

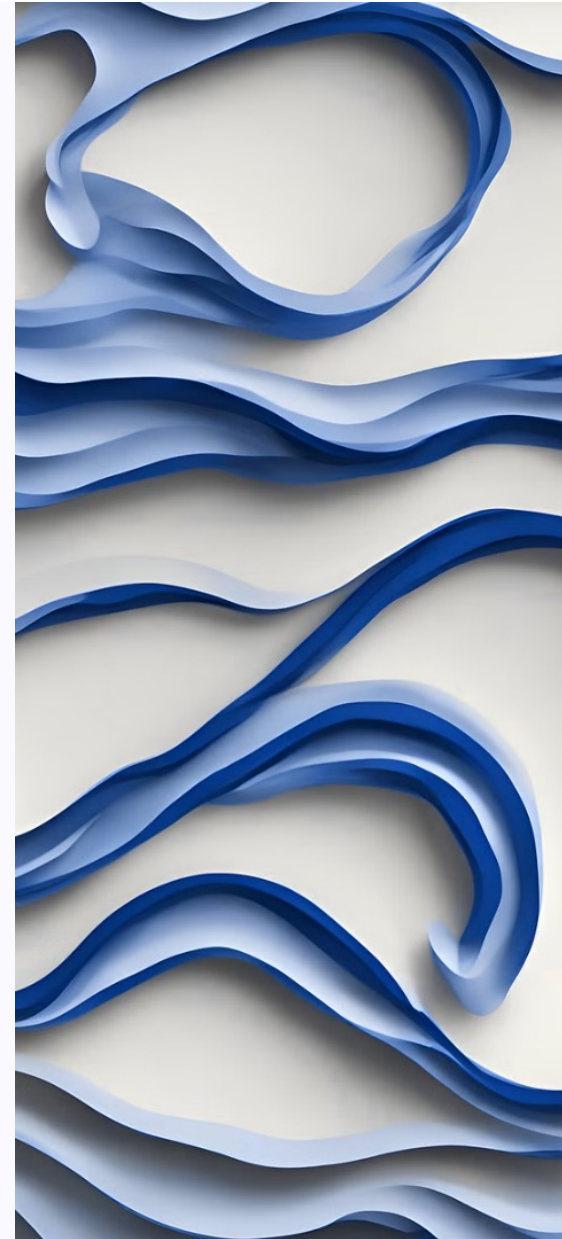
Building social cohesion on diversity, from policy to practice.

Children's language learning in multicultural
context.

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The monolingual paradigm in France

Historical Background

French society, like all European societies, is characterised by great linguistic and cultural diversity, the result of intertwined histories, cultural and commercial exchanges, migratory movements, diasporas, etc.

Educational Paradigm

In France, however, the school system remains marked by the historical legacy of a dominant monolingual paradigm, in its very construction and its persistence in making language the tool for promoting the Nation.



The Monolingual Heritage and Its Consequences

Exclusion of Minority Languages

The French school system, defined ontologically by the monolingual imperative as the cement of the Nation, continues to exclude from its institutional and civic programme many so-called "minority" languages.

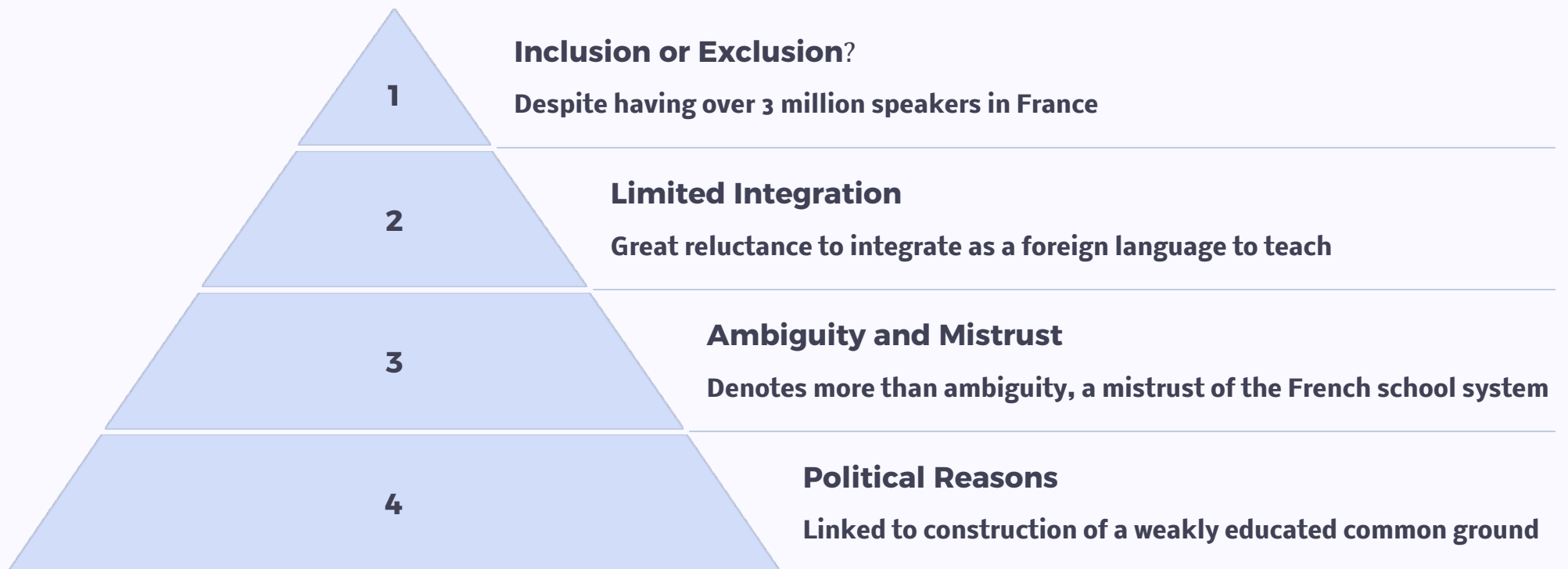
Hierarchies of Languages and Cultures

This approach harbours more or less explicit hierarchies of languages and cultures, such as the fate reserved for the Arabic language, which nevertheless has many speakers in France.

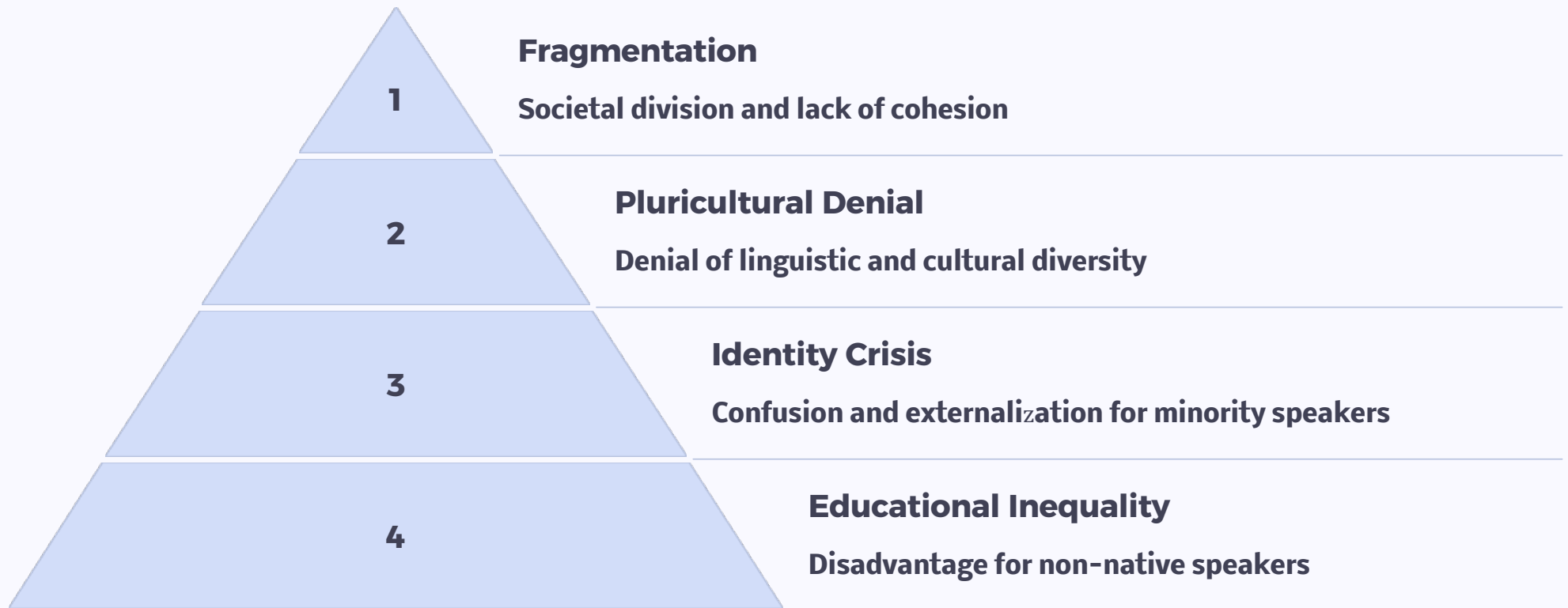
Invisibility and Marginalisation

These languages are not only minorised but made invisible by the school system, leading mechanically to the de-schooling of their learning by the populations concerned, in the family or associative environment.

The Case of Arabic Language in French Education



Consequences of Monolingual Paradigm



The invisibility of minority languages in the education system raises questions about the consequences for social cohesion and the promotion of a projected common good (Véran & Malet 2025)

The Finnish Experience: An Alternative

1 Traditional homogeneity

A majority of Finnish-speaking population, and old minorities such as the Swedish-speaking Finns, the Sami, and the Roma

2 1980s-1990s

Finland experiences an influx of immigrants, later compared to France

3 From 2000s onwards. Structural change of the population

Population 5,603,851(Statistics Finland, 2023)



| LANGUAGE,% | 2000 | 2023 |
|------------|------|------------------------|
| Finnish | 92.4 | 84.9 |
| Swedish | 5.6 | 5.1 |
| Sami | 0.0 | 0.0 (2051 individuals) |
| Other | 1.9 | 10.0 |



Two paradigms of multicultural education in Finland

Assimilationist model of Multicultural education

as concerning the ethnically and linguistically Other student

Critical multicultural education model

aiming at support cultural diversity and social justice, counter marginalisation and discrimination in education and society.

Minority groups

Sami and Roma communities as groups with differentiated rights



Evolution of the Finnish Educational Approach

1

Homogeneous Society
Finland was long a homogeneous society from the point of view of its ethnolinguistic composition

2

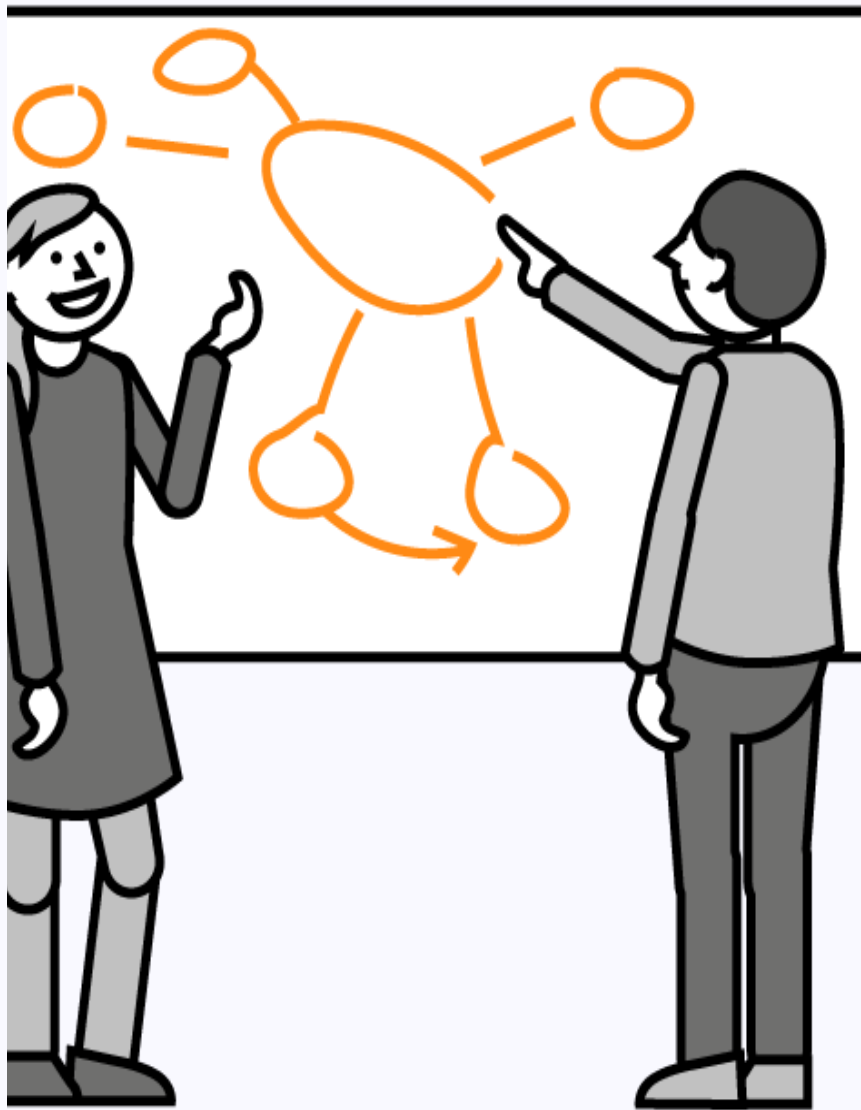
Influx of Immigrants
Late influx of immigrants compared to France, starting from the 1980s and 1990s

3

Adoption of Assimilationist Model
Led to the adoption of a multicultural education model that respects and accepts minority languages

4

Ongoing Experimentation of critical ME that considers diversity as resources
The model is still being experimented with, but could be fragile due to political changes



Research data, methods and data processing

Data

the National Curriculum Guidelines on Early Childhood Education and Care in Finland, 2003 2005 and the National Core Curriculum for Early Childhood Education and Care 2016.

methods

A combination of thematic analysis (braun and Clarke, 2006) with critical discourse analysis (Fairclough, 2001)

Data processing

using Nvivo12 to iteratively scrutinise, code, and progressively extract relevant themes from the multicultural-related statements in the two curriculum standards

Curriculum Reforms in Finnish Early Childhood Education

| Year | Key Features | Focus on Diversity |
|------|---------------------------|--|
| 2003 | First curriculum for ECEC | 8.36% of recommendations related to cultural diversity education and promotion of multilingualism |
| 2016 | first curriculum reform | 14.85% of recommendations related to cultural diversity education and promotion of multilingualism |



Key changes in Finnish Early Childhood Education



Recognition of Cultural Diversity rather than only allowing spaces for expression of diversity

The 2016 Finnish national core programme for ECEC recognises the social and cultural diversity of Finland and consider it as valuable resources



Multilingual Education

The 2016 reform advocates bilingual and multilingual education for all children as a competence, not just for immigrant children



Cultural Identity as prerequisite for healthy development and wellbeing

Helping immigrant children build their cultural identity and self-esteem through their mother tongue



Linguistic Rights

Finnish legislation requires institutions to guarantee early childhood education services to people whose mother tongue is Finnish, Swedish or Sami, as well as to other language groups



Forms of Multilingual Education in Finland

Large-Scale Multilingual Education

Focuses primarily on Finnish, Swedish, and Sami, the three national languages. Other languages can be included if they represent at least 25% of school activities.

Small-Scale Multilingual Education

Aims to stimulate children's interest in language learning and foster positive attitudes towards different languages and cultures. Helps immigrant children build their cultural identity and self-esteem through their mother tongue.



Implementing Multilingualism in Finnish Education

1 Integration of Languages

Rather than a strictly bilingual approach or massive recruitment of native language teachers, the Finnish school favours integration of diverse languages and cultures into general education

2 Holistic Approach

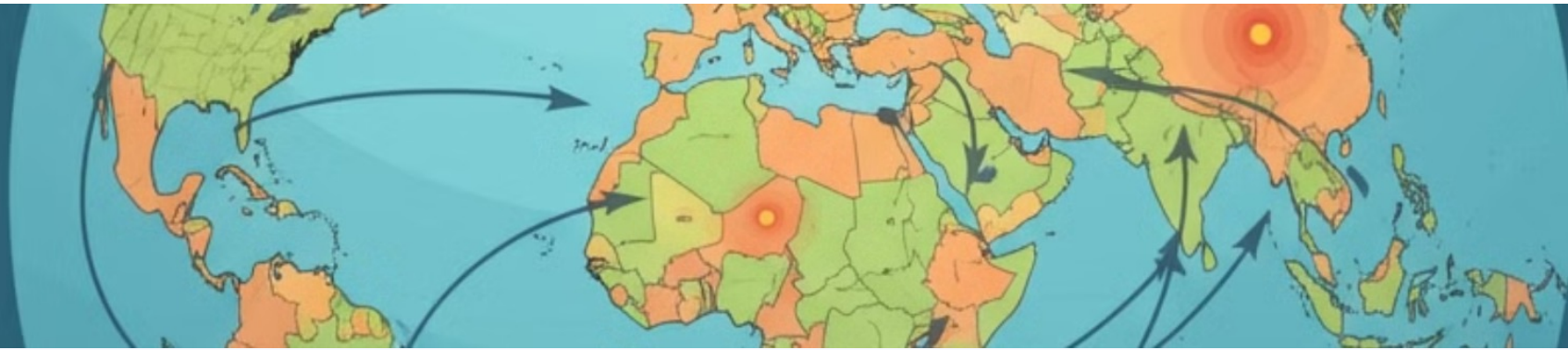
The curriculum encourages recognition and valorisation of students' languages and cultures of origin, favouring a holistic, interdisciplinary approach to teaching content

3 Teacher Development

The reform promotes continuous professional development of teachers, while encouraging the development of local and international networks between teachers

4 Best Practices Exchange

Facilitates the exchange of good practices in dealing with linguistic and cultural diversity in classrooms



Lessons of the Finnish experience

Policy Framework

Develop comprehensive policies that recognise and value linguistic diversity in education.

Curriculum Design

Create flexible curricula that can adapt to local linguistic and cultural contexts while maintaining national educational standards.

Teacher Education

Invest in initial and continuous teacher training programmes that focus on multilingual and multicultural education strategies.

Community Engagement

Foster partnerships between schools, families, and community organisations to support multilingual education efforts.

This shift represents a significant change in the approach to multicultural education in Finland, moving from private to public responsibility.



Conclusions - Plurilinguism as a route Social Cohesion and Inclusion



Integration & common good

Recognition of mother tongues promotes social integration.



Equity

Linguistic rights contribute to social equity and cohesion.



Global Citizenship

Multilingual education prepares children for a globalised world.

Finland has made a clear bet on developing children's multilingual capacities through strengthening public education missions in this direction of cohesive societies.



Building a Democratic Education for a Pluricultural World

Rethinking Common Good

The contemporary debates on the common good primarily invite a critique of educational systems that appear both unequal and disconnected from global transitions

Accessibility

The challenge is to make school culture meaningful and accessible to all, without compromising on quality.

Plurilingual and Pluricultural Approach

Promoting a "common nourished by diversity", particularly in linguistic and cultural terms, is crucial for the development and cohesion of our societies



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