Student Teachers' Leadership Development in A Finnish Class Teacher Education Program

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Abstract

This case study examined student teachers' (n = 5) leadership development in a Finnish class teacher education program. The study focused on identifying the student teachers' individual approaches to leadership development and examining how they developed their leadership during teacher education, including their reflections on the achieved leadership development. The data were collected with motivation letters written by the student teachers and semi-structured individual interviews. The analysis methods comprised qualitative content analysis with inductive reasoning and typologization. The results revealed student teacher types representing three different approaches to leadership development: competence-, personality-, and context-driven. The student teachers developed their leadership during teacher education in alignment with their individual approaches and utilized the study program diversely in this process. Student teachers who presented a competence-driven approach estimated their achieved leadership development to be relatively weaker. Furthermore, pre-service teachers possess individual leadership development motivations and goals and the capability to facilitate their own professional development in alignment with these goals. This study contributes to the literature by focusing on the individual nature of leadership development in initial teacher education and by addressing this as a matter to be considered in designing how to support pre-service teachers' professional (leadership) development in the future.

Key Words: Teacher leadership, teacher professional development, leadership development, class teacher education, case study

Introduction

In their daily work, teachers are required to enact leadership in various ways and on various levels (Ash & Persall, 2000; Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2009). Besides teachers leading, for example, a group of students (e.g., Schmuck & Schmuck, 2001), they often focus on leading their colleagues and collaborating with them in the professional community of a school (Jäppinen & Ciussi, 2016; Muijs & Harris, 2006). Teachers' leadership may also involve decision-making (Wenner & Campbell, 2017) and administrative procedures, such as recruitment processes of new teachers (Barth, 2001). Leadership enacted by class teachers usually takes place in a primary or comprehensive school context (Sahlberg, Gardner, & Robinson, 2021).. Teachers play a multifaceted

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role in school leadership, but their inadequate leadership competencies may result in a weakened capacity to effectively contribute to the key areas of providing holistic support for student learning, such as shared pedagogical planning, classroom management, and home–school collaboration (cf. Leithwood, Sun, & Schumacker, 2020). High leadership competencies, in contrast, can help teachers successfully manage their daily work, which may result in decreased levels of teacher stress, burnout, and career turnover (e.g., Rokala, Pakarinen, Eskelä-Haapanen, & Lerkkanen, 2022).

Development toward the multifaceted leadership enacted by teachers is a continuous process of professional development (Desimone, 2009; Metsäpelto et al., 2020). Although this development process starts in the shared context and social community of a teacher education program (Bond, 2011; Forster, 1997), the nature of a student teacher's leadership development is concurrently individual (cf. Krzywacki, 2009; Vähäsantanen, Hökkä, Paloniemi, Herranen, & Eteläpelto, 2017). Individual factors, such as professional development needs (Craft, 2000; Morgan & Neil, 2003), prior knowledge, and experience, as well as personal interests (Joint Task Force, 1998; Owen, 2011, pp. 112–113) and motivation (Krzywacki, 2009) influence a teacher's professional (Craft, 2000; Morgan & Neil, 2003) and leadership (Wagner, 2011) development process. Having an opportunity to set individual goals for one's leadership and other professional development is accompanied by a higher probability of using intrinsic motivation as the driving force for development (cf. Haase, Heckhausen, & Köller, 2008; Sheldon & Elliot, 1998). To this end, intrinsic motivation has been indicated as support for deep and effective learning and development (Deci & Ryan, 1985, 2008).

The significance of the individual nature of leadership development is recognized in the research literature on in-service teachers' leadership development (see e.g., Morgan & Neil, 2003; Sinha & Hanuscin, 2017; Smylie & Eckert, 2018). However, research focusing on individual leadership development among student teachers is rather limited, although there is previous research on student teachers' individual factors and development concerning other areas of professional development, such as forming a teacher identity (Krzywacki, 2009) and professional vision (Stürmer, Seidel, & Holzberger, 2016). Further, studies on leadership development in the initial teacher education phase in general, particularly outside the Anglo-Saxon setting, are scant (cf. Ado, 2016; Leonard, Petta, & Porter, 2012; York-Barr & Duke, 2004). Research on student teachers' leadership development is needed to design and develop research-based support for it, which is also a development challenge addressed by the Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2022). The present study examines the kinds of individual approaches used by Finnish student teachers in developing their leadership and how they develop their leadership during class teacher education, including their reflections of achieved leadership development as well as factors that support or prevent this development. We perceive our research as a case study because it aims to holistically examine the five student teacher cases (cf. Patton,

2015) from the perspective of their individual teacher leadership development.

Theoretical Framework
Student teachers' leadership development
The professional development of teachers is a complex process (Desimone, 2009; Metsäpelto et al., 2020) that covers both the activities for development (Guskey, 2003) toward improved professional practice and the achieved improvement (Timperley, Wilson, Barrar, & Fung, 2007). The process and activities may include both formal learning, such as structured learning opportunities and processes within a formal study program (Feiman-Nemser, 2001; Richter, Kunter, Klusmann, Lüdtke, & Baumert, 2011), and informal learning, such as learning through work (Fuller & Unwin, 2002; Tynjälä, 2013). Professional development as a teacher in general and as a teacher leader are strongly related and overlapping processes in the case of student teachers during initial teacher education (cf. Bond, 2011). Student teachers play an important role in their own leadership development (Day, Harrison, & Halpin, 2009) by facilitating and leading their own learning by, for instance, actively utilizing and reflecting on various experiences and learning opportunities (Eteläpelto, Vähäsantanen, Hökkä, & Paloniemi, 2014; Wagner, 2011).

Leadership development involves various kinds of development, including gaining theoretical and other formal knowledge of leadership, as well as practicing the skills and competences needed by a leader (Seemiller, 2013; Sessa, 2017). Student teachers' leadership development also includes the process of holistic personal development and inquiry (cf. Lanas & Kelchtermans, 2015; Sessa, 2017; Tomlinson, 2004). This personal development involves the development of one's leadership identity, which includes how one sees and understands oneself as a leader (Sessa, 2017; Wagner, 2011). Related to that, holistic personal development includes the development of self-knowledge and self-efficacy—that is, one's beliefs about whether one is able to act successfully and effectively as a leader (Wagner, 2011; see also Bandura, 1997)—as well as the examination and development of one's values and beliefs as a leader (Sessa, 2017; Tomlinson, 2004). Generally, student teachers develop their leadership for a particular leadership context (see, McCauley, Van Velsor, & Ruderman, 2010; cf. also Smylie & Eckert, 2018). In the case of this study, this context refers to class teachers' work in a primary school context (cf. York-Barr & Duke, 2004).

Teacher education as a leadership development environment
A formal study program can serve as a learning and development environment for leadership by providing various kinds of challenges and learning opportunities that support student teachers' leadership development (Owen, 2011; Sessa, 2017). Some of these opportunities are more formal, such as a lecture in a classroom, and others are more informal, such as having a casual conversation with a university teacher (Joint

Task Force, 1998; Keeling, 2004; Owen, 2011, pp. 112–114). Other examples of the activities supporting leadership development in a study program are opportunities for applying one's skills in a new context, observing role models, gathering together with other developing leaders to learn from each other, identifying one's own strengths by observing the strengths of others, and receiving personal mentoring (Wagner, 2011, p. 93).

In Finland, class teacher education is a master's level education (300 ECTS) conducted by universities, which takes approximately five years to complete (Government of Finland, 1998; Silander & Välijärvi, 2013). The students complete, first, a bachelor's degree (180 ECTS) and, second, a master's degree (120 ECTS). The central curricular elements of Finnish teacher education include theoretical studies in educational sciences, multidisciplinary studies in subjects taught in basic education, teaching practices, and other studies, such as various optional studies (Silander & Välijärvi, 2013). Finnish teacher education aims at increasing student teachers' theoretical and practical knowledge base in teaching and learning, as well as supporting their holistic personal development (Metsäpelto et al., 2021; Väisänen, 2005; cf. also Sessa, 2017). In this way, Finnish teacher education naturally helps student teachers develop as teacher leaders by aiming at increasing their self-knowledge, competency in classroom management, theoretical knowledge base in the matters that teachers face in their future work (leadership) contexts, and value base concerning, for example, an understanding of every student as an equally valued learner.

Methodology
The aim of the present study

This study examines the kinds of approaches to leadership development employed by student teachers and how they develop their leadership during teacher education. This investigation includes both leadership development during the first two years of the studies and the student teachers' plans for developing their leadership during the rest of their studies. This study also assesses the student teachers' reflections of their achieved leadership development, and the factors that support or prevent this development. The research questions are as follows:

1. What kinds of approaches did the student teachers employ in their leadership development?
2. How did the student teachers pursue achieving leadership development during teacher education?
3. What are the reflections of the student teachers regarding their achieved leadership development and the related supportive and preventive factors?

Context, participants, and procedure

This study was conducted as part of the DAWN project (2018–2022), the aim of

which was to examine the current state of leadership and the need for its development in educational organizations in Finland. The sample of the present study consisted of five third-year student teachers (also referred to as *students*) studying in one Finnish class teacher education program. It was particular for this study program that the students studied in various study groups within the broader program. In these study groups, the students studied the core studies in educational sciences (25 ECTS) and simultaneously focused on a specific educational theme of a given study group. Students study in the study groups most intensively during the first year of the teacher education studies. The participants of this research were students in a study group that aimed to enhance their leadership development. The aim of this study group was to enhance the students' knowledge base and competence in teacher leadership, especially in leading oneself, including leading one's own professional development and understanding one's own values as a teacher leader. In this paper, this study group is referred to by the pseudonym TL study group (teacher leadership study group).

Research ethical guidelines were followed throughout the research process. The DAWN project was approved by the Data Protection Officer of the University in April 2019. The participants in this sub-study were informed that their participation was voluntary, and that they could cancel their participation at any point in the research. They signed written consent for the wider research project when starting their teacher education studies (October 2019) and were informed in detail of the present sub-study before being additionally asked for oral consent (May 2020) to participate. The five student participants were chosen from among the broader pool of TL study group students based on their voluntary acceptance of the call to participate in the individual interview, which was an additional data collection method within the broader study.

Along with the present sub-study, we conducted another sub-study that focused on examining how the TL study group alone supported students' leadership development (see Alho, Hanhimäki, & Eskelä-Haapanen, 2023). Because the TL study group and the broader teacher education program are closely integrated and aim to support each other, in this study, we wanted to examine TL students' leadership development in their broader study context, the whole teacher education program, to expand our knowledge of their holistic leadership development during their studies.

Data collection
The data of this research consisted of the motivation letters written by the participants at the beginning of their studies as part of their application procedure to the TL study group (September 2019) and the semi-structured individual interviews (see Galletta & Cross, 2013) of the participants at the beginning of the third year of their studies (September 2021). The data collection was scheduled this way because the aim of our study was to gain insights into the students' (reflections of their) leadership development from the beginning of and during their studies (versus, e.g., solely in their

graduation phase). The reason for this aim was that examining the students' real-time reflections might best help understand their approaches to leadership development and, thus, design timely support at the various phases of their studies. The beginning of the third year of studies was, additionally, estimated as a suitable point for the second phase of the data collection because, from that point on, the students' studies begin to become more individualized, possibly resulting in the students starting to reflect on their individual leadership development more actively.

In the motivation letters, the students described and argued for their motivation to study in the TL study group. The length of the motivation letters varied between 2 and 10 phrases per letter. The individual interviews consisted of six open-ended questions. The interviews were started by showing a student his or her motivation letter. After that, the interviewer started the actual interview by asking a student to discuss the thoughts inspired by the letter. Other interview questions focused on the students' perceptions of their leadership development during the first two years in teacher education, their plans for developing their leadership during the rest of their studies, and their dreams and goals as future teacher leaders. The length of the individual interviews varied from 14 to 32 minutes. The interviews were transcribed literally. The original language of both the motivation letters and the interviews was Finnish. The researchers chose the data extracts to be included in this report and translated them into English.

Data analysis

The analysis methods used in the present study consisted of qualitative problem-driven content analysis with inductive reasoning (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008; Krippendorff, 2013) and typologization (Patton, 2015). The analysis was conducted in the following phases:

1. The first author conducted close readings of the students' motivation letters and applied problem-driven content analysis to identify the students' leadership development approaches at the beginning of their studies.

2. The first author transcribed the interviews and read the transcriptions several times (cf. Elo & Kyngäs, 2008). Problem-driven content analysis was used to examine whether the content of the interview data supported the interpretations made in Phase 1 regarding the students' leadership development approaches (cf. Patton, 2015). The aim was also to identify the students' leadership development approaches at the beginning of the third year of their studies and to examine whether the approaches remained the same compared to the beginning of their studies.

3. Based on the findings in Phases 1 and 2, student types representing various leadership development approaches were generated (see Patton, 2015). Typologization enabled identifying the individual approaches of the students and approaching the data entity with this lens (cf. Hänninen, 1999).

Previous theory was utilized to label the types built through an inductive analysis process (cf. Hsieh & Shannon, 2005; Krippendorff, 2013). The process of generating the student types is presented in Table 1. The analysis conducted in Phases 1–3 produced results for the first research question by revealing three student types representing various leadership development approaches.

Table 1.

The Typologization of the Students (A–E) Based on Their Leadership Development Approaches

Example units describing the students' leadership development goals	Approach to leadership development
I want to develop my leadership competence (A) A teacher must be able to lead a group well (A) …that industrial peace is maintained (A) …facilitate a group by creating a safe atmosphere and being efficient (B)	Competence-driven
I hope to learn to know myself better (C) …strengthen my view of the leadership position in which I want to be (C) …that being in the role of a leader would become more natural to me (D)	Personality-driven
I want to learn more about what is included in teachers' leadership (E) I would like to strengthen… my understanding of a teacher's leadership role (E)	Context-driven

4. The content analysis was continued by reading the interview transcriptions again to find answers to the second (the students' ways of developing leadership) and third (the achievement of leadership development) research questions. First, the analysis was conducted on the students' leadership development during the first two years of their studies. Second, the analysis was conducted on the students' plans for developing their leadership during the rest of their teacher education studies.

5. The findings regarding all the research questions were collated on separate coding sheets of each of the five participants to combine the findings from Phases 1–4 concerning each participant. This reorganization of the data was followed by the generation of individual student cases. The cases aim to describe the development of the students who portrayed the three types of leadership development approaches.

6. Based on the five student cases, compiled type descriptions (combining individual student cases) were generated insofar as there were more than one student representing a leadership development approach. These types of

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6. Based on the five student cases, compiled type descriptions (combining individual student cases) were generated insofar as there were more than one student representing a leadership development approach. These types of descriptions contain commonalities as well as unique features of the leadership development of students representing the given type. To identify these commonalities and unique features, cross-case analysis was applied (see Patton, 2015). All five student cases were included in the type descriptions to present the variety among the individual student teachers and to maintain the richness of the data (see Patton, 2015). The phases of the whole data analysis process are presented in Figure 1.
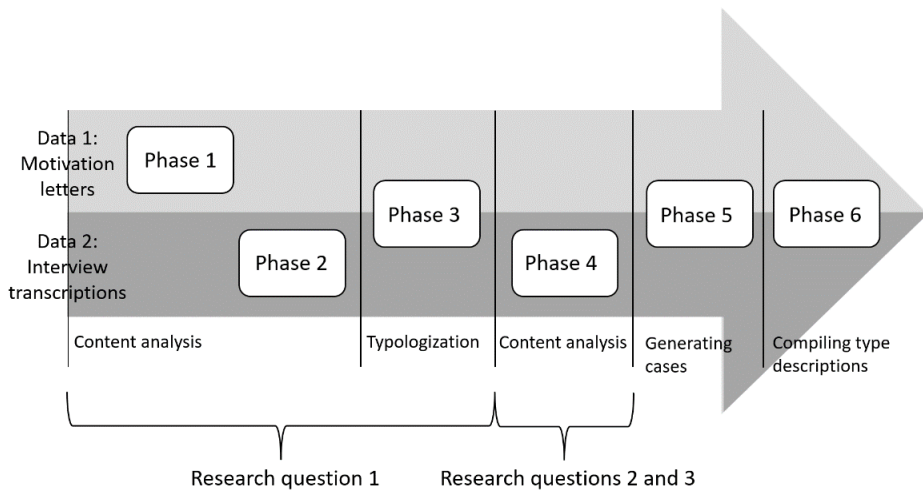

Figure 1. Data Analysis Process

Direct quotations are included in this report to improve the trustworthiness of the study. The participants are referred to by codes A–E to protect their privacy. Trustworthiness (cf. Lincoln & Guba, 1985) was, additionally, increased in the research process from the perspective of 1) credibility by data triangulation, prolonged engagement (a two-phase data collection), the involvement of several researchers in the analysis process, and the utilization of the semi-structured interview that enables checking from the interviewees; 2) transferability by taking into account the context when making interpretations and describing it in sufficient detail in the report; 3) dependability by carefully designing, conducting, and reporting the research frame, including, for example, following the same interview frame with all the participants; and 4) confirmability by going back to the raw data several times during the analysis process to keep the findings grounded in the data, as well as by ensuring that there was no significant overlap between the generated types. Throughout the research process, we pursued

maintaining a critical approach to our interpretations and possible wishes for the results (cf. reflexivity; Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Findings
Student teachers' leadership development approaches

Our first research question examines the kind of leadership development approaches the students represented. Three student types were identified: competence-driven, personality-driven, and context-driven approaches to leadership development. We found that the approaches remained the same during the first two years of students' teacher education studies. The competence-driven approach was represented by two of the five students (A and B). These two students mentioned that it was important to them to develop their leadership-related competences, which would help them enact their leadership more effectively in practice in the classroom and the broader school organization. Both students did not have much previous leadership experience, and they wanted to develop their competence in facilitating a student group. Student A emphasized gaining more experience in leading a group to increase the level of confidence as a leader of a group. She also wanted to develop her competence in acting as a member of a collaborative colleague group:

> I want to develop my leadership competence because I have no previous experience in, for example, facilitating a hobby group. A teacher must be able to lead a group well to ensure that the children receive the teaching they deserve, and that industrial peace is maintained. I also want to develop my leadership competence in terms of acting as a group member because collaboration among teachers is becoming increasingly important. (Student A)

Student B's additional interest was in the administrative side of school leadership, including recruitment processes, and he wanted to learn more about the practicalities related to it.

The personality-driven approach to leadership development was represented by two of the five students (C and D). Whereas the students representing the competence-driven approach emphasized developing their competences in practical leadership, the students with the personality-driven approach focused on the holistic development of themselves as leaders. Student C said that she wanted to learn to know herself better as a leader and to clarify her identity as a leader: "I hope to learn to know myself better, develop my authority, and strengthen my view of the leadership position in which I want to be in the future." Student D mentioned that he wanted to develop himself as a "good leader" and to strengthen his confidence as a leader so that acting in the role of a leader would be more natural to him:

> I think my goal is just to feel that I have become a better leader and to gain confidence. To feel that I am a good leader and that being in the role of a leader would become more natural to me. I want to be able to… trust in what I am doing. I want to be kind of a safe person for my students but, at the same time, a leader. (Student D)

One of the five students (E) presented the context-driven approach to leadership development. She emphasized developing her leadership in a teacher's work and role context: "I want to learn more about what is included in teachers' leadership. I would like to strengthen my identity as a teacher and my understanding of a teacher's leadership role in the classroom and elsewhere in the school." In Student E's approach, both the development in leadership competences and holistic personal leadership development were included, but the focus was on deepening understanding of and developing one's leadership, especially from the perspective of the teacher's work.

Student teachers' leadership development during teacher education

With the second research question, we examined how the students pursued achieving leadership development during teacher education. We were interested in how students developed their leadership during the first two years of their teacher education studies and how they pursued developing their leadership during the rest of their studies. Additionally (the third research question), we were interested in the students' reflections of their achieved leadership development during the first two years of their studies, and the factors supporting and preventing this development. The contents of the second and third research questions were highly connected, for which reason they are discussed together in this subsection.

Students exhibiting a competence-driven approach emphasized the significance of practical exercises and knowledge for their leadership development. Student A said that she developed her leadership particularly through the teaching practice at the end of the first academic year, as the teaching practice had enabled her to gain more experience in leading a group:

> Well, I think that I have perhaps gained experience in facilitating a group, for example, through the teaching practice we had during the first year of our studies. It was the first time for me to really experience what and how it is to lead a group in a school environment. (Student A)

The two students depicting the competence-driven approach said that their leadership competency had not developed strongly during the first two years of their studies. Student B mentioned that he would have wished to have gained more knowledge of the school's administrative matters, such as recruitment processes and the role of a vice-principal. According to him, past teacher education and TL study group studies had

not included content related to these issues. According to Student A, leadership-related themes had been present in the TL study group but approached rather superficially, for which reason she felt that the study group had not supported her leadership development substantially:

> Although we had the study group related to leadership, it was conducted basically during the first year of our studies, and there the leadership theme was related to the other courses. I think it was more about scratching the surface. I see that I still have much to develop. (Student A)

> During the rest of their studies, the students with a competence-driven approach planned to develop their leadership through teaching practices. In teaching practices, they wished to learn more about leading a group of children by gaining more experience in that area: "I will soon have my second teaching practice. I believe that it will be possible to develop my leadership skills in the classroom through it" (Student B). Student B also mentioned that he saw it important for his leadership development that teaching practices include opportunities to observe how the teacher responsible for mentoring the practicing student teacher acts as a mentor: "In the teaching practice, there will be a mentor teacher supporting me, so it will . . . be an opportunity to see what . . . counseling by this mentor teacher is toward me. So, it's about seeing another perspective."

Student A also hoped that there would be a master's-level course on the leadership theme that would support her in developing her leadership competence. Student B planned to include optional leadership-related courses conducted by another faculty in his degree plan. Student B said that he was pursuing these optional studies as a means of improving his chance to become accepted into basic studies in educational leadership (25 ECTS), which he planned to conduct as his minor subject in the master's studies phase. The basic studies in educational leadership include, among other things, administrative perspectives on school leadership and qualifying the participants for principal positions.

> Students who showed a personality-driven approach said that they had pursued achieving, and simultaneously achieved, leadership development in several ways during teacher education. They stated that the TL study group played a central role in supporting their leadership development. In the study group, their knowledge base in leadership, including self-leadership, increased. In particular, the shared peer discussions had developed their views of leadership. As the students described, "We talked a lot about leadership, and everyone had a chance to share his or her own views and thoughts. It has made my own thinking richer" (Student C), and "I have received answers

to what makes a person a good leader because we have talked about that a lot" (Student D).

The students employing a personality-driven approach to leadership development also mentioned that the TL study group supported them in developing their self-knowledge and self-confidence as leaders:

> For example, I have been encouraged that I am suitable for a leadership position because I have learned that a leader does not need to be a certain kind, for example, very authoritarian, but that there can be all kinds of leaders. (Student C)

> After being in the TL study group, I noticed that it has been easier for me to be in a leadership role in group projects. (Student D)

Student D also mentioned that he had developed his leadership through teaching practice because there had been an opportunity to observe the actions of an experienced teacher. Student C had included optional leadership-related courses from another faculty in her degree plan. She said that through them, she had gained basic knowledge and ideas on leadership. Both Student C and Student D indicated that if there had been more practical leadership exercises included in the studies, it could have helped them enhance the practical side of their leadership skills more effectively. According to them, not having sufficient practical exercises had, to some extent, prevented or, at the least, slowed down their achievement of practical leadership development.

During the rest of the class teacher education studies, Student C planned to develop her leadership skills by continuing her optional leadership studies. She also planned to learn more about leadership by including leadership-related themes in her bachelor's and master's theses. Student D, too, planned to utilize the thesis processes in developing his leadership skills but particularly with the aim of developing himself as the leader of himself through being responsible for conducting his own work in the thesis processes. Additionally, Student D planned to develop his leadership skills through future teaching practices and by acting in a leadership position in the future group projects included in the rest of his studies.

> Student E, who represented the context-driven approach to leadership development, utilized the teacher education studies particularly to increase her understanding of what leadership is in a teacher's work and role. Student E said that the studies had supported her leadership development as an entity, and she did not perceive any single element to stand out from the entity regarding its significance for her leadership development. However, she mentioned that teaching practices and content knowledge on educational sciences and pedagogy had helped her develop her understanding, knowledge base,

and expertise in leadership as part of a teacher's work: "For example, how to give special support or how to deal with difficult situations or these kinds of concrete things, and then also studying pedagogy-related theories, have supported my leadership development."

What was special in Student E's case was that she had completed previous leadership training in another field before her teacher education studies. In her teacher education studies, she actively utilized and reflected on her previous knowledge and experiences in leadership, applying, and modifying it for a teacher's work. She pursued increasing her understanding of differences in teacher's leadership compared to leadership in other contexts: "I have learned to modify my previous expertise and experience in leading a group to the kind of leadership that a teacher can utilize." In general, Student E reported having achieved leadership development during her teacher education studies. Similar to the other four students, Student E mentioned that the practical side of her leadership had not developed particularly much during the first two years of her studies. During the rest of her studies, Student E planned to develop her leadership by taking a course in leadership or applying to basic studies in educational leadership. In general, Student E planned to continue inquiring about ways of doing what would suit her as a teacher leader. In this inquiry process, she planned to utilize especially the future teaching practices: "…I am going to inquire about what means work for me and, in my opinion, it is also interesting to see how the other teachers act because the same means may not work for all teachers."

Discussion

The aim of the present study was to examine the leadership development of the student teachers studying in a Finnish teacher education program that included a study group on teacher leadership as its special feature. First, we identified three types of leadership development approaches among the five student participants: competence-, personality-, and context-driven. Second, we found that the students representing the competence-driven approach to leadership development especially utilized teaching practices (with the special aim of enhancing practical competence) and the students with the personality-driven approach the TL study group (with the special emphasis on holistic personal growth and reflective approach) to support their leadership development. The student representing the context-driven approach utilized the study program in her leadership development process rather diversely. Third, based on students' reflections on their achieved leadership development, including the factors supporting and preventing this development, our findings revealed that students with a competence-driven approach estimated the support of the teacher education program for their leadership development less than the estimates of the two other student types. The students with a personality- and context-driven approach seemed to emphasize

in their leadership development a holistic and reflective inquiry process, including pondering and developing their teacher leadership identities (Lanas & Kelchtermans, 2015; Väisänen, 2005; Wagner, 2011). Thus, it seems that the students representing these two approaches engaged themselves in the holistic and reflective process of professional development typically highlighted in Finnish teacher education (Silander & Välijärvi, 2013; Väisänen, 2005).

Based on this research, it seemed that the student teachers developed their leadership in the class teacher education program in various ways and areas, including pedagogical and leadership-related knowledge, values, and personal qualities, as well as practical skills (Desimone, 2009; Metsäpelto et al., 2021; Sessa, 2017). In this development process, the students' individual approaches to leadership development (Morgan & Neil, 2003) were emphasized, and they appeared quite stable during the first two years of their studies, continuing to the students' plans for the rest of their class teacher education studies. The type of leadership development approach seemed to be connected to individual factors, especially the amount of previous leadership experience (Joint Task Force, 1998; Owen, 2011, p. 113). For example, students with less previous leadership experience tended to focus on developing their practical leadership skills and competences (cf. Smylie & Eckert, 2018). By contrast, possessing more previous leadership experience seemed to enable the students to focus on developing and modifying their leadership skills from "general" leadership or leadership in another context toward context-related leadership, for example, in the primary school context (cf. McCauley, Van Velsor, & Ruderman, 2010; York-Barr & Duke, 2004).

The class teacher education program as a leadership development environment included various elements supporting the students' leadership development, such as teaching practices for enhancing practical leadership development, a study group consisting of peer students sharing a special interest in developing their leadership, support from facilitators, and flexibility in the degree structure, which enabled the students to include optional leadership studies in their degree (cf. Keeling, 2004; Owen, 2011; Wagner, 2011, p. 93). However, the students perceived limitations in how the class teacher education program supported their leadership development, particularly in the area of practical leadership development. The students estimated that the COVID-19 restrictions resulting in long-term remote studying decreased the number of practical leadership exercises in their teacher education studies during the first two years.

This study also indicated that although the students seemed to successfully lead their individual development processes, no continuous and coordinated support for them in leading these processes existed in the study program. Establishing this kind of support could help the students identify and set even more diverse leadership development goals and utilize the available support in the study program more broadly (cf. Hanhimäki & Risku, 2021). The support could include, for example, expanding TL group meetings beyond the first year of study and adding practical peer leadership

exercises to these meetings. Additionally, the study group meetings could include peer support for the students by offering opportunities to share ideas and experiences of the leadership development goals and the related support in the teacher education context. In addition, personal leadership development plans, including development goals and means for achieving them, could be created for every TL student with the assistance of TL facilitators. Furthermore, courses that directly discuss leadership in a teacher's work could be added to teacher education curricula.

There are some limitations to this study. The number of participants was comparatively small, and the study aimed at examining their individual leadership development, for which reason the results cannot be traditionally generalized beyond the given cases (Patton, 2015). However, the data concerning the five participants were rich, enabling holistic qualitative inquiry into the cases well (Patton, 2015). Additionally, according to Lincoln and Guba (1985), the transferability of the case studies' working hypotheses might be possible between two separate contexts if there is a sufficient degree of congruence between the contexts (see also Gomm, Hammersley, & Foster, 2009). Aligned with this view, it can be assumed that the five student cases may also represent the other students studying in the TL study group to some extent. It should be noted that the students wrote the motivation letters for a certain purpose—the application process to the study groups. Before writing the motivation letters, the students participated in a briefing in which university teachers introduced the study group options for application. It is possible that the content of the motivation letters was influenced by the briefing and that, in the motivation letters, the students pursued appealing the jury responsible for the student admissions instead of presenting their genuine reasons for applying to the TL study group. However, the content of the motivation letters was congruent with the content of the interviews, which suggests the genuine expression of motives and reasons indicated in the motivation letters. Qualitative interviews enable gaining insights into how the participants subjectively perceive their leadership development but do not examine the phenomenon 'objectively' (see deRoche & deRoche, 2010). Data triangulation (motivation letters and interviews) strengthened the credibility of the study (see Patton, 2015).

Conclusions

The present research indicates that student teachers developed their leadership individually in initial teacher education (cf., e.g., Morgan & Neil, 2003; Sinha & Hanuscin, 2017) and that teacher education, although including shared learning goals and components, enabled a sufficient level of flexibility and space for this purpose. The results show initial teacher education as an important context and phase for developing diverse teacher leadership, which is aligned with the scholars' statements regarding teacher education as the phase for creating the basis for continuous leadership development (e.g., Forster, 1997). Based on this study's findings, we consider it worthy that

future studies investigate whether the process of generating the professional identity of a teacher leader and developing the practical side of leadership could be supported in initial teacher education to a greater extent. For example, Katzenmeyer and Moller (2009) suggested ways for integrating practical and inclusive leadership development into pre-service teacher education. Additionally, it is important to ensure that student teachers are not given too much responsibility in leading their individual leadership development processes but are provided with sufficient support that might help them reach even more holistic leadership development during their pre-service phase. It should be noted that the participants in this study clearly recognized their own leadership (development) potential, which cannot be considered self-evident (cf., e.g., Bond, 2011). This recognition was probably supported by the TL study group that was scheduled in the first year of the studies and that discussed such themes as leadership in a teacher's work and leading one's own professional development process.

In the future, it would be interesting to examine how the student teachers evaluated their achieved leadership development in their graduation and induction phases. It would also be interesting to study these teachers in the later stages of their teacher education studies to assess potential changes in their leadership development approaches, which appeared rather stable in this study. The present research contributes to the previous literature by providing knowledge of individual leadership development in the initial teacher education phase, on which topic the previous research is scarce, and by identifying initial teacher education as a leadership development context. Through this, this study contributes to research-based suggestions and solutions for supporting leadership development in teacher education.

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