: (1) the adoption approach (Hewitt, 2006), (2) the teachers as transmitters of curricular ideas approach (Ben-Peretz, 1990), (3) the fidelity approach (Snyder et al., 1992), and (4) the teachers as implementers approach (Croll et al., 1994).
- b) *moderate ownership*: the concept of teachers' feelings of curriculum ownership is defined as teachers seeing externally developed curriculum materials as aids and supports rather than prescriptions. At least three items from the previous conceptualisations represent this degree: (1) teachers as having an influence on the implementation of curricular ideas (Ben-Peretz, 1990), (2) the mutual adaptation approach (Snyder et al., 1992), and (3) the teachers as policymakers in practice model (Croll et al., 1994).
- c) *high ownership*: teachers are involved in curriculum development and have the freedom to implement it creatively, thus feeling the curriculum to be their own. In terms of the above-described conceptualisations, this highest degree of ownership is represented by the following: (1) the adaptation approach (Hewitt, 2006), (2) the teachers as full partners in curriculum development approach (Ben-Peretz, 1990), (3) the enactment approach (Snyder, 1992), and (4) the teachers as partners in education policymaking model (Croll et al., 1994).

Primarily relying on the difference between *teachers as partners in education policymaking* and *teachers as policymakers in practice* (Croll et al., 1994), the research group found it useful to distinguish between what can be called the **weak** and **strong** versions of high ownership. The *weak* version of high ownership emphasises teachers' freedom to adapt the curriculum to the specific circumstances

of their classrooms, yet without necessarily involving them in the development of curriculum policies beyond their individual or organisational context. In contrast, the *strong* version requires the active participation of teachers in the development of curriculum policy at all levels, including the state level. As can be seen from the results of the empirical study, this difference also appeared in the respondents' definitions (Mikser et al., 2023).

Finally, it is possible that a teacher can feel *too much ownership*. This is what Pierce et al. (2003) call the *dark side* of ownership: being overly possessive of innovation, unwilling to share it with others, and even feeling the need to keep exclusive control of it. This might develop when opportunities to collaborate in the implementation process are lacking (Ketelaar et al., 2012). Teachers' resistance to curriculum innovations can be caused by the fear of a potentially negative impact on test results (Priestley et al., 2012).

2.8. Defining the notion of curriculum

The somewhat unconventional strategy applied to the third study of the thesis (Mikser et al., 2023) also led the research group to render a brief overview of how the concepts of *definition* and *curriculum* are defined in the thesis. In an ordinary study, such a level of detail can be regarded as superfluous. However, the author regarded it as most necessary in this thesis because defining these concepts was central to the third and final study underlying the thesis (Mikser et al., 2023).

It is important to define the notion of curriculum because, as Ornstein and Hunkins have stated, this definition reflects the approach to the curriculum:

Our approach to curriculum reflects our perceptions, values, and knowledge. A curriculum approach reflects a holistic position, or a metaorientation, encompassing curriculum's foundations (a person's philosophy, view of psychology and learning theory, and view of social issues), curriculum domains (common, important knowledge within the field), and curricular theory and practice. An approach expresses a viewpoint about curriculum's development and design; the role of the learner, teacher, and curriculum specialist in planning curriculum; the curriculum's goals; and the important issues that must be examined. (Ornstein & Hunkins 2014, p. 2)

During the third study's analysis of teachers' statements, it was first necessary to decide which statements to classify as definitions so, before moving on to defining the curriculum, the concept of definition itself was examined.

A dictionary definition of *definition* identifies it as the 'specification of the meaning or, alternatively, the conceptual content of an expression' (Yagisawa, 2015, p. 247). A good definition assumes maximum clarity and conciseness, a balanced degree of broadness (i.e. neither too narrow nor too broad), the maximum match between the defining expression and the degree of the vagueness of the expression being defined, and the avoidance of circularity (Swedberg, 2020; Yagisawa, 2015).

Swedberg (2020) distinguishes *lexical*, *ostensive* and *stipulative* definitions. A lexical definition specifies the meaning of an expression by stating it in terms of other expressions whose meanings are assumed to be known (e.g. ‘a curriculum is a guideline for school instruction’). The lexical definition is usually available in a common dictionary.

An ostensive definition specifies the meaning of an expression by pointing to examples of things to which the expression applies (e.g. ‘a curriculum is a social contract or a document that includes statements of educational goals, lists of subject matter etc.’).

A stipulative definition assigns a new meaning to an expression or a meaning to a new expression. The expression defined (*definiendum*) may either be a new expression that is being introduced into the language for the first time or an expression that is already in use (e.g. ‘an instructional guideline is called a curriculum if it ...’). A stipulative definition is one that allows for a ‘reconceptualisation of a concept’ (Swedberg, 2020, p. 433).

Throughout the history of curriculum studies, the concept of *curriculum* has been laden with different meanings and definitions derived from philosophical, psychological and sociological deliberations (Krull & Mikser, 2010).

Lunenburg (2011) has drawn up a list of possible curriculum conceptions and definitions: a curriculum being defined as *content*, *as learning experiences*, *as behavioural objectives*, *as a plan for instruction*, and *as a non-technical approach*. Krull (2020) has summarised the different ways and approaches of defining a curriculum as follows: as a set of documents that reflect it according to its content and function (e.g. Dewey, Bobbit and Johnson), as a set of main components (e.g. Tyler, Taba and Eash) according to the reach and scope of educational guidelines (Kelly) and as a set of basic truths (Schwab).

Given that there is no universally accepted definition of the concept of *curriculum* (see Lunenburg, 2011), the research group decided on a maximum inclusive definition of the term in order to avoid excluding any potentially useful stipulative definition given by the respondents (Mikser et al., 2023). The examples provided demonstrate the multiplicity of ways in which the concept of curriculum has been defined in previous studies. For the present purposes, the following definition will suffice:

...curriculum is the symbolic centre of a loosely coupled system of ideologies, symbols, organizational forms, mandates, and subject and classroom practices that instantiates collective, and often differing, understandings about what is to be valued about the idea and the ongoing practice of education (Westbury, 2003. p. 532).

This definition has been described as exemplary by Krull and Mikser (2010), who have claimed that over about 80 years since the first attempts to establish curriculum development as a theoretical discipline, curriculum researchers have to admit their failure to define the field satisfactorily. Other authors, including those representing Estonia, have recognised this problem. Rather similarly, the notion of curriculum has been defined by Tuul and colleagues, referring to Westbury (2003; see the references below).

3. METHODOLOGY FOR THE EMPIRICAL STUDY OF THE THESIS

The following chapter gives an overview of the research methodology used in the empirical study of the thesis. First, the design and development of the data-gathering instrument, the written questionnaire, are introduced. Then, the data collection procedure and the data analysis process are described.

The empirical study of the thesis was divided into three phases:

- 1) developing the data collection instrument for investigating the teacher-curriculum relationship: a concept introduced more specifically in the theoretical overview of the thesis. In particular, the author introduces teachers' expectations for curriculum policy regulations and specific solutions (Article I);
- 2) conducting a questionnaire survey of Estonian schoolteachers (Article II);
- 3) analysing, by the method of qualitative content analysis, Estonian schoolteachers' feelings of curriculum ownership reflected in their statements about what they mean by the term 'curriculum' (Article III).

3.1. Data collection instrument

3.1.1. Drafting the Questionnaire

The questionnaire was developed to collect data on what teachers thought about the national curricula in force when the empirical study was conducted, their feelings about the curriculum development process, and their ideal curriculum solutions. The data collection instrument, a semi-structured written questionnaire, was developed by following the generally accepted principles of questionnaire preparation (Wolf, 1997).

In order to create a questionnaire that would allow for a comparison of teachers' curriculum-based beliefs across countries, it is crucial to determine the common understandings and elements present in the curriculum documents of many countries. As general education curricula vary greatly worldwide, identifying common components or dimensions is essential to describe specific national contexts using an internationally understood system and terminology. The first stage of developing the questionnaire was to create a model of the factors influencing teachers' usage, development practices and curriculum thinking. The factors were defined based on the curriculum components or dimensions typically present in all curricula provided by Eash (1991). These are a) a general understanding of the learner and society, b) aims and objectives of the curriculum, c) form, selection and principles of subject matter content, d) transaction principles and modes: instruction and learning environment methodologies, and e) forms and principles of assessment. After that, the possible variables charac-

terising these factors were defined, and the questions were formulated. After most of the research group approved the composed questionnaire, the draft version was delivered to a small group of experienced teachers for testing and commenting. The teachers were asked to fill in the questionnaire and make suggestions for improving it to make it more teacher-friendly, i.e. easily understandable and relevant to practising teachers. After discussing the changes suggested by the teachers, the research group considered the questionnaire ready for piloting.

The questionnaire was piloted in three general education schools in Tartu. 150 teachers were asked to complete the questionnaire, and 103 questionnaires were returned. The analysis of the collected data revealed the necessity for changes in almost all parts of the questionnaire.

The internal reliability of its two main scales – for assessing teachers' ratings of curriculum components and preferred curriculum solutions – was the central question in assessing the reliability of the questionnaire to be created. To ensure the reliability of the research instrument, an item analysis of these scales was conducted. The statistical analysis showed that the internal reliability of this scale was high (Cronbach's alpha 0.90). Therefore, only minor modifications were made to the format and sequence of the items.

Based on the analysis, the scale constructed as a semantic differential, which dealt with teachers' expectations of the ideal curriculum, had relatively low reliability (Cronbach's alpha 0.57). As a result of the piloting, the most significant changes had to be made in the questions presented as a semantic differential constructed to determine the teachers' expectations of the ideal curriculum. To achieve satisfactory reliability, the scale was significantly modified. For this purpose, it was divided into two subscales; two questions were eliminated, and the remaining ones were reformulated. The seven measurement scales, which harmonised with each other, included items asking the respondents to describe their preferences between relatively prescriptive and restrictive curricular guidelines, and those that allowed teachers to make their own decisions. This item block was labelled '*Expectations for Curricular Autonomy One*'. The combination of the four items included those asking about teachers' preferences regarding curricular solutions in more general terms without going into specifics. This item group was labelled '*Expectations for Curricular Autonomy Two*'. In Article I (Viirpalu et al., 2014), a more detailed description of the development of the research instrument is provided.

The research results of the pilot study primarily served to organise and supplement the questionnaire's questions. However, the results of the pilot study also provided valuable indications of Estonian teachers' satisfaction with the existing curricula, their involvement in curriculum development, and teachers' expectations regarding their perceived autonomy as curriculum users and developers. These indications provided valuable information for the main study, which tested these results using a representative sample.

The pilot study revealed meaningful information about teachers' curricular thinking and preferences for offering input for conducting the main study. A majority of the respondent teachers considered the national curriculum to be helpful

for their work. Teachers' expectations of ideal curricular solutions provided necessary information for understanding their readiness to act as autonomous curriculum developers. The respondents supported, by almost equal percentages, teachers' autonomy in curricular decision-making and prescriptive and detailed guidelines in instruction. Those respondents who regarded the school curriculum as increasing their freedom preferred a greater degree of autonomy.

The responses to two questionnaire items clearly expressed teachers' preferences for prescriptive curricular guidelines. In contrast, one item demonstrated the respondents' preference for a curriculum that allows teachers greater autonomy in educational decision-making. The answers reflected teachers' preferences for comprehensiveness and the integrity of curricular guidelines and materials. Five items revealed teachers' dissatisfaction and three items revealed their satisfaction with current curricular solutions that they have experienced since the 1996 national curriculum was introduced.

In their answers to the open-ended questions, the respondents expressed the expectation that teachers' suggestions should be considered more when developing the curricula. They also urged that the curriculum documents be tested before making them mandatory. The wide variety in teachers' definitions of curriculum reflected diversity in teachers' knowledge, preparation and expectations about the curriculum. It is essential to consider this information both in teacher education and in the curriculum development process.

The final version of the 'Questionnaire on the General Education Curriculum and its Development' was used to study a representative sample of Estonian schoolteachers. The results of this study answered the research questions of the thesis, and these responses are included in the results subsection of the dissertation.

3.1.2. The nature and structure of the finalised questionnaire

The final version of the questionnaire, '*Questionnaire on the General Education Curriculum and Its Development*', consisted of five parts.

The first part of the questionnaire was designed to collect data on respondent demographics, qualifications, teaching experience, workload and initial training.

The second part asked about specific aspects of the teachers' work. The third part, *Experiences Related to Using Curricula*, asked about the role of the national and school curricula in respondents' everyday teaching and the quality of these items expressed in these documents. A nine-item set of questions, the '*Curriculum Components Rating Scales*', asked teachers to assess the quality of the components of the general part of the national curriculum. These components, evaluated on seven-point Likert measurement scales, were:

- statement of educational objectives;
- notion and categorisation of competencies expected of students;
- concept and selection of cross-curricular themes;
- concept of learning;

- principles of organising instruction;
- principles for the selection of instructional methods and creating a learning environment;
- description of instructional and educational activities by school levels;
- principles of assessment;
- guidelines for compiling school curricula.

The third part of the questionnaire asked the respondent teachers about their perceptions of the extent to which they had participated in developing the school or national curriculum and about their experiences of that participation process. The respondents were asked to evaluate the influence of their participation in the curriculum development process at the national and school level using five-point Likert measurement scales.

The fourth part of the questionnaire, the '*Optimal Solutions Scales*', aimed to discover the teachers' preferred curricular solutions. The 12 items provided by the research team, using semantic differential measurement scales, included statements expressing oppositional curricular solutions in terms of the following aspects:

- a) the relationship between the general part of the national curriculum and the subject syllabi,
- b) the relationship between national and school curricula, and c) the problems of teachers' autonomy in curricular decision-making. Statements at one end of the scale mainly reflected solutions specific to the versions of national curricula and, at the other end, opposing solutions.

The fifth part of the questionnaire, *Expression of Opinions*, asked the teachers to make suggestions for improving the curriculum development process and its organisation at the local and national levels. The last item of these three asked the respondents to define, in their own words, the term 'curriculum'. The answers were subjected to a qualitative content analysis. The results were published in one of the three leading journals on curriculum studies (Mikser et al., 2023, the *Journal of Curriculum Studies* and *Curriculum Inquiry*). Out of 45 initial questionnaire items, 27 included spaces for commenting or giving alternative answers.

3.2. Compiling a representative sample of respondents and the data collection process

Analysing the pilot study's results provided valuable input for developing a representative sample of teachers from Estonia's general education schools. More specifically, the teachers' participation in curriculum development and their understanding of curricular guidelines demonstrated a dependence on the length

of their teaching experience and the subject they were teaching. Therefore, the research sample comprised 16 groups representing teachers by subjects they taught and their teaching experience. In terms of the subjects that the respondents taught, four groups were formed: class teachers, teachers of social sciences/humanities, natural sciences/mathematics teachers, and arts/crafts/technology/sports teachers. By teaching experience, the respondent teachers were divided into four groups: up to 3 years, 4–6 years, 7–10 years and 11 years or more. As there is no official database of Estonian teachers covering all of these criteria, the available information on location, school type and size was used. A balanced research sample was created by distributing the 2,400 questionnaires to head teachers of selected schools representing all categories of teachers across Estonia. The research group received 1035 completed questionnaires (the response rate was 43%), representing 7.3% of all teachers working at Estonian general education schools. The average teaching experience of the respondents was 23.1 years, and the average age was 48 years, which is very close to the average work experience and age of teachers working at Estonian schools of general education. By school size and region, the respondents were relatively equally distributed. Of the returned 1035 questionnaires, 760 answered the question ‘Please describe, in your own words, what a curriculum is for you’. A qualitative content analysis of these 760 statements was conducted and is described in Article III.

3.3. The data analysis process of the study

In the main study (Articles II and III), the quantitative data collected from the survey were submitted for statistical analysis. The study’s database is a matrix of 1,035 cases by 69 variables measured on ordinal scales. Considering the nature of the data and the aim of the study, we used descriptive statistics, inferential statistics, correlational analysis and ANOVA to analyse the data. All statistical procedures were performed using SPSS version 20 (Statistical Package for Social Sciences) for Windows.

A three-step qualitative content analysis of teachers’ statements on the meaning of curriculum was conducted (Article III). The three research team members coded the data to increase the research results’ trustworthiness. First, the data were carefully read, and the statements that did not qualify as definitions of curriculum were excluded. All of the decisions were made consensually, and 756 out of 760 responses were included. The analysis included all of the respondents’ statements regarding curriculum in the broadest sense of the term (Westbury, 2003), avoiding the risk of losing important information on teachers’ curricular thinking.

In the next step, the respondents’ statements were carefully analysed to detect any expression of teachers’ feelings of curriculum ownership in the definitions. The statements were categorised and coded individually by three researchers into four categories: 0 – definitions that were not informative in terms of teachers’ feelings of curriculum ownership; 1 – definitions expressing low ownership; 2 –

definitions expressing moderate ownership; and 3 – definitions expressing high ownership and its *weak* or *strong* version. Then the categorisations were compared, and some re-categorisations were made. The statements illustrating each category and the expressions of teachers' resistance were determined, and coding instructions based on them were developed. After that, the final categorisation was conducted, the categorisations were compared, and some re-categorisations were done again.

The methodology elaborated by Fleiss (1971) was used to assess the categorisation's reliability, and a two-step calculation procedure was followed. First, an agreement was calculated for all pairwise combinations of researchers as a ratio of the total number of accepted responses (756). Next, the mean percentage of agreement between the ratings of the three pairs of the researchers was calculated. The result was a categorisation reliability of 72.6%. The results of the distribution between categories characterising different degrees of teachers' feeling of ownership of curriculum definitions are presented as averages of the percentages of the three researchers' categorisations.

4. RESULTS

The 'Questionnaire on the General Education Curriculum and its Development' was used to study a representative sample of teachers from general education schools across Estonia. Teachers' feelings of curriculum ownership may be developed based on their participation in curriculum development; therefore, knowledge of teachers' experiences, preparation and perceptions of the curriculum development process is needed to determine the state of teachers' curriculum ownership. The results of the study, which are essential for determining teachers' sense of ownership of the curriculum, are presented in the following sub-sections.

4.1. The Estonian schoolteachers' views on the curriculum development process and their role in it

The empirical study's results provide information about teachers' views of curriculum development and their role in that process. These factors are valuable indicators of teachers' feelings of curriculum ownership and are introduced in the following sub-section.

The following questionnaire items were related to teachers' experiences of curriculum development:

- 1) the respondents' evaluations of their preparation for curriculum development;
- 2) the respondents' involvement in the curriculum development process in terms of the curriculum categories or levels: general part of the national curriculum (NC), syllabi of the NC, general part of the school curriculum (SC) and syllabi of the SC;
- 3) the respondents' perceived influence on the development of different curriculum levels.

Regarding teachers' preparation for curriculum development, 44% claimed to have some preparation. Only 26% considered their preparation satisfactory, and 11% claimed no preparation. Teachers' involvement in curriculum development depended on the curriculum category (Figure 1). Of the respondents, 67.5% said they had participated in developing school subject syllabi. However, only 4% responded that they had participated in developing the general part of the NC. Altogether, 73% of respondents had participated in the curriculum development process. Of those who had not participated, 65% were uninterested, and only 35% claimed they would have participated if possible. A moderate positive correlation existed between being prepared for curriculum development and participating in related activities.

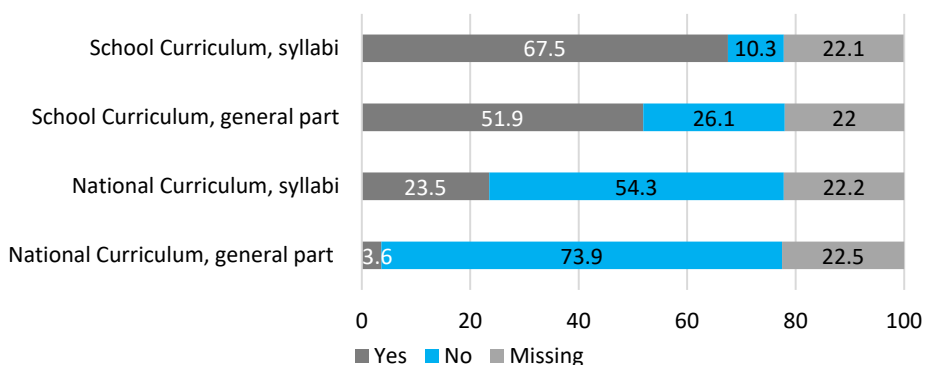


Figure 1. Teachers' involvement in curriculum development by curriculum levels and categories (in percentages).

Teachers' participation in curriculum development was related to the curriculum level and the length of their teaching experience (Figure 2). While 67.5% of the respondents had been involved in developing SC subject syllabi, only 4% were involved in developing the general part of the NC. Involvement in the curriculum development process depended on the teachers' length of teaching experience. Only 28% of the respondents with teaching experience of up to three years, but 76% with experience of 11 or more years had been involved in the curriculum development activities.

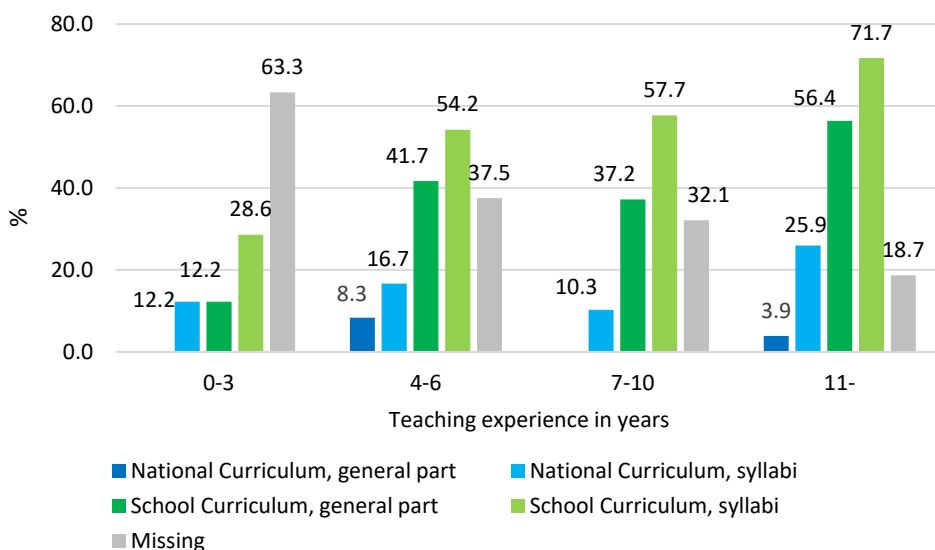


Figure 2. Teachers' involvement in curriculum development by curriculum categories and teaching experience (in percentages)

Across the curriculum levels (NC general part; NC syllabi; SC general part; SC syllabi), teachers with longer work experience participated significantly more in higher-level curriculum development work. The length of teachers' teaching experience was also related to how they valued the curricula as guidelines. With added teaching experience, the value that the respondents attributed to the NC and SC documents slightly decreased.

The participation in the curriculum development process by teachers of different subject groups was also compared (Figure 3). The most significant differences appeared in the NC and SC syllabi development. In developing the SC syllabi, science teachers were the most active (91.6%), and art, music and technology teachers were the least active (82.6%). In the development of the syllabi of the NC, the situation was just the opposite: art, music and technology teachers were the most active (41.7%), and science teachers' involvement was the lowest (27.2%); the difference between their involvement was statistically significant ($p < 0.01$)

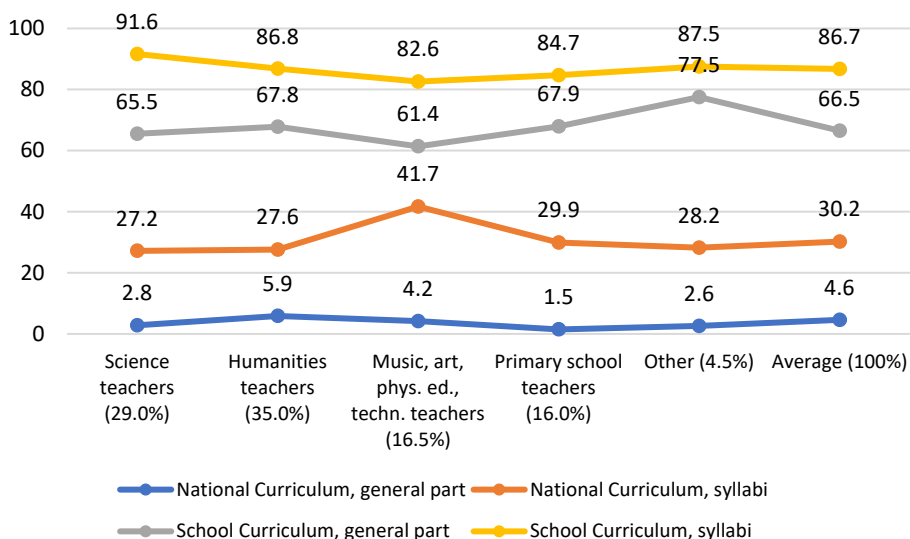


Figure 3. Teachers' involvement in curriculum development by subjects taught (in percentages)

In addition to the respondents' participation in curriculum development, the development of teachers' feelings of curriculum ownership is supported by their perception of themselves as partners who have an influence on making important curricular decisions. Therefore, the respondents were asked to evaluate their impact on the development of different curriculum levels (Figure 4). A very small proportion of the respondents (1.4%) perceived themselves as having had an impact on the development of the general part of the national curriculum. On the other hand, 42.5% of teachers reported having had a significant impact on the subject syllabi of the SC.

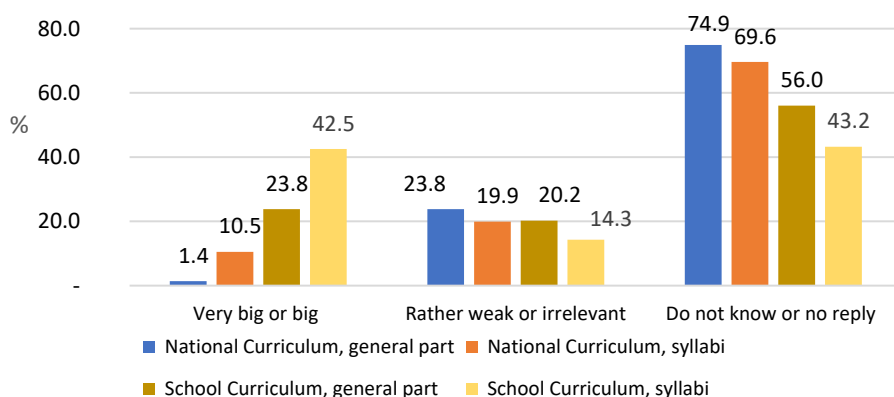


Figure 4. Teachers' assessments of their impact on curriculum development (in percentages)

In summary, the information gained about teachers' participation in the curriculum development process, which has been found to have served as a prerequisite for the development of their feeling of curriculum ownership, reveals that, regrettably:

- 27% of teachers had not participated in curriculum development on any level or category, and 65% of these teachers were not even be interested in participating;
- 10% of teachers had not been involved in the development of school curriculum subject syllabi;
- 20% of teachers involved in curriculum development activities did not perceive that they had had any influence in developing the general part of the school's curriculum.

4.2. The Estonian schoolteachers' views on the usefulness of the current national and school curriculum documents

Another critical factor affecting teachers' feelings of curriculum ownership is how they perceive the curriculum documents as necessary and valuable sources for their everyday work. Four questionnaire items turned out to be the most informative ones for assessing how teachers evaluated curriculum documents.

From the answers to the question 'To what extent have the NC and SC been helpful as guidelines?', 55% of the respondents assessed the NC as helpful in some ways. 35% of the respondents regarded the documents as very helpful, while SC was assessed as helpful in 52% of cases and very helpful in 40% of cases. About 10% of the respondents said that the NC and 8% that the SC had been of little help or even useless. The usefulness of the NC and SC was assessed differently by different teacher categories. More experienced teachers, teachers

primarily at the gymnasium (upper secondary) level, teachers from large schools, teachers from schools in urban areas, and teachers of the humanities found the NC the least helpful.

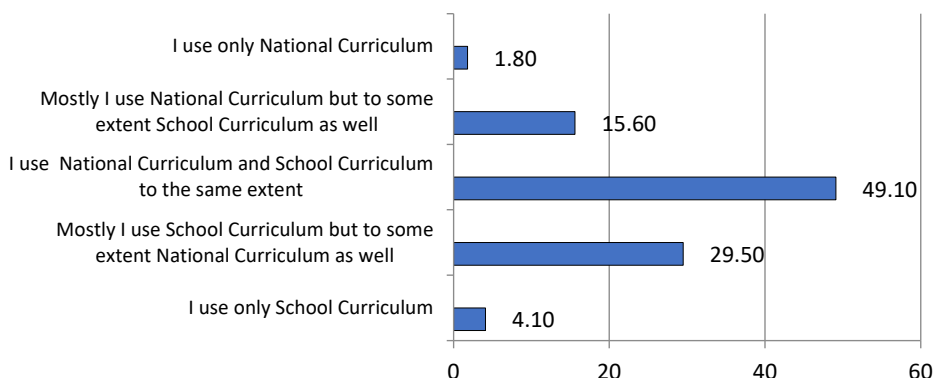


Figure 5. The relative importance of NC and SC as working guidelines (percentage of the respondents' answers).

49% of the respondents claimed that they had used the NC and the SC as guidelines equally (Figure 5). The percentage of the respondents who mostly or only used the SC was almost twice as high as those who mostly used the NC. Differences in using the NC or the SC of different teacher categories also emerged. Teachers from large schools and more experienced teachers mostly used the SC as the main guideline, whereas the NC mostly guided teachers from small schools and novice teachers.

To understand how teachers perceived the NC and the SC, the respondents were asked to rate the impact of these documents in increasing or limiting teachers' decision-making autonomy (Figure 6). Almost 20% of the respondents claimed that the SC rather or significantly increased their autonomy, whereas the rate was 15% for the NC.

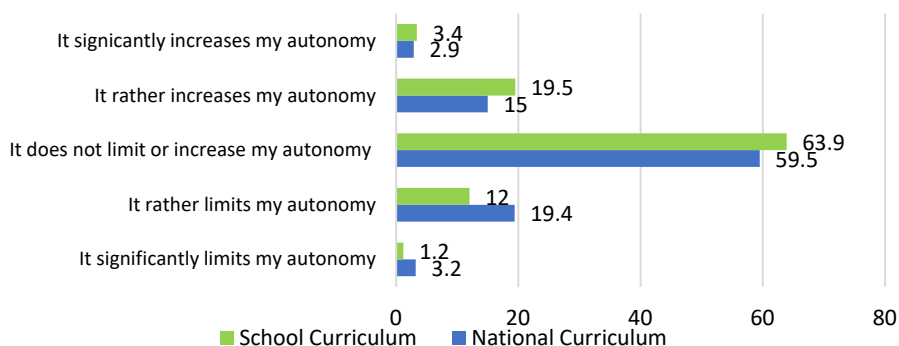


Figure 6. Answers to the question: 'To what extent do the NC and SC increase or limit your autonomy in decision-making?' (in percentages).

The teachers were asked to rate the main components of the general part of the current curriculum on *the Curriculum Components Rating Scales* (Table 1). A six-point scale was used ('excellent,' 'good,' 'satisfactory,' 'do not know,' 'somewhat satisfactory,' and 'completely unsatisfactory'). The median ratings for five of the seven components were good, and two components – the principles of organising instruction and the guidelines for compiling the school's curriculum – were rated as satisfactory.

Table 1. Teachers' median ratings for curriculum components of the general part of the 2011 national curriculum

Curriculum components	Median ratings of 2011 NC
1. Statement of educational objectives	Good
2. Notion and categorisation of competencies expected of students	Good
3. Concept of cross-curricular themes and their selection	Good
4. Concept of learning	Good
5. Principles of organising instruction	Satisfactory
6. Principles of the selection of instructional methods and creating a learning environment	Good
7. Description of instructional and educational activities by school levels	Good
8. Principles of assessment	Good
9. Guidelines for compiling school curricula	Satisfactory

4.3. The Estonian schoolteachers' expectations for curricular guidelines

The Estonian schoolteachers' expectations for curricular solutions on a scale from prescription to full autonomy are introduced in the current sub-section. *The Optimal Solution Scales* were used to study teachers' preferences for the main cross-curricular ideas and concepts. Answers were given on a seven-point scale ('strongly agree', 'agree', 'almost agree', 'neutral', 'almost disagree', and 'strongly disagree'). In order to get a more precise overview of whether the respondents preferred a prescriptive or a free curriculum, the answers were dichotomised during data processing. For this purpose, the percentages of supporters and opponents of a certain point of view or solution were used without distinguishing the degree of agreement. The left column of Table 2 shows the statements that express teachers' preferences for autonomy, and the right column shows teachers' preferences for a more prescriptive curriculum.

Table 2. Dichotomised preferences for opposing curricular solutions (in percentages).

No.	Statement	%	Statement (opposing)	%
The most helpful in my work is a school curriculum that...				
1	... is free of the methodological recommendations and prescriptions of the NC	43.6	... rigorously follows the methodological recommendations and prescriptions of the NC	30.0
A good curriculum (guideline) is one that ...				
2	... leaves freedom of choice in selecting textbooks and other study aids to teachers	52.3	... presents lists of compulsory textbooks and other study aids	33.8
3	... does not define general (key) competencies to be achieved as a result of studying different subjects because the achievement of these competencies is not controllable	15.9	... defines general (key) competencies to be achieved as the result of studying subject content	60.2
4	... does not prescribe cross-curricular topics to be treated in classes of different subjects because this limits teacher autonomy in decision-making	13.9	... prescribes cross-curricular topics, which in treating classes of different subjects helps develop general competencies in pupils	69.0
5	... introduces cross-curricular topics and key competencies by treating them as mutually defined entreties	79.5	... introduces cross-curricular topics and key competencies independently and separately	4.0
6	... states educational objectives in general terms, as their achievement is not directly controllable	37.3	... states educational objectives in detail to provide teacher control over their achievement	41.7
7	... does not introduce the concepts of learning, as teachers would rather proceed in their decision-making from their own experiences	21.0	... describes in its general part the concepts of learning to facilitate teachers' choices of instructional methods	59.7

The results revealed that teachers preferred greater professional autonomy in two aspects. The majority of teachers found that:

- (1) a good SC is free of the methodological recommendations and prescriptions of the NC;
- (2) a good curriculum gives teachers freedom of choice in using textbooks and other study aids.

In general terms, teachers tended to prefer freedom in curricular decision-making. However, on many other important topics related to specific solutions, they preferred a more prescriptive curriculum. Such preferences occurred, for example, in stating aims and objectives in detail (6) and describing the main concepts of learning for orientation in selecting instructional methods (7). The teachers' preferences related to the necessity of guidelines for compiling the SC were not as clear. Around one-third of the respondents preferred methodological recommendations and prescriptions from the NC for compiling the SC, and almost half of the respondents preferred an SC free of the prescriptions of the NC.

As some intriguing contradictions were found in teachers' expectations related to curricular freedom and detailed guidelines, the next study aimed to understand more deeply the teachers' feelings of ownership of the curriculum and the ways of its expression. From the analysis of the answers to the question of what teachers understood by the term 'curriculum', it became apparent that the definitions also reflected different degrees of teachers' feelings of curriculum ownership. Teachers' curriculum conceptions, their understanding and attitudes toward the curriculum were reflected in these definitions. In other words, teachers' feelings of curriculum ownership can be studied by using their curriculum definitions as a valuable data source for educational policy-makers and practitioners themselves. This knowledge makes it possible to find opportunities to enhance this ownership in Estonia and beyond.

4.4. The distribution of the teachers' responses by the degree of feeling of curriculum ownership

In the current sub-section, the results of analysing teachers' feelings of curriculum ownership reflected in their statements about what they meant by the term 'curriculum' are given.

Our research group conducted a qualitative content analysis of teachers' curriculum definitions. We used a three-degree hierarchy developed based on the conceptualisations of teacher curriculum relationships described in subchapter 2.5 of the doctoral thesis. This allowed us to categorise the respondents according to the degree of curriculum ownership they expressed in their definitions:

- (a) a low feeling of curriculum ownership: teachers saw the curriculum as a prescriptive document and mandatory guideline;
- (b) a moderate feeling of curriculum ownership: teachers saw the curriculum as externally developed but supporting and aiding them;
- (c) a high feeling of curriculum ownership: teachers were involved in curriculum development, implemented it creatively and felt the curriculum was their own.

Low ownership

Our analysis revealed that many teachers perceived the curriculum as a mandatory, prescriptive, formal and externally created document. This document serves as an instruction or guideline that determines, establishes and regulates classroom instruction. Here are some typical statements from our respondents:

- (a) *'... a document that determines the amount and the content to be delivered in a particular class!'* (R 514);
- (b) *'... a basic document that establishes what should be taught and how, and what the required outcome is'* (R 663);
- (c) *'A document that regulates educational and instructional practice in schools'* (R 472).

In eight cases (about 2.2% of the low ownership group), the respondents' statements indicated their resistance to curriculum policies:

- (a) *'[A curriculum is] the guideline I follow. Unfortunately, it is unsystematic now, and there are no textbooks, workbooks or teacher books! Why should the teacher waste her time figuring out what the idea of a workbook's author is when including a particular task in the workbook?'* (R 266);
- (b) *'Why should we make the national curriculum "digestible" in our school?'* (R 267); and
- (c) *'I'm dizzy... The teacher must, must, must... What's the ministry doing?'* (R 467).

These statements illustrate a view of the curriculum as a top-down directive that teachers must follow. In our study, 48.7% of the 756 teachers' statements indicated a low degree of curriculum ownership. This means nearly half of the teachers saw the curriculum as something imposed on them rather than something they had a role in shaping.

Moderate ownership

Our analysis also found that many teachers, similarly to a previous category, defined curriculum as a normative document. The difference emerged in describing it more as advising, supporting and assisting teachers in their work. Teachers also emphasised freedom of choice and creativity in their statements. Some typical responses:

- (a) *'A plan that guides and supports teaching and learning'* (R 246);
- (b) *'A framework that assists in planning a daily activity schedule'* (R 301); and
- (c) *'...a document from which I get ideas, a kind of a guideline for outcomes'* (R623).

These statements reflect a view of a curriculum as a supportive framework rather than a rigid directive, providing teachers with both structure and flexibility. These teachers saw the curriculum as a resource that aided their teaching, offering guidance while allowing them the freedom to adapt and be creative. In our study, 29.3% of the 756 teachers' statements expressed moderate ownership of the curriculum.

High ownership

Our study revealed that some teachers viewed the curriculum as a document in which they had a high degree of ownership. These teachers experienced the curriculum as a dynamic and flexible guide, enabling them to implement it in ways that aligned with their personal teaching styles and interests. They felt empowered to use the curriculum as a tool that enhanced their teaching practice through personal involvement, creativity and enjoyment.

Here are some typical responses:

- (a) *'It is my plan that I follow when teaching children'* (R 838);
- (b) *'A curriculum is a work aid – together with freedom of choice'* (R 444); and
- (c) *'A framework document that allows me to use my creativity and to follow what I like and am interested in'* (R 227).

In their curriculum definitions, teachers used 'I' when talking about the curriculum work; only one of them mentioned the role of colleagues and cooperation:

'[A curriculum] is what I developed together with my colleagues over the course of several weeks' (R 393).

In one case, a high degree of feeling of curriculum ownership was related to a teacher's resistant mindset:

'I'm a practitioner. I don't tolerate any curricula imposed from someone or somewhere else. Everything in my subject is my own creation. The curriculum I have developed and implemented is clearly effective because my students' achievements have also been appreciated outside of our school' (R 680).

In our study, 11.5% of the 756 teachers' statements indicated a high degree of curriculum ownership.

Most respondents expressed low feelings of curriculum ownership. The second largest group, with a moderate feeling of curriculum ownership, saw curriculum documents mainly as support tools for teachers to show their creativity and choice. Only a small percentage of interviewees expressed strong feelings of ownership and highlighted their role in shaping the curriculum. However, most of these responses focused only on the self-referential aspects, neglecting how and by whom the curriculum was developed and neglecting the educational

dimension. It was observed that the lower the respondents' feelings of curriculum ownership, the more likely they were to see the curriculum as a formal and mandatory document of external origin that 'determines', 'establishes' and 'regulates'. In this definition, the curriculum was something imposed on teachers from the outside, at the state or school level. The representatives of this approach saw themselves as mere implementers of the curriculum who adopted (Hewitt, 2006), transmitted (Ben-Peretz, 1990) and showed fidelity to it (Snyder et al., 1992).

5. DISCUSSION

The overall aim of this dissertation is twofold. Firstly, a data collection instrument was developed and piloted to explore schoolteachers' feelings about their relationship to the curriculum (Article I). Secondly, the developed instrument was used to find out the Estonian schoolteachers' *feelings of their curriculum ownership* (Articles II and III). Teachers' feelings of curriculum ownership were defined as teachers' psychological state of feeling that curriculum decision-making and implementation essentially belonged to them (reported in Mikser et al., 2023).

The first research question was: What are Estonian schoolteachers' views and expectations for the national and school curriculum development process and the current curriculum documents? (Reported in Viirpalu et al., 2022).

The study revealed that the teachers' understanding of their roles as users and developers of the curriculum and as proposers of new curriculum solutions did not reflect strong feelings of curriculum ownership. Teachers' views on the curriculum development process and their role in it appeared contradictory. The respondents rarely mentioned their involvement or influence in the curriculum development process at the national level. According to the classification of Croll and colleagues (1994), the respondents perceived themselves primarily as *implementers of educational policy* rather than as participants in educational and curriculum policy-making. Most respondents had participated in developing school curricula, but more than one-third had not participated in this process.

About a third of the teachers claimed to not have any preparation for curriculum development. The respondents' participation in curriculum development increased with their teaching experience, and different subjects had slightly different participation rates.

The results of the current study indicated that 73% of teachers had participated in curriculum development at some level. Compared with the study conducted with preschool teachers, about 75% of early childhood teachers had participated in curriculum development (Tuul et al., 2015). However, in the current study, of teachers who had not participated, 65% were not interested in being involved at all. Some of them claimed that curriculum development had to be done by the ministry, and the teachers' business was to teach in the classroom. One possible reason for the lack of teachers' feeling of curriculum ownership could be related to teachers' limited or insufficient knowledge necessary for acting as partners in education policy-making beyond the classroom, i.e. at the macro level. The results of several previous studies, including those conducted in Estonia, have shown that the majority of teachers lack both the necessary conceptual knowledge and the will to contribute to curriculum development at all levels of the curriculum and to take on the role of educational policymakers (Erss et al., 2014; Handler, 2010; Mikser et al., 2016). Placing a teacher in a role for which she is unprepared is harmful to her professional identity and self-confidence. Teachers' preparation includes subjects and topics related to the curriculum. However, these duties often remain at the level of lesson planning and do not allow teachers to get a broader picture and understanding of their possible role in curriculum development.

To deal with this situation, the theory of curriculum development and its different interpretations need to be paid more attention to in teacher education.

Regarding the usefulness of the national and school curricula, most respondents found the current national and school curriculum documents to be useful guides. However, most respondents did not specify whether the curriculum increased or decreased their professional autonomy. Teachers' expectations for the curriculum mainly aligned with the existing solutions. Half of them considered both the national and the school curriculum guidelines equally relevant, and only 16% considered the school curriculum more relevant than the national one. So, the question arises of the role of the school curriculum as the main guide for teachers. One highly probable reason for that, also in line with a previous study (Mikser et al., 2016), is that the school curriculum copies the national curriculum. This interpretation, in turn, may result from teachers' limited preparation for curriculum development or a lack of motivation in developing the school's curriculum, as teachers proceed mainly from centralised tests and state exams. Therefore, it seems that the idea of creating and adapting a school curriculum to local conditions has not been realised in practice for most teachers.

Comparing these results with the survey conducted among preschool teachers (Tuul et al., 2015), it appeared that the latter group were satisfied with both the national curriculum and the preschool curriculum, as well as the organisation of curriculum development in Estonian preschool institutions. The preschool curriculum was rated as more valuable than the national curriculum, suggesting that its development was important to the teachers. This result differs from studies conducted among general education school teachers (Erss et al., 2014; Kalin & Zuljan, 2007; Olek, 1998; Zogla, 2001), in which teachers do not want to take on more responsibility for the curriculum. Such a difference may be because of the pressure of accountability culture (Perryman et al., 2011), which concerns teachers in general education schools.

The respondents' expectations for optimal curriculum solutions ranged from full guidance to full autonomy. Most teachers wanted more freedom in interpreting general curriculum directions but preferred detailed guidance for making specific decisions. A similar finding also appeared in an earlier study conducted with Estonian preschool teachers (Tuul et al., 2015).

The respondents' assessments of the necessity of guidelines for preparing the school curriculum were quite contradictory. One-third of the teachers preferred methodological recommendations and prescriptions for compiling the school curriculum. In contrast, almost half of the respondents preferred the SC, which is free of the prescriptions of the national curriculum. Comparing the respondents' evaluations of the current curricula and their expectations of the ideal curriculum, no correlations emerged. No correlation was found between respondents' evaluation of the current curricula and their expectations for an ideal curriculum. It is possible that the teachers did not perceive the connection between these issues.

As Fullan (2007, p. 41) has stated, 'Shared vision and ownership is more an outcome of a quality process than a precondition. This is important because it causes one to act differently to create ownership.' It follows from this belief that

participation in curriculum development and implementation at different levels is needed to enhance teachers' curriculum ownership.

However, the research results showed a fascinating contradiction: despite a low participation rate in the development of the national curriculum, teachers were mostly satisfied with the current curriculum. One possible explanation could be related to the Soviet legacy, which may still be influencing teachers' behaviour and attitudes towards education policy, with longer-term effects than expected. To understand this legacy, examining the differences and continuities between Soviet-type centralised and neoliberal 'decentralised, centralised' curriculum policies (Karlsen, 2000) and their impact on teachers' feelings of curriculum ownership is necessary. Teachers' habit of rejecting formal demands may be partly due to their Soviet heritage. Still, it is also characteristic of neoliberal curriculum policies, where teachers, however ironically, are encouraged to individually choose which policies to implement. In this sense, different policy solutions in Estonia and England can have similar effects on the professionalism of teachers (Erss et al., 2014).

The second research question was: What is the state of Estonian school-teachers' feelings of curriculum ownership as expressed in their definitions of the concept of curriculum? (This is reported in Mikser et al., 2023, and Viirpalu et al., 2022.)

The vocabulary used by the respondents when defining the concept *curriculum* often narrowed the widely understood concept to a very limited meaning, which emphasised the formal and mandatory character and the importance of an external origin. The common practice of formulating curriculum documents does not exclude the involvement of teachers in the decision-making process. However, it is intriguing that only a few respondents stated that they were participants in the development of the curriculum documents. Instead, the documents were anthropomorphised, treated as active subjects. This phenomenon could have limited the role of teachers in curriculum policy-making and could also have prevented clearly defining the authority or responsibility of teachers in curriculum development. However, for historical reasons, this finding is not surprising. This is because, as in most other Northern European countries, the curriculum is traditionally defined as a state-level document in Estonia.

The analysis enabled us to distinguish among three degrees of curriculum ownership in teachers' definitions: low, moderate and high. Teachers' high feeling of ownership was mainly related to the micro, i.e. classroom, level of curriculum development.

As the results of this study indicate, teachers' low curriculum ownership was related to the *anonymity* in the curriculum decision-making process. Teachers' subordinated curricular mentality and feelings could have been a holdover from the Soviet period. Prior research suggests a Janus effect in the two-step curriculum development process. Whereas the National Curriculum is only defined for schools as a model for school curriculum development, the ownership given to schools and teachers is hindered by standardised tests and exams (Erss et al., 2014). The standardisation policy that developed in the mid-1990s reduced

teachers' initial enthusiasm for participating in curriculum reform initiatives to such an extent that even many of those who were formally involved in the decision-making process at the national level ultimately lost their motivation for being engaged (Mikser et al., 2016).

Teachers' low, high (but individualistic) or weak curriculum ownership could have been related to external accountability criteria that forced teachers to compete with each other. Perryman and others (2011) have explained: '...performative systems offer to some the opportunity and satisfaction of being excellent.' This can seriously inhibit collaboration and encourage only the most successful teachers to feel ownership of the curriculum. An important topic for further research is how teachers' feelings of curriculum ownership are related to students' test and exam results.

Fullan (2016, p. 97) contends, 'Educational change depends on what teachers do and think – it's as simple and complex as that.' If we accept that teachers will always profoundly affect what is taught and how, and thus what students learn, perhaps we should instead seek to define the 'curriculum-proof teacher' (Taylor, 2010). The 'curriculum-proof' teacher does not ignore or sabotage the text; rather, he or she can and does use any given curriculum in highly effective ways. However, such a teacher must also have a bigger picture of the curriculum, knowledge of curriculum theory and alternative curriculum solutions. The gap between curriculum policy and practice could be considered rather than the gap between education and practice goals, principles and values (Drew et al., 2016). Such an approach would help to produce practical solutions suitable for objectives when implementing the curriculum. This would help to prevent curriculum development from being simplified to just marking outputs, which does not allow teachers to see the real goals and big ideas of the curriculum.

One of the goals of this doctoral thesis is to support a policy that sees teachers as participants in the formation of educational policy and developers of curricula through the study of teachers' feelings of curriculum ownership. The author hopes that the approach used in this thesis, based on teachers' professional roles as curriculum users and developers, will also become an easily applicable model for curriculum development research and policy-making in other countries. Undoubtedly, the questionnaire used here needs adaptation to collect comparable feedback on teachers' experiences in other countries because, despite neo-liberalism occurring as a world movement (Ball et al., 2012; Meyer et al., 1992), curriculum policies and documents are still not identical across countries. However, the questionnaire provides a conceptual framework and example for conducting similar studies in other countries. The questionnaire used in the study can be a prototype for collecting data in similar situations.

The analysis carried out within the framework of this doctoral thesis showed that the teachers' curriculum definitions reflected their understanding of the curriculum and their feelings of curriculum ownership. The picture of teachers' feelings of curriculum ownership, obtained from a representative sample, showed that these feelings occur on a scale ranging from absence (low ownership) to total presence (high ownership), i.e. complete acceptance of the curriculum as theirs

and internalisation. In other words, teachers' curriculum definitions are indicators of their feelings of curriculum ownership. The results encourage the use of the same methodology to draw general conclusions about the state of the teacher-curriculum relationship in further research.

Along with the conclusion and discussion, I will make recommendations for enhancing teachers' curriculum ownership in Estonia and beyond. These recommendations include policy suggestions and perspectives for further theoretical and empirical research.

As for policy suggestions, the current state of the Estonian teachers' curriculum ownership appears to be a combined effect of policies from different historical periods, including the late Soviet era, the 'window of opportunity' period and the recent time of standardisation and accountability. Following Perryman and others (2011), some researchers have called the Estonian teachers' attitudes 'policy evasion' or 'resistance within accommodation' (Erss et al., 2014). A significant characteristic of the current era, little discussed so far but apparent from the present study, is the almost complete bureaucratic and impersonal nature of curriculum decision-making in teachers' eyes, not only at the individual but also at the institutional level.

This finding leads to the major policy suggestion of personalising the curriculum development process to enhance teachers' feeling of curriculum ownership. Teachers need to perceive that there are people, not just documents, who represent and are responsible for the curriculum, and they also need to feel represented in the curriculum development process (see Mikser et al., 2016).

The state of Estonian teachers' feeling of curriculum ownership has developed due to political and historical influences, including from the Soviet era, the transition era and the recent period of standardisation and accountability. According to current research, it is noteworthy that the main factors in curriculum development are bureaucracy and a sense of the impersonal, which affect both individual and institutional levels. This shows the need to personalise the curriculum development process to increase teachers' feelings of ownership. Teachers need to feel represented both in curriculum documents and the development process: i.e. that the curriculum is theirs. This can happen only through curricular sense-making (Priestley et al., 2017), because teachers must understand the curriculum to internalise it.

The impersonal nature of the decision-makers may explain the rarity of opposition or resistance in the responses, since resistance implies opposition to embodied authority. Based on previous research (Goodson et al., 2006), resistance can be assumed to be progressive, as it refers to clarity and transparency between the ruler and the ruled. Regarding the study's recommendations, our findings indicate the need to study *curricula longue durée* (Braudel, 1958/2009), not just to compare one reform cycle or two but to examine continuity through change. An additional research question arises about teachers' low awareness of the curriculum and their strict obedience in different experience groups, as no significant differences were found among teachers with different experience levels. Given the strong influence of more experienced teachers on their younger

colleagues (Kardos et al., 2001), Soviet-era perceptions and attitudes, together with influences from later historical periods, may accumulate and influence teachers' perceptions, attitudes and behaviour patterns in ways that have not been explored so far.

The importance of the current study has increased since the empirical data collection in 2013 for several reasons. Before conducting the questionnaire survey, a qualitative study where Estonian teachers were interviewed was conducted, providing valuable insights into the differences between Soviet and Western curriculum policies (published in Erss, et al. 2014; Mikser et al., 2016; Tuul et al., 2015). Recent research in former Soviet European countries helped to explain the continuities in teachers' thinking that support the present study's findings and will guide future research directions.

Since the updated version of the national curriculum will be implemented in Estonian schools in the fall of 2024, and the development process of a new national curriculum has started, it is appropriate to give some recommendations for the curriculum development process based on the results of this doctoral thesis.

The latest version of the national curriculum contains only competencies and learning outcomes, leaving the decisions about content to the teachers and schools. Hopmann (2007) has expressed doubts that national testing and narrowing the state curriculum to competency expectations increase teachers' and schools' autonomy. In fact, local agency and diversity may decrease as teachers are forced to tailor instruction to pre-determined competencies. Real freedom of content choice is lost because testing requires specific combinations of content and meaning. (Hopmann 2007)

Another issue is whether teachers are prepared to take on this responsibility. According to Stenhouse (1975), there is no curriculum development without teacher development. Therefore, to increase teachers' confidence in the curriculum, it is necessary to consider curriculum theory, philosophy and alternative curriculum solutions more than before in the initial and continuing education of teachers. Teachers must understand that they have an essential role in curriculum development, that they are the designers and creators of their students' learning experiences in their daily work and, thus, the real curriculum owners. To achieve these goals, teachers must understand the goals of the curriculum and the reasons for changes; they must be involved in every stage of the curriculum development process from the beginning. Teachers should be treated and trusted as partners in curriculum policy-making on all levels. For this, decentralisation as devolution (Karlsen, 2000), i.e. transmitting real authority and responsibility to them, is needed.

5.1. Limitations of the study

The principle of defining teachers' ownership of the curriculum through their professional roles as users and developers of curricula is also applicable to the study of curriculum development and policy processes in other countries. It provides a conceptual framework and a model for conducting similar studies,

especially in countries with relatively centralised curriculum policies. However, the questionnaire used in this study must be adapted to obtain comparable feedback on teachers' experiences in other countries, as curriculum policies and documents are not identical. Despite this limitation, the questionnaire used in this study can be considered a prototype for data collection in similar cases.

This study conceptualised teachers' curriculum ownership through their roles as curriculum users and developers based on qualitative indicators. These were teachers' feelings of autonomy in using curricula, involvement in curriculum development and estimations of their impact on curriculum development. The results of the pilot study provided valuable information for forming a representative sample of teachers for the main study. Teachers' curricular preferences, expectations and experiences varied among subject and experience groups. We considered the possibility of predicting teacher curriculum ownership through joint variables and constructing predictive models of teachers' curriculum ownership using factor analysis, i.e. finding a correlation between ownership as a factor variable and the work experience of respondents. Since there was no official database of Estonian teachers available to create such a sample, we relied on indirect information about Estonian schools, such as location, type and size, to create a balanced sample. By selecting schools based on these characteristics, we assumed that all teacher categories would be sufficiently represented for statistical analysis. However, the distribution of respondents by work experience and involvement in curriculum development was very uneven. Therefore, using factor analysis, predicting teacher curriculum ownership through a joint variable and constructing predictive models of teachers' curriculum ownership were not justified.

A follow-up study is needed to compare teachers' expectations and perceptions during the implementation of updated curricula. In the case of a follow-up survey, equal representation of teachers with different work experience should be ensured.

One possible research direction stems from the considerably low percentage of agreement between the three investigators: 72.6%. This finding supports our theoretical assumption that detecting the degrees of teachers' feelings of curriculum ownership is relatively complicated, especially in cases of moderate or high degrees of ownership, leading to difficulty in reaching consensus. Further studies, therefore, need to elaborate on the concept of teachers' curriculum ownership, particularly in terms of what constitutes higher degrees, and focus on how different patterns of resistance are related to different degrees of ownership.

Some of the questions that emerged from the conducted study are still unanswered: How do educational authorities at the national level see teachers as curriculum developers, and how is this reflected in the national curricula? How do teacher training programmes treat curriculum theory and practice and the role of the teacher in it? Answering these questions could help to understand the local contexts for developing and ensuring sustainable curriculum development.

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SUMMARY IN ESTONIAN

Õpetajate õppekava-alane omanikutunne: Eesti üldhariduskoolide õpetajad kui õppekava arendajad ja kasutajad

Poliitilise tsentraliseerimise, moderniseerimise ja industrialiseerimise tulemusena toimus 19. sajandi alguses paljudes Euroopa riikides ja mujal Lääne kultuuri-ruumis põhimõtteline nihe: haridust hakati juhtima riigi tasandil (Hopmann, 1990). See nihe tõi omakorda kaasa vajaduse kooli õppekava keskse juhtimise ja haldamise järele. Seda ettevõtmist iseloomustasid poliitilised protsessid, mida Hopmann (ibid) on käsitanud *lahterdamise, litsentsimise ja segmenteerimisena* (vt ka Mikser et al., 2016).

Kõik need kolm protsessi tähistasid teatud reaktsiooni raskustele, mis ilmnesisid õppekava riikliku arendamise ja haldamise käigus. Hopmann (1990) tõstab neist protsessidest esile kolmanda – *segmenteerumise*. Ta tõlgendab seda kui reaktsiooni tähtsaks arusaamale, et õppekava on võitlusväli erinevate huvigruppide vahel, millest igaüks kipub kurtma, et tema huvisid on alahinnatud. Seda konflikti on erinevalt kontseptualiseeritud selliste põhiküsimustega nagu: „Kellele kuulub õppekava?“ (Brady & Kennedy, 2014) või „Kes otsustab?“ (Westbury 2008,48). Segmenteerimine tähendab selles kontekstis erinevate huvigruppide lahus hoidmist erinevates otsustusorganites, et vältida või minimeerida ilmset vastasseisu (Hopmann, 1990a, 60; Mikser et al., 2016,836).

Westbury (2008, lk 48) on õppekavaga seotud otsuste juures välja kõige olulisemana välja toonud *poliitiliste* (ingl „political“, *avalike* (ingl „public“) ja *ametialaste* (ingl *professional*) huvigruppide vahel tekkivat konflikti. Demokraatlikes ühiskondades teevad valitud poliitilised võimud otsuseid muuhulgas ka kooli õppekava osas (Westbury, 2008). Kuna aga just õpetajad on need, kes õppekava oma töös tegelikult kasutavad, sõltub õppekava ellurakendumise edukus sellest, kas õpetajad seda aktsepteerivad (Schwartz, 2006). Seega on õppekava puudutavate otsuste kujundamisel poliitiliste, avalike ja ametialaste huvide vahel dünaamiline koosmõju. Nii on Westbury mõistes võtmeküsimuseks tasakaalu leidmine õppekava poliitilise reguleerimise ning õpetajatele kui professionaalidele õppekava otsuste tegemisel antud vabaduse ja autonoomia vahel. Kohalikud võimud ja koolidirektorid rõhutavad küll õpetajate autonoomia olulisust, kuid ei ole vaatamata poliitiliste süsteemide olulisusele siiski valmis loovutama kontrolli õppekavade arendamise ja rakendamise üle (Kennedy, 2015; vt ka Viirpalu jt, 2022). Tasakaalu otsimine poliitiliste ja professionaalsete sidusrühmade vahel on seetõttu alati olnud pingeline.

Viimaste kümnendite jooksul on haridus- ja õppekavapoliitikas kogu maailmas toimunud pööre sisendipõhiselt lähenemiselt õpiväljunditest ja eksamitulemustest lähtuvalt lähenemisele (Biesta, 2017; Lundgren, 2013; Nieveen & Kuiper, 2012; Priestley, 2011). Seega, hoolimata sellest, et õpetajatele on ametlikult antud suur vabadus ja autonoomia õppekava kohandamiseks vastavalt kohalikele ja isiklikele vajadustele, kogevad õpetajad paljudes riikides pettumust

ja allasurumist, mis on põhjustatud tsentraalselt kehtestatud kontrollisüsteemidest (Jeong & Luschei, 2018; Leat, Livingston & Priestley, 2013; Lundahl, 2005; Wong, 2008).

Ka Eesti ja teised endised sotsialistlikud Euroopa riigid on olnud hädas tasa-kaalu leidmisega väliste õppekavaregulatsioonide ning õpetajatele antud vabaduse ja autonoomia vahel õppekava üle otsustamisel (Cerych, 1999; Mikser jt, 2016). 1990. aastate alguses oli nõukogude tüüpi riiklikust pealesurutud ja standardiseeritud õppekavapoliitikast loobumine suhteliselt kiire ja lihtne protsess. Kuid vajadus säilitada hariduse sisu riikliku kontrolli tingimustes õpetajate omanikutunne on osutunud keerukaks (Mikser et al., 2016). Ühest küljest on nende riikide õpetajatele antud õppekavaga seotud otsuste tegemisel märkimisväärne autonoomia alates 1990. aastate algusest (Catlaks, 2003; Zelvy, 2004; Zogla, 2001; Nagrockaitė, 2015). Teisalt viitavad senised uuringud õpetajate segastele või isegi negatiivsetele tunnetele neile ametlikult õppekavas antud vabaduse ja autonoomia suhtes (Erss jt, 2014; Kesküla jt, 2012; Mikser jt, 2012; 2016).

Kokkuvõttes ei ole 1996. aastal esimestes põhikooli- ja gümnaasiumi riikliku õppekava dokumentides sõnastatud eesmärk kaasata õpetajaid õppekavaprotsessidesse vabade ja aktiivsete osalejatena praktikas realiseerunud (Mikser et al., 2016). See tingimus muudab õppekava edasise arendamise ja rakendamise tulemuslikkuse küsitavaks ja potentsiaalselt ebatõhusaks, sest just õpetajatest sõltub õppekava tegelik rakendumine.

Doktoritöö eesmärkideks on:

- 1) töötada välja küsimustik õpetajate õppekavatöö ja eelistuste ehk õpetajate ja õppekava suhte uurimiseks (artikkel I);
- 2) loodud küsimustiku abil selgitada välja, milline on Eesti õpetajate õppekavalane omanikutunne (artiklid II ja III).

Õpetaja ja õppekava suhet saab mõtestada ja kirjeldada erinevalt – õpetajate ainealaste teadmiste, uskumuste, eesmärkide, kogemuste, arusaamade ja nende identiteedi kaudu (nt Remillard, 2005). Käesolevad doktoritöös kirjeldatakse õpetaja ja õppekava suhet õpetajate õiguste, vabaduste, autonoomia ja tegutsemisvõime kaudu õppekava rakendamisel, arendamisel, muutmisel ja kohandamisel vastavalt oma tõekspidamistele, arusaamadele ja vajadustele. Tulenevalt seatud eesmärkidest püstitati doktoritöös järgmised uurimisküsimused:

- 1) Millised on Eesti õpetajate seisukohad ja ootused riikliku ja kooli õppekava arendusprotsessi ning õppekavadokumentide osas? (Artikkel II).
- 2) Milline on Eesti õpetajate õppekavalane omanikutunne väljendatuna nende ootustes õppekavale, rollis õppekavade koostajate ja kasutajatena ning õppekava mõiste määratlustes? (Artiklid II ja III).

Katuspeatüki teoreetilise osas antakse ülevaade õpetaja ja õppekava suhte olulise-matest käsitlustest. See annab nende teemade uurimiseks vajaliku laiema aja-loolise ja arengukonteksti. Avatakse ka *õpetajate õppekava-alase omanikutunde* kontseptsioon, mis on käesoleva doktoritöö alusmõiste. Järgnevalt antakse üle-vaade õpetajate õppekava omanikutunde kujunemist mõjutanud rahvusvahelistest haridus- ja õppekavapoliitika muudatustest nii endistes sotsialistlikes Euroopa riikides kui Eestis.

Doktoritöö esimeseks eesmärgiks oli luua küsimustik õpetajate õppekava-alaste eelistuste väljaselgitamiseks, mis võimaldaks ka võrdlusuuringuid eri riikides. Õpetajate õppekava-eelistusi uuritud on varem valdavalt kvalitatiivseid meetodeid ja väikeseid valimeid kasutades, pigem juhtumiuuringutena. Valminud kirjalik küsimustik võimaldab koguda struktureeritud andmeid õpetajate suurte valimite kohta. Ankeet koosneb 45 küsimusest, milles palutakse vastajatel hinnata oma ette-valmistust õppekava-arendustööks, oma osalemist ja mõju õppekava-arendus-tegevuses, samuti andmete kogumise hetkel kehtinud õppekavade komponentide kvaliteeti ning oma ootusi õppekavade sisule. Ankeet sisaldab kaht skaalat, neist esimene on õppekava komponentide hindamiseks ning teine ideaalsele õppe-kavale esitatavate ootuste väljaselgitamiseks.

Mitmed uuringud on näidanud, et vastupidi sellele viimastel kümnenditel amet-likult deklareeritud õpetajate suurenenud autonoomiale õppekava-alastes otsustes tajuvad õpetajad pigem suurenenud töökoormust, oma ebapiisavat ettevalmistust ise otsustamiseks ning õpiväljundite kontrollimise, eelkõige riiklike eksamite ja tasemetööde, demotiveerivat mõju. Oluline aspekt, mis mõjutab õpetajate hinnan-guid õppekavadele ning õppekavareformidele, on õpetajate varasem kogemus ja ettevalmistus reformidega seotud muutusteks. Pikaajaliste demokraatlike tradit-sioonidega riikides on õpetajad saanud õppekava arendamise küsimustes kaasa rääkida juba pika aja vältel ning selleks on olnud ka tugi vastava teadustradit-siooni näol. Eestis puudus õpetajatel enne taasiseseisvumist ametlikult selline võimalus.

Esimene, 1996. aasta Eesti riiklik õppekava tutvustas kooli õppekava mõistet ning rõhutas õpetaja varasemast suuremat rolli õppekava arendustöös ja õpetaja muutumist hariduspoliitika tegijaks. Riikliku ja kooli õppekava rollides ning kooli õppetegevuse koordineerimisega seostuvates arusaamades ei ole viimase ligemale 30 aasta jooksul toimunud suuri muutusi. Põhimõtteliste erinevuste puudumine nii nende dokumentide sisus ja struktuuris kui ka nendega õpetajatele antava otsustusvabaduse määras sunnib küsima, kas tõesti teostus üleminek Nõu-kogude totalitaarselt õppekavapoliitikalt ja arusaamadelt demokraatlikule otsus-tamisele sedavõrd kiiresti ning sündisid lahendused, mis jätkuvalt rahuldavad nii õppekava-arenduse eest vastutavate haridusjuhtide kui õpetajate ootusi? Või on võimalik, et õpetajad on endiselt harjunud „ülevalt alla“ mõtteviisiga, nende eest otsustavad teised ning neil pole mõtet taotleda suuremat autonoomiat, kuna neil puudub vastav ettevalmistus ning nende häält ei võeta nagunii kuulda. Vastuste saamine nendele küsimustele oligi küsitluse üks põhitaotlusi.

Uurimistulemused näitasid, et õpetajad ei tunne õppekava kasutajate, arendajate või alternatiivsete lahenduste väljapakkujatena tugevat omanikutunnet. Õpetajate arusaamades õppekavade arendamise protsessist ja oma rollist selles väljendasid mitmeid vastuolusid. Enamus vastajaist pidas kehtivaid õppekavajuhiseid kasulikuks ning nende ootused ühtisid olemasolevate lahendustega. Asjaolu, et pooled vastanutest pidasid nii riiklikku õppekava kui ka kooli õppekava võrdselt asjakohaseks, seab aga kahtluse alla kooli õppekava kui õpetaja peamise tööjuhendi otstarbekuse. See võib olla tingitud kahe dokumendi sisulisest sarnasusest, mille puhul kooli õppekava lihtsalt kopeerib riiklikku õppekava. Lisaks võib paljudel õpetajatel puududa vajalik ettevalmistus ja motivatsioon õppekavade väljatöötamiseks või uuendamiseks, sest lähtutakse peamiselt tsentraliseeritud testide ja riigieksamite nõuetest. Konkreetse piirkonna vajaduste, õpilaskontingendi eripära ja õpetajate endi eelistuste arvestamist – mis on olnud kooli õppekava vajalikkuse peamiseks põhjenduseks – ei saa seetõttu lugeda õnnestunuks.

Enamik õpetajatest eelistas suurt autonoomiat üldisemate õppekava-alaste otsuste tegemisel, kuid otsis üksikasjalikke juhiseid konkreetsete õppekavalahenduste jaoks. Seda tulemust võib tõlgendada kui vastuolu õpetajate tajutama ideaali ja igapäevatöö vajaduste vahel.

Õpetajad olid suuresti rahul olemasolevate õppekavadega, hoolimata sellest, et nende osalus õppekavade arendamisel ja hariduspoliitika kujundamisel on oluline, ent tervikuna riiklikul tasandil ebapiisav. See vastuolu võib osaliselt tuleneda nõukogude perioodi pärandist, kus õpetajad harjusid tsentraliseeritud õppekavaotsustega, ilma et neid oleks kaasatud otsustusprotsessi (Cerych 1999; Mikser, Kärner, ja Krull 2016). Teiseks võimaluks seletuseks on õpetajate vähene ettekujutus asjaolust, et õppekavapoliitika võiks olla ka teisiti reguleeritud, sest nagu enamikus teistes Põhja-Euroopa riikides, on ka Eestis õppekava käsitletud peamiselt riikliku dokumendina (Sivesind 2013).

Dissertatsiooni hulka kuuluvatest artiklitest viimases (Mikser jt 2023) tutvustatakse uurimust, millest selgus 760 Eesti õpetaja antud definitsiooni põhjal õppekava mõistele, et ligi pooled vastanutest määratlesid õppekava kui kohustuslikku, ettekirjutavat dokumenti, mis piirab nende omanikutunnet. Selle rühma õppekava-alast omanikutunnet võib määratleda kui *madalat*. Ligikaudu kolmandiku õpetajate omanikutunnet võib määratleda kui *mõõdukat*. See grupp vastanuid kirjeldas ühelt poolt küll õppekava kui välist suunist, samas tajusid nad ka enda rolli selle rakendamisel. Kõige vähem esines vastanute hulgas *kõrget* omanikutunnet. Uurimuse tulemused viitavad sellele, et 1990. aastate alguse retoorika õpetajate omanikutunde prioriteediks seadmisest jäi kiiresti välishindamist ja standardiseerimist soovivate ülemaailmsete suundumuste varju.

Edasiste teemakohaste uurimisvajaduste kohta selgus uuringust eelkõige kaks olulist, ent seni ebapiisavalt käsitletud teemat. Esiteks on ebaselge ning pigem kaheldav, kuivõrd tajuvad õpetajad õppekava-arendusprotsessi *isikustatuna* – st mõistes, et ka riikliku õppekavaarendustegevuste üle mitte abstraktsed komisjonid, vaid konkreetsed inimesed. Õppekava mõiste sage defineerimine „dokumendina“ anonümiseerib selle protsessi – keegi kusagil otsustab, aga otsustajani

on võimatu kuna jääb isegi selgusetuks, kes see on. Seda nähtust on rahvusvaheliselt käsitletud kui neoliberaalset pööret laiemalt iseloomustavat (Fisher 2009). Teiseks oluliseks uurimissuunaks, mis aitaks selgitada vastuolusid õpetajate õppekava-alases omanikutundes ja hoiakutes, on nn *longue durée* (Braudel 1958/2009) uuringud, mis vaatavad tagasi pikemale ajaperioodile kui üksnes viimane reformitsükel, ning keskenduvad muutuste kõrval ka järjepidevuste uurimisele. Vaatamata nõukogude perioodist möödunud märkimisväärsele ajale on erinevate ajalooajalooperioodide järelmõju õpetajate hoiakutele ja arusaamadele väga pikk (Kardos jt. 2001). Peamise praktilise soovitusena ilmneb õppekavaarendusprotsessi ajakohastamine selliselt, et õpetajad tajuksid end mitte üksnes abstraktselt kaasatuna, vaid et see protsess oleks nende jaoks läbipaistvate ja konkreetsete otsustajatega ning et nad mõistaksid oma rolli selles protsessis. Õpetajaid tuleb kaasata õppekava arenduse protsessi igasse etappi, nad peavad tundma, et on õppekava loomise ja rakendamise võtmeisikud ja partnerid õppekavapoliitika kujundamisel. Selleks, et õpetajad oleksid õppekava arendamiseks valmis, tuleks õpetajakoolituses senisest enam tähelepanu pöörata õppekava teooriale, filosoofiale ja alternatiivsetele lahendustele.

Käesoleva doktoritöö raames läbiviidud analüüs näitas, et õpetajate õppekava-definitsioonides peegeldub selgelt nende arusaam õppekavast ja nende omanikutunde õppekava suhtes. Esindusliku valimi põhjal saadud pilt õpetajate õppekavaga seotud omanikutundest näitas, et see esineb skaalal, mis ulatub omanikutunde puudumisest kuni õppekava täieliku omaksvõtuni ehk täieliku omanikutunde esinemiseni. Saadud tulemus julgustab sama metoodikat ka edaspidi kasutama selleks, et teha üldiseid järeldusi õpetajate ja õppekava suhte hetkeseisu kohta. Teisisõnu näitavad õpetajate õppekavade definitsioonid, kas neil on õppekava omanikutunne. Tulemused julgustavad kasutama sama metoodikat, et teha üldisi järeldusi õpetaja ja õppekava suhte seisuga edasistes uuringutes.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I want to thank the people who contributed to completing my doctoral thesis. Thanks to my supervisors, Professor Edgar Krull and Associate Professor Rain Mikser, for their support and help! I am very grateful for the opportunity to have worked with you. I have learned a lot from it. Edgar, thank you for encouraging me to enter the PhD program, guiding me, and always being there. There were always answers to my questions in your awe-inspiring wealth of knowledge. I have learned a lot from your guidance and feedback: how to be optimistic despite shortcomings in work, notice the good in everything, always being there, and so much more. Rain, thank you for believing this is possible and putting so much effort into our articles, the doctoral thesis and my PhD defence. Thank you for keeping your sense of humour even during the busiest times. That was a huge help. I admire your ability to combine words, your vast reading, and your ability to combine art and science in the best possible way.

Thank you, Professors Miiä Rannikmäe, Äli Leijen and Margus Pedaste, for your support. Thank you, Professors Krista Uibu and Priit Reiska, for reviewing my dissertation for the pre-defence and giving valuable feedback to improve my work. Thanks to all my colleagues and fellow students.

I am deeply grateful to my family and friends. Without your unconditional support and faith, I would not be here today.

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Publikatsioonid:

Mikser, R., Viirpalu, P., & Krull, E. (2023). Reflection of teachers' feelings of curriculum ownership in their curriculum definitions: the example of Estonia. *The Curriculum Journal*, 34(4). doi:10.1002/curj.217.
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