

“We are Swedish Preschool Teachers”. Student Teacher Feedback on Internationalisation and Interculturality in Preschool Teacher Education

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Abstract

Course materials in teacher education programmes are one of the means to support young teachers learn content knowledge and pedagogical theories. The materials are chosen to support their learning in a range of areas, and this article presents the findings of a study that explored how Swedish preschool student teachers perceived their course materials in relation to internationalisation and intercultural practice. Questionnaires were administered to students in a preschool teacher education at a Swedish university through the *Survey and Report* tool, and 94 students responded. Findings indicate that the responding student teachers valued content and materials for three key reasons: (i) materials that were localised, (ii) practice-oriented, and (iii) prepared them for working specifically in Swedish preschools. Identity as a Swedish preschool teacher (Swedish context and preschool teaching focus) appeared to be of greater influence in determining the responding students' value of content than the higher education goals of globalisation and internationalisation.

Keywords: internationalisation, interculture, preschool teacher education, sociomateriality, student teachers

Introduction

In Sweden national and higher education policy encourages internationalisation, including in teacher education programs, and is commonly referred to amongst university vision and strategic plans,

national and international policy. For example, this project is aligned with the strategic plan of the university studied, which, states that to be an international actor is an academic responsibility of the university. There are diverging motivational factors for Higher Education providers to engage in internationalisation; besides the educational aim of preparing graduates for a globalised future, branding, prestige and ranking should not be underestimated. To be able to compete on the “educational marketplace” internationalisation is regarded as a necessity for Higher Education institutions.

Including the competences and abilities specific to intercultural education in the field of lifelong learning strategies for future teachers and the appropriate motivation of trainers in this direction is, in our opinion, one of the fundamental priorities of the reform of the teacher training system and a basic condition the functioning of diversity-based societies. (Stan & Manea, 2018, p. 296).

This article specifically focuses on preschool teacher education. Children typically begin Swedish preschools during the year after they turn one year old, and stay until they begin preschool class (within school) around age 6. We recognise that in international contexts, the term “early childhood education” is often the more widely utilised translation. In this article we use the term “preschool” as direct translation of the Swedish term “förskola”, and as used by the official English-language translation of the Swedish preschool curriculum *Lpfö18* (Skolverket, 2019) and as used in the name of the programme we studied. Preschool teacher education qualifications in Sweden are seven academic semester (3.5 years) bachelor degrees.

Our research is framed by an underlying interest in knowing if the demands of the preschool teacher education and the aims of higher education in alignment? In this time of recent increased migration and rapid globalisation it is important to question whether there are common aims between internationalisation policy influencing teacher education, and the needs of preschools where university graduates will be employed. The research problem therefore is to know if the provision of international materials – and engagement with these materials – sufficiently enables teacher graduates to be prepared to work with internationally diverse children and their families. We need to know how university material content contributes toward such theory-practice connection. We need to know if student teachers, graduates and other teachers view the kinds of international materials that we provide in teacher education to be relevant to the work of teaching in contemporary Swedish preschools. It enables an exploration of what type of nar-

ratives course materials inscribe amongst a potentially confusing discourse of terms: multicultural, cross-cultural, intercultural, internationalisation and globalisation (Stokke & Lybaek, 2018).

This article focuses on the questionnaire component of a larger research project funded by the teacher education board of a mid-sized university in Sweden. The questionnaire data answers project research question two: How do preschool student teachers value various course content and materials relating to internationalisation that they have encountered (and which do they deem as useful to their future teaching careers)? Course materials are defined as course plans, course literature, and other course materials such as assignments, film, lectures, and materials to support field placement.

Internationalisation, Interculturality and Sociomateriality

In this section, three concepts of key importance to this research are discussed: *internationalisation*, *interculturality* and *sociomateriality*. These concepts are critical to frame our research, which explores student perspectives of materials in their preschool teacher education course which connect to internationalisation and interculturality.

Internationalisation.

Internationalisation is a strategic concept capturing the aim of Higher Education and government agenda to strive for a sustainable future by implementing ideas of global movement and development. However, preschool teacher education programmes are reported to be less internationalised than other higher education programmes in Sweden (SOU, Statens Offentliga Utredningar/The government official investigations, 2018). Swedish society has undergone rapid social and cultural diversification in the last decade. As of 2017, the percentage of inhabitants with a foreign background in Sweden had risen to 24.1% (Statistiska Centralbyrån (Central Bureau of Statistics), 2017). Swedish classrooms are therefore heterogenous linguistic and/or cultural environments. The Swedish preschool curriculum responds to this cultural diversity with the mandate: “The preschool’s task includes transferring and developing a cultural heritage – values, traditions and history, language and knowledge – from one generation to the next. The preschool should also make sure that different cultures are visible in education” (Skolverket, 2019, p. 9).

Different strategies for achieving internationalisation includes for example: student and staff mobility, partnership building and collaboration, curriculum development, international content, and joint programs over national borders. Internationalisation can be understood

as a dual process, taking place both at home and abroad. Language-learning is one of the most tangible outcomes of sending students to study abroad, but other outcomes include cultural enrichment and knowledge, the ability to view one's own cultural context in new ways, and global networking. Increasing attention is also given to internationalisation at home, whereby students engage in learning on-campus but with international experiences such as online discussions. Margrain, Fredholm and Schultheis (2020) describe an example of internationalisation at home in which student teachers asynchronously met to discuss education issues within The International Project (IPC). Gilmore, et al. (2020) also discuss opportunities for promoting internationalisation through virtual meetings between student teachers and also between lecturers in empirical data from three countries (Australia, New Zealand and Sweden). According to their research, through virtual meetings and exchange of relevant course materials, students and lecturers reported that they were made more aware of intercultural commonality and differences with early childhood education from their respective countries.

Recently, a number of scholars have questioned the educational benefits of internationalisation, stating that to a high degree investment in internationalisation has been based on theoretically weak assumptions of learning – by just living and experiencing difference, students will automatically learn cultural sensitivity (Wikan & Klein, 2017). Scholars have also critically discussed the reproduction of hierarchical power structures and different forms of inequality in relation to the rapid internationalisation of higher education. Concerns have been raised about reproduction of ethnocentrism, exceptionalism and entitlement (Pashby & Andreotti, 2016).

While it is beneficial for student teachers to engage in internationalisation through visit and contact with students and teachers in other countries, that is not sufficient to gain cultural competence needed to understand diversity (Abraham & von Brömssen, 2018). Internationalisation programmes which include field visits can have different impact on different cohorts of students. Norwegian research on a three month practicum for different student groups indicates that when students during their field studies devote most of their time in contact with their home country, for example through internet, and are less curious of what happens in the country they are visiting, it can lead to less understanding of the reality of their host country and strengthen an ethnocentric view of their own education system (Wikan & Klein, 2017).

In addition to what is happening abroad, there are situations that influence students to prioritise their national professional identity. Student teacher professional identity formation is influenced in relations between their higher education and institutions, the actual preschools working conditions, national professional organisations and different other networks (Hordern, 2012). According to Hordern (2012), institutions [preschools] where they are placed for their practicum play an important role in shaping their professional development.

Murray's (2013) research with students attending their early years program, showed that external and internal components are relevant in the process of professional identity formation. According to Murray (2013), "External components include formal requirements such as regulated standards, social norms and expectations. Internal components are attitudinal and relate to the self-concept and perception of professional attributes the individual associates with the role." (p. 9)

Interculturality in education

Intercultural perspectives and *intercultural studies* have traditionally focused on communication across cultural and linguistic borders (Aman, 2015). When scholars use the term intercultural in relation to the discipline of Education, it usually describes diversity and cultural encounters between people from different cultural backgrounds; encounters between different cultures; border crossings and migration. Etymologically *inter* means "in between" and the term interculturality describes the processes activated by cultural encounters. However, to apply an intercultural perspective is afflicted with certain terminological complexities and problems. There are diverging interpretations of the term intercultural, stretching from essentialist, culturalist and reductive ideas about (so called) cultural groups, to non-essentialist open-ended conceptualisations of fluid group identities and active processes of identification (Dervin, 2011, 2015; Rozbicki 2015).

A major reason for the plurality of interpretations of the term intercultural is that it is based on the concept of *culture* – one of the most widely used and polysemic concepts in academic discourse. Culture has become a catch-all term that is "both used and misused", and from time to time brought forward to explain seemingly inexplicable aspects of social life (Dervin, 2015, p. 73). Different norms, values and behaviours have, in a substantial amount of studies provided self-explanatory and uncontested definitions of an "otherness" that is secluded by national borders (e.g., Hofstede, 2001; Jandt, 2010; Liu, et al., 2014).

Applying the concept *interculturality* instead of intercultural highlights a move towards applying a processual thinking about intercultural encounters (Dervin 2016). Interculturality captures ongoing social processes that develop over time. Interculturality implies that culture should be understood as active processes of meaning making – or as a verb as some scholars would say (Scollon, Scollon & Jones 2012). In teacher education and training, the dominant conceptualisation of interculturality has been “intercultural competence”. The development of certain skills – linguistic, communicative, social and analytical – has been the main goal with developing intercultural competence, for example in the profession of teaching. Dervin and Jacobsson (2021) critiqued the confused terminology regarding interculturality and the potential for applying intercultural perspectives in contemporary education. While Stan and Manea (2018) point out that intercultural education must be more than words in textbooks, a critical review of the words, terms and discourses that students encounter is an important start to our work.

Sociomateriality

Sociocultural theories have long been resonant with preschool education and research. Sociomateriality is one aspect of sociocultural theory that recognises that the relationship between humans and their environment is mediated through cultural means such as signs, tools and artefacts. Human skills and capabilities are mediated and fundamentally transformed by tools and instruments (artefacts) that they use in their work (Fenwick & Dahlgren, 2015). The work of teachers, and teacher education, is thus critically influenced by materials available to support their work and professional learning. Landri (2012) draws attention to “materialities of education” (p. 91).

... practice as epistemology directs attention to education as an *embodied and materially mediated practice* that occurs in a material organisation of spacetime and unfolds through sociomaterial arrangements (texts, blackboards, benches, pencils, technologies, objects of knowledge and space, bodies, etc.) which contribute to shape and, to some extent, are constitutive of educational practice. (p. 96, italics in original)

Kotzee (2012) proposes that sociomateriality is an entanglement of material and human forces, also influenced by contextual factors. Nevertheless, within this entanglement, artefacts can also be analysed as representations of expertise. Quality artefacts are thus not only important to support expert activity in humans, but also themselves demonstrate expertise.

Methodology

This research is a part of a project aimed at finding how a cohort of Swedish preschool student teachers (hereafter referred to as 'students') perceived the inclusion of internationalisation and interculturality within their course materials. The preschool teacher programme is three and half years (seven semesters), delivered in Swedish, at a mid-sized university in Sweden with a relatively long history of teacher education.

This research, drawing on sociomaterial perspective, takes in to consideration the constructivist and the interpretive approaches (Balogun, Jacobs, Jarzabkowski, Mantere, & Vaara, 2014). Students construct their reality based on their own experiences of how interculturality and internationalisation are treated through their course materials. As researchers, we attempt to interpret the responding students' descriptions of their experiences and subsequently disseminate it to readers of the research, who make their own interpretations. The vision for internationalisation is socially constructed on the national arena and the university that the research considered. The survey was conducted in order to find out how students in a preschool teacher education programme viewed the effect of the course materials on their understanding of internationalisation and interculturality. As noted by Braun et al. (2021) online surveys allow flexibility for participants, given they can be completed at their own time, without the need to meet the researcher. Braun et al. (2021) further explains that online surveys are less expensive than methods that require researchers to physically meet participants and this affords more time to analyse the data.

The survey results were analysed in relation to already constructed concepts within internationalisation and interculturality. In particular, the students' responses were analysed in terms of what they encountered and valued in their course material content, and what they felt needed more inclusion.

As an extension to our constructivist and interpretive approach to this research, we also consider the sociomaterial focus on both human and non-human agents (Moura & Bispo, 2020) on the process of internationalisation and interculturality. The human agents such as the university lecturers and students and the non-humans such as policy documents and course materials are included. Here is where the socially constructed materials and the actions of human agents in the process of internationalisation and intercultural understanding are interpreted (Balogun, et.al. 2014).

To be able to find out what the cohort of students think about their course materials, survey was considered the most appropriate research design to reach all students in preschool teacher education and provide each individual the opportunity to participate in the study. Closed questions (n=11) were presented to the students, in the area of course materials already available, course materials that should be included to promote internationalisation and interculturality, and if the already available course materials helped them to enhance their understanding in these two themes. In alignment with sociocultural perspective, questions included who was engaged in the delivery of materials and intercultural experiences were included. Additional open-ended questions allowed respondents to add comments.

Prior to sending the survey out to students, ethics approval was obtained by the authors' employing university and the programme leader informed. A cover page of the questionnaire provided information about the aim of the research, the researchers involved, that replies would be anonymous, and that respondents were free to accept or decline participation. The questionnaire included an initial item acknowledging informed consent before proceeding.

Surveys were disseminated online using the *Survey and Report* tool used by the university where the research was conducted. The survey was sent online to all 648 students in the preschool teacher education programme at a mid-size Swedish university which was the focus of the research. These students include both on-campus and distance students. However, at the time of the survey, all students had been working online for two months due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The questionnaires were posted first 2020-05-27, followed by two reminders around 10 days apart (2020-06-08 and 2020-06-17) and the survey was closed 2020-06-30. The survey questionnaire was open for a total of 35 days.

Ninety-four students (14.5%) responded to the questionnaire, with replies received anonymously. Responses were received from a disproportionately higher number of students enrolled in the first semester and seventh, final semester of the program (19.5%). The least number of replies were received from students in semester two (10.8%) (see Table 1 next page).

Results

I think it can be good with course literature and materials in English as English is an international language. Knowledge of what it looks like with preschool in other countries, I think also creates an understanding and where you can find new ways to communicate if you are not understanding each other.” (Translated from: Tycker att det kan vara bra med kur-

slitteratur och material på engelska då engelskan är ett internationellt språk. Kännedom kring hur det ser ut med förskola i andra länder tror jag också skapar en förståelse och där man kan hitta nya vägar till kommunikation om man inte förstår varandra).

Table 1. Number and Percentage of Respondent Students by Semester of Study Course

Semester	Number of Students received questionnaire	Number of students responded	%
Semester 1	106	18	17%
Semester 2	102	11	10,8%
Semester 3	79	10	12,7%
Semester 4	96	12	12,5%
Semester 5	89	13	14,6%
Semester 6	89	13	14,6%
Semester 7	87	17	19,5%
Total	648	94	14,5%

The above respondent quote illustrates that those students who responded recognised that international course content and materials have value. In any qualitative investigation there will always be a range of differing views and perspectives. In this article, we acknowledge that there are some respondents who held a positive perspective, but focus our attention on the areas of contradiction and challenge. This is not because we wish to focus on negative data, but because research that illuminates areas of challenge and tension provides opportunity for change and growth (Bryman, 2016; Merriam et al., 2002). The structure of the results sections firstly focuses on feedback relating to course materials, and then findings that arose relating to interactions. The feedback relating to materials is reported in three subsections: (1) student critique that there is limited internationalisation content in materials, (2) specific challenges identified with use of English language, and (3) student desire that materials directly relate to preschool teaching practice. A fourth aspect of findings relates to human interactions, and fifthly are shared some findings relating to students' evaluation of programme quality.

Internationalisation in materials: Limited visibility, limited appreciation

Many comments indicated student critique and perception of there being too little internationalisation material content in the programme,

- 'We haven't had anything international.'
- 'The material that we had was very limited.'
- 'Nothing at all.'
- 'No special content.'
- 'Nothing in my semester.'

Only half the students said they had encountered course material about preschool teacher education from countries other than Sweden 47 (50%), but even fewer said they thought it should be included in the programme 42 (45%). Course materials relating to children and childhoods in other countries was stated to be encountered by 60 (64%) of the students, and a higher number of 70 (74%) thought this material should be included. A lower figure of 45 (48%) of students said that they had encountered international statistics about children, with 50 (53%) thinking that this should be included in the programme. The aspect of the course that the largest number of students stating that they encountered content relating to multiculturalism and multilingualism: encountered by 78 (83%) but thought should be included by the lower number of 69 (73%). Thus, students most readily recognised multicultural content, and valued this content as well as content relating to children and childhoods. They were less convinced of the relevance for international perspectives on teacher education and international comparative statistics (see Figure 1).

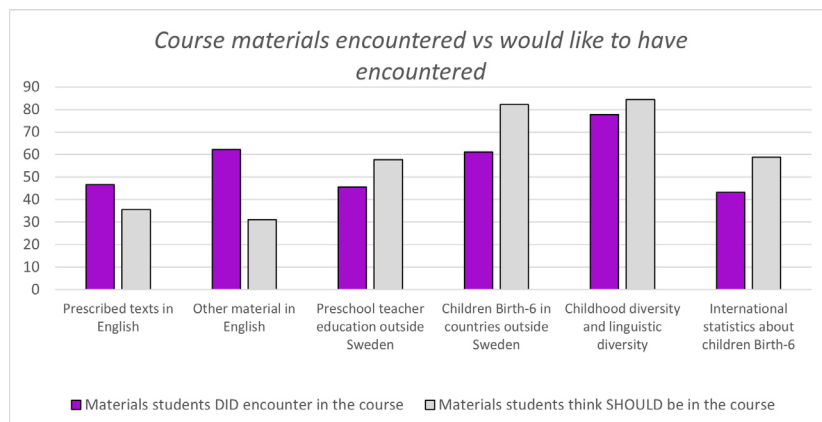


Figure 1. Course materials encountered vs would like to have encountered.

That students had limited appreciation for international content may be understood through a view expressed by some students material content from beyond the Nordic region is of questionable relevance to them. They expressed a strong identity as *Swedish* preschool teachers.

Information about opportunities to study abroad may be of interest, but nothing I think should be included but rather offer information about it. Lecturers from other countries may be interesting from the point of view of how other countries work. However, I do not consider it relevant for the

education as Sweden's preschools and schools differ from other countries. (Information om möjligheter att studera utomlands kan vara av intresse, men inget jag anser bör ingå utan snarare erbjuda en information om det. Föreläsare från andra länder kan vara intressant ur den aspekt att man får se hur andra länder arbetar. Dock anser jag inte att det är relevant för utbildningen eftersom Sveriges förskolor och skolor skiljer sig från andra länder).

English language materials: Challenging and not “my language”

Only 38 (40%) of the students had seen compulsory materials in English, although 58 (62%) of the student respondents stated that they had seen some broader (non-compulsory) literature in English. Investigation of the course literature shows, in one of the seven semesters, there was no English literature, while in one other semester there was a recommendation to students to use one article published internationally. The remaining five semesters included 1-4 English language articles or books. However, when asked what *should be* included in pre-school teacher education, even fewer students indicated that materials in English should be included. Reasons for not valuing English language articles were partly that reading in a language that was not students' mother tongue was challenging, and partly that it was not valued as reflecting the student's own cultural identity. Two students' views on challenges with using English language are noted in the following quotes:

Personally, English is not the best, so I have a bit of a hard time reading a lot in English and especially complicated explanations and concepts (Personligen är inte engelskan det bästa så har lite jobbigt med att läsa mycket på engelska och speciellt komplicerade förklaringar samt begrepp).

[It is] Difficult to read English articles and literature because it is in an academic language, for someone who is not good at English this becomes a challenge and not rewarding. (Svårt att läsa engelska artiklar och litteratur eftersom det är på ett akademiskt språk, för någon som inte är bra på engelska blir detta en utmaning och inget givande).

The feedback from student teachers that English is challenging is somewhat a surprise given that English language competence is a course entry requirement, even though the course is in Swedish. Another student gave her reason for not preferring reading English materials, as it not being her “own language”.

Important and interesting but [I] want information in Swedish mostly because I get a deeper understanding when it is information in my own language ... (Viktigt och intressant men vill ha information på svenska mest för att jag får en djupare förståelse när det är information på mitt eget språk ...).

Practice-oriented materials: Concrete planning and working methods

Students recognised course content relating to diversity within their course, and simultaneously a desire for more content that supported interculturality, as practical preparation for their work as teachers. As the quote below indicates, students appreciated practical activities and resources, for example curriculum planning.

As well as more concrete examples of how to work with children and groups of children where multilingualism and multiculturalism exist. Concrete examples of how to plan the activity so that it will be as good as possible where there are multilingual children or groups of children. Less fluctuating and unclear information where one barely learns something and instead clarity so one learns and acquires important and essential knowledge so that one can plan activities in the best way. [...Samt flera konkreta exempel på hur man kan arbeta med barn och barngrupper där flerspråkighet och mångkultur existerar. Konkreta exempel om hur en planerar verksamheten för att den ska bli så bra som möjligt där det finns flerspråkig barn eller barngrupper. Mindre flum och otydliga uppgifter där en knappt lär sig något och istället tydlighet så en lär sig och får med sig viktigt och väsentliga så att en på bästa sätt kan planera sin verksamhet.]

However, no students cited the kind of practice-based tools which they would have experienced in fieldwork as part of their course materials.

Another student highlighted the need for all teachers to learn “working methods” that enabled them to work interculturally, regardless of the multicultural statistics of the schools they ended up working for. The specific area of work with linguistic diversity was noted and the need to learn specific methods which could ameliorate barriers

As in some cities it is less common with multicultural preschools, I think it is very important that there are opportunities to gain greater knowledge about working methods as there is a lack of knowledge of how to work with perhaps mainly language barriers, within preschools. As society as a whole becomes increasingly internationalised, it is important to work more on this very point. [Då det i vissa städer är mindre vanligt med mångkulturella förskolor anser jag det väldigt viktigt att det finns möjligheter till att få större kunskaper om arbetssätt då det saknas kunskap hur det går att arbeta med kanske främst språkbärrärer, inom dess förskolor. Då samhället i stort blir alltmer internationaliserat är det viktigt att arbeta mer med just denna punkt].

Intercultural interactions: Practicum as pivotal, few international interactions

Students, however, acknowledged the preschool community, for example supervising teachers, as contributing to their course learning. 73

(78%) of students acknowledged that they had experienced intercultural discussions with field supervising teachers, and 86 (92%) of students thought these were an important part of the programme (see Figure 2).

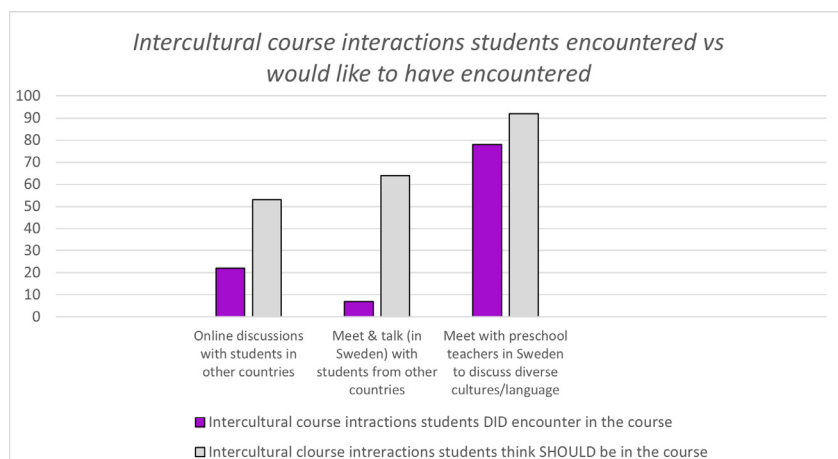


Figure 2. *Intercultural course interactions students encountered vs would like to have encountered*

Some students noted that their internationalisation course content was supplemented with guest lecturers. We know that some students had had an experience of engaging online with student teachers from different countries within their course, but the students did not explicitly comment on this international community.

Students recognised potential for further intercultural interaction than that which they had experienced to date in their course. Fifty (53%) students said they thought online engagement with international students abroad should be a part of the course (for example with online communication), yet only 21 (22%) stated that they had had this experience. Sixty (64%) recognised potential for on-campus intercultural interaction with international students from other courses, yet only 7 (7%) had experienced this interaction. These activities with international student abroad or on-campus were not as valued as the opportunity to meet with Swedish preschool teachers in the field (see Figure 2).

Quality in higher education

A range of policy-related rules guides Swedish preschool teacher education. These rules include the Swedish *Higher Education Ordinance*, 1993:100 (Utbildningsdepartementet [Ministry of Education], 1993), institutional strategic plans, policies, and course plans. Amongst

these documents, across all levels, exists a commitment to internationalisation. Students did not refer to any of these Higher Education guiding documents in their questionnaire responses. However, the students did expect that their course should be of high quality, thus indirectly connecting to the intent of these Higher Education requirements.

Students included as a measure of quality in their programme that lecturing staff should have relevant and recent preschool experience. An illustration of this student perspective is their concern that some academic staff had not taught in preschools for more than 10 years (or longer, if at all).

I consider meeting and actively discussing with active pre-school teachers to be of interest during the education. That we now have [university] teachers with experiences from preschool 10 years ago does not feel so current. Better to take in those who are active. [Att träffas och dicsutera med aktiva förskollärare anser jag vara av intresse under utbildningen. Att vi nu har lärare med erfarenheter från förskolan för 10 år sedan känns inte så aktuellt. Bättre att ta in aktiva.]

Thus, to the students, the quality of materials has little meaning if not applied to authentic preschool examples.

Discussion

As preschool teacher education is publically funded in Sweden, and in many countries, we have a strong ethical responsibility to ensure that the materials that are provided in a programme do the job intended. They need to support student teachers to learn, and they need to be of quality. A wider and deeper sociomaterial analysis of programme material content would yield insights that this small research investigation could only glimpse aspects of.

Around half of the respondents indicated that they have not been exposed to internationalisation and that they only had limited content in their courses, although other respondents were somewhat satisfied. How there can be such difference between students' recognition of course content requires further investigation. Further, it is also important to contemplate the reality that even if more content exists than the students remember, the material lacks resonance. Interestingly, despite university internationalisation agenda, there appeared to be little desire from these students to increase aspects of comparative internationalisation.

Many student respondents, however, show a strong desire to have more knowledge of interculturality in their education, which prepares them for their future work as teachers in multicultural contexts. These

students showed their interest by referring to their awareness of cultural and linguistic diversity in Swedish society and the relevance of the knowledge they gained from some specific lectures. There are also students who express their view that as the Swedish preschool education is different to other countries, due to this it is primarily just the Swedish and Nordic experiences that are relevant for their education. Therefore, the value of international and intercultural content is framed through the lens of being a *Swedish preschool teacher*, defined as relevant to Sweden, and specific to preschool teaching. This perspective was also evident through students emphasising Swedish and Nordic identity, and their value of practicum experience as a context in which they most easily learned about interculturality.

A desire to have more knowledge of interculturality and focus on the national identity could be influenced by different internal and external factors (Hordern, 2012; Murray, 2013). Individual students, who are both motivate to have more of and less interested on internationalisation and interculturality are examples of internal components of identity formations. On the other hand we can consider, education program itself, the influence by mentors in the students practicum, the professional associations, the mass media and other institution could be considered as external components possibly influencing students professional identity formation, that might lead to emphasis on Swedish and Nordic identity.

Another category of students highlighted in the findings is those who are sceptical of the value of using course materials in English. Reasons given are that it is not their mother tongue, and in some cases difficult to grasp complex academic concepts in English. It is interesting that students who are highly competent in English language still noted that it is not “their own” language. While inclusion of English language texts met university internationalisation agenda (SOU, 2018), it added stress to some students and potential risk to their course achievement if dependent on their understanding of content from texts in English. These findings of English language challenge demand further investigation as they are specific examples where higher education agenda of internationalisation was, for many, in conflict with the students’ aim to succeed academically in their course.

Conclusion

The outcome expected from the object of internationalisation and interculturality is that materials and experiences support students to gain knowledge and understanding of differing cultural systems and interactions, and comparative understanding of preschool curricula,

statistics and practices. As well as extending knowledge about the wider world, internationalisation agenda seeks to challenge the cultural assumptions in order for them to engage as global citizens. According to student teacher survey feedback, there is little evidence to suggest that this outcome has been achieved within the preschool teacher education programme, although there is recognition that more is possible. Just 45 (48%) of student teachers agreed that the course materials helped to deepen their understanding of internationalisation 49 (52%) disagreed. Students maintained identity as *Swedish* (rather than global) teachers, and were more strongly drawn to activities that related to their practical professional intercultural work.

A positive alternative perspective is that materials and experiences assist students to gain intercultural competence to be able to work in preschools that have culturally and linguistically diverse children and families. There is stronger evidence that student teachers recognised and valued this part of the preschool teacher education programme, but they also considered that more could be done. The feedback from student teachers indicated that they most valued course materials that aligned to their development of intercultural professional practice. They also recognised practicum as a context in which they came to understand interculturality in practice, but not internationalisation in theory. Thus, to achieve the programme's intercultural practice aims, both academic and field partners are necessary contributors, and materials need to clearly connect theory and practice.

The conclusion is that internationalisation is largely a higher education driver, and intercultural practice a professional practice consideration. This research has illustrated that student teacher respondents in this research prioritised professional intercultural outcomes over academic internationalisation outcomes, and they aligned to local (Swedish) identity over global. Responses were shaped by the perspective and identity of being Swedish preschool (student) teachers. Sociocultural review of materials could more explicitly draw on these student perspectives and identity, harnessing the concept of intercultural practice.

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Appendix: Questionnaire to preschool student teachers on internationalisation

<https://sUNET.artologik.net/kau/report/8405> (translated to English by the authors)

1. In which semester are you currently studying? (*semesters 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 or 7*)
2. Which of the following content and/or materials have you encountered in your preschool teacher programme? (multiple selections are possible)
(*Options probed encounters with required and additional course literature in English, content about preschool teacher education, or childhood / children (age birth to 6) in other countries than Sweden, or children in culturally and linguistically diverse contexts*)
3. Which of the following content and/or materials have been included in your preschool teacher programme (multiple selections are possible).
(*Options include guest lecturers, lecturers with people from countries other than Sweden, information about practicum abroad or other opportunities for study abroad*)
4. Which of the following content and/or materials have been included in your preschool teacher programme (multiple selections are possible).
(*Options include opportunities for online discussion about education with students in other countries, opportunities to meet and talk with students from other countries who are in Sweden, opportunity to meet and discuss with preschool teachers in Sweden about working in culturally and linguistically diverse contexts*)
5. Other international content or materials included in the programme (open-ended response)
6. Which of the following content and/or materials do you think SHOULD be included in your preschool teacher programme? (*options match Q2*)
7. Which of the following content and/or materials do you think SHOULD be included in your preschool teacher programme (*options match Q3*)
8. Which of the following content and/or materials do you think SHOULD be included in your preschool teacher programme (*options match Q4*)
9. Has the material you encountered in your preschool teacher programme deepened your understanding of internationalisation? (*yes/no, followed by why/why not - open ended response*)
10. Has the material you encountered in your preschool teacher programme deepened your understanding of intercultural perspectives? (*yes/no, followed by why/why not - open ended response*)
11. What do you think needs to be added to the preschool teacher programme regarding international materials and content? (*open ended response*)
12. Additional comments (*open ended response*)