

Inclusive vocational education in Finland

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Towards inclusive vocational education

The starting point for inclusive vocational education is that every student can participate in the teaching provided regardless of nationality, gender, age, religion, illness, or disability (Takala, 2020, p. 16). The task of a vocational teacher is to arrange teaching, guidance, and support in such a way that it supports the student's competence acquisition, studies, and holistic well-being in the best possible way. Vocational teachers work in the planning and implementation of inclusive education in cooperation with other personnel, students, guardians of underage students and, where needed, other networks that support the student. (See Vitka, 2021)

The inclusive framework for vocational education (Figure 1) describes the dimensions that affect the level of inclusion. The structural foundation for education, such as the Act on Vocational Education, the Government Decree on Vocational Education, the selection criteria for education and the qualification requirements for vocational education, forms a good basis for the implementation of inclusive vocational education. In addition to this structural foundation, the operating cultures of vocational education, working life and society, with their particular values and attitudes, also either support or prevent the development of an inclusive operating culture. When structures and operating culture are positive, they promote inclusiveness, and when they are negative, they promote exclusiveness. Of this, the role of vocational education and working life actors is important, because through their own activities they can support students both in their professional growth and also in their socialisation into communities and growth to come full members of society. (see Ebuanye et al., 2020)

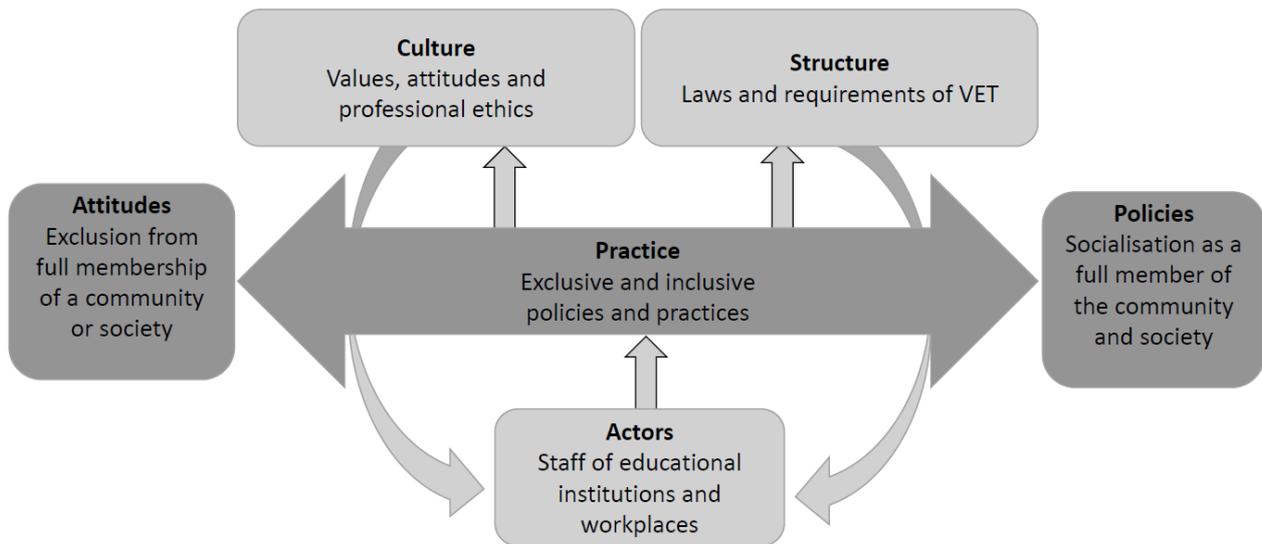


Figure 1. Inclusiveness framework for vocational training in Finland (Ebuene et al., 2020, modified)

Measures aimed at the entire student community aim to promote pre-emptive support for all students and to build common operating models for the educational institution. A pre-emptive culture is needed in order to achieve better inclusion. Pre-emptive action also supports the well-being of all other actors and helps everyone to achieve their goals. (see Vitka, 2021)

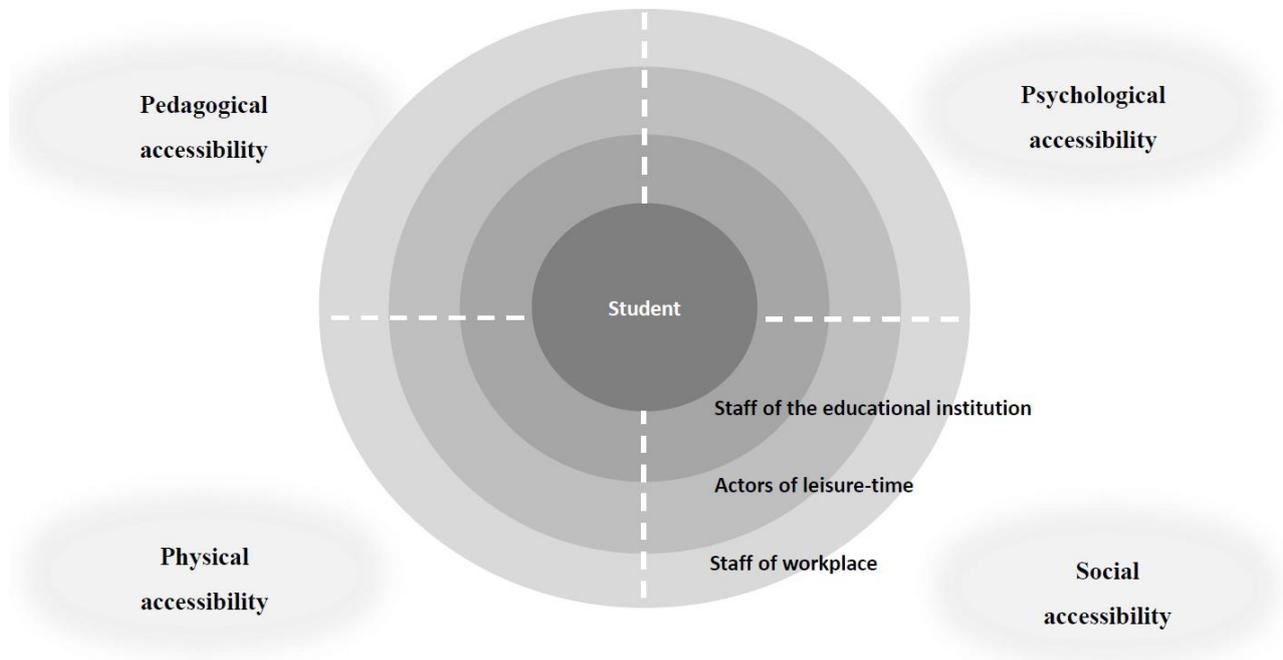
Inclusive vocational education is solution-oriented. In situations requiring change, a better solution is sought for the existing situation in cooperation with the student and other relevant actors. Central to inclusive education is to make progress by harnessing the student's strengths, and this is why the student's participation is important. The vocational teacher should take a concrete approach in seeking out solutions and agree with the student goals that they can commit to. At the same time, the teacher's competence and attitude towards diversity also develops. A solution-oriented approach helps the teacher to treat all students as individuals (see Vitka, 2021)

Accessibility

Accessibility must be taken into account in inclusive vocational education (see Figure 2).

Accessibility is supported by both the staff of the educational institution, leisure-time actors such as family and friends, and working life actors such as workplace supervisors. From a customer-orientated (student orientated) perspective, accessibility means that the education is arranged to be psychologically, socially, physically and pedagogically accessible (Eskola et al., 2007).

Figure 2. Accessibility components in vocational education



Psychological accessibility

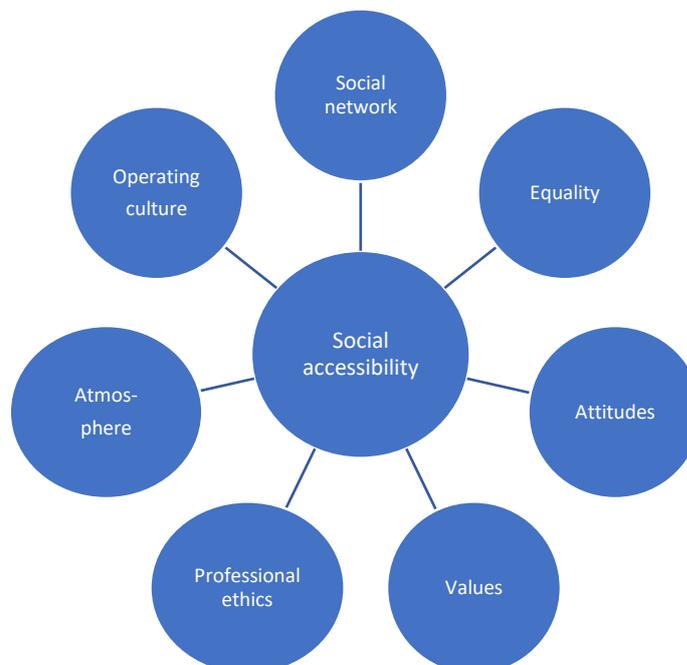
Psychological accessibility can be viewed as a kind of mental well-being which provides resources for learning and development. The implementation of inclusive vocational education requires attitudinal accessibility, which means a non-discriminatory attitude towards each student's study opportunities regardless of their characteristics or background. Efforts are made to guarantee each student equal rights and opportunities for studying and completing a degree. The attitudes of teachers and workplace supervisors affect the accessibility of the teaching and how the student is treated. An atmosphere of care for and good treatment of students is built up from small elements like genuine presence and good listening. Psychological accessibility and attitudinal accessibility presuppose a positive attitude towards each student. (see also Lignell, 2013, p. 62; Finnish National Board of Education, 2014, p. 7-8)

Social accessibility

In a socially accessible educational institution and on-the-job learning location, each student can experience belonging to the community and can participate in social activities. A social network built around their studies is for many students the most significant source of functional capacity in

the community. From the perspective of accessibility, the aim is that students can study on an equal footing with one another and feel accepted and safe. The part played by teachers and workplace supervisors is of essential importance in creating an attitudinally, psychologically, and socially accessible learning environment. With their own attitudes, values and professional ethics, the teacher and workplace supervisor can influence the learning atmosphere either positively or negatively. An acceptable and encouraging atmosphere and operating culture lay the foundation for a balanced and productive learning process in which everyone can learn according to their own abilities and goals. (see also Metsola, 2008, p. 37 to 38)

Figure 3. Social accessibility in vocational education

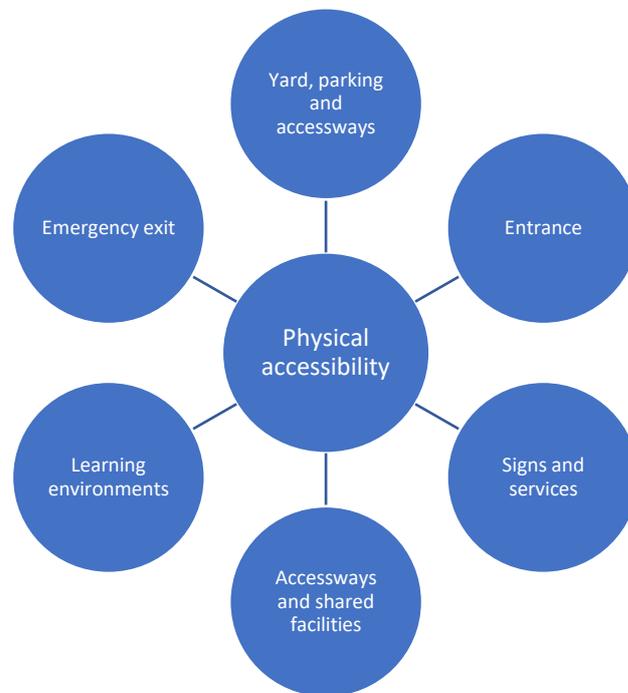


Physical accessibility

The accessibility of learning environments refers to the accessibility of an educational institution's building, accessibility of moving around and operating within the building and its yard areas, and good ergonomics in the learning environment. An individual building or environment is accessible if it is safe and functional for all users and if all spaces are easy to access. The facilities and their functions must be logical and as easy to use as possible. (Eskola, 2007, p. 71; Finnish National Board of Education, 2014, p.12-13) The accessibility of learning environments in vocational education also extends to the workplaces where students acquire competence. When concluding a

training or apprenticeship agreement, teachers must ensure that the learning environment is fully accessible for the student.

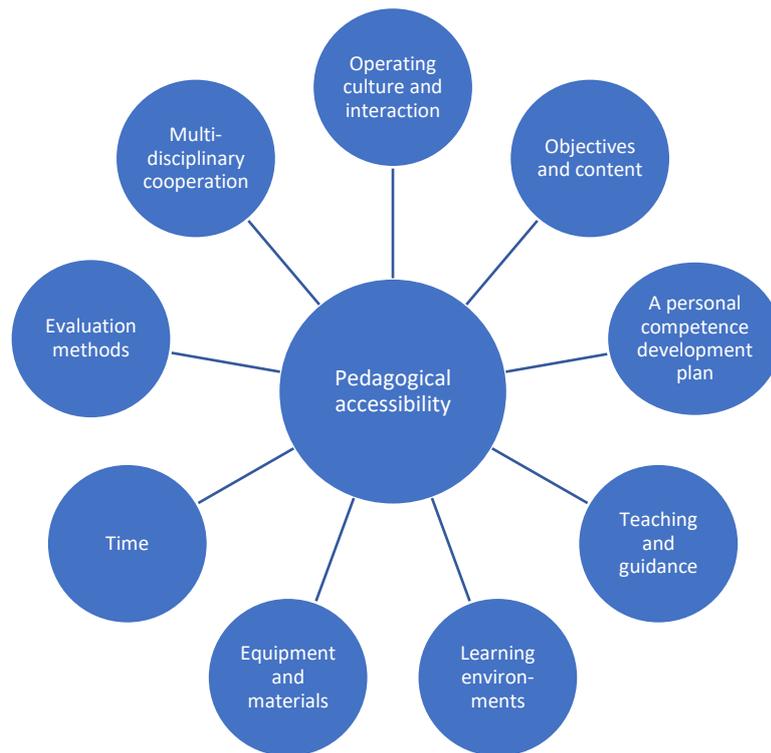
Figure 4. Physical accessibility in vocational education (adapted from Eskola, 2007, p. 21)



Pedagogical accessibility

Pedagogical accessibility (Figure 5) covers the student's ability to acquire competence and learn according to their individual abilities. This requires the teacher to identify the student's strengths and needs for support as part of the individualisation process. The teacher must set the teaching objectives in cooperation with the student so that they are realistically in line with the student's targets, as the student is an active stakeholder and an expert in their own learning. In teaching and acquiring competence, opportunities are created for students to influence what, where, how and when they study. The teaching must be planned and implemented in accordance with the students' individual objectives, and it must be ensured that the students receive the support and guidance they need. A student is motivated to acquire competence when they feel that the learning material is important, and they understand its content in relation to the profession as the whole and the requirements of working life. Different teaching methods, teaching arrangements and support measures can enable accessible learning regardless of any particular learning and study difficulties that students may face. (see also Metsola, 2008, p. 21-22; Finnish National Board of Education, 2014).

Figure 5. Pedagogical accessibility in vocational education (adapted from Metsola, 2007, p. 21)



Study guidance plays a key role in building an accessible study path. Guidance requires being aware of, identifying and taking into account factors related to support needs. The entire educational institution's personnel take part in the guidance within their own roles. Teachers motivate, encourage, support and guide students as part of their teaching. The study counsellor is particularly involved in the planning of learning, the progress of studies, and matters relating to further studies. The tasks of student welfare personnel include promoting the student's health, well-being and functional capacity together with the student.

Accessibility in teaching and guidance work

A vocational teacher requires strong pedagogical competence to meet the challenges of inclusion and accessibility. The teacher creates the framework and structures for the student's competence acquisition and for pedagogical activities. When planning their own teaching work, a vocational teacher should pay attention to making sure it is accessible to all students. (see Lignell, 2013, p. 67)

The following table (Table 1) summarises the keys to vocational teacher's competence from the perspective of accessible teaching and guidance work. Accessibility must be taken into account in

study guidance, planning of teaching, encounters with students, the activities of learning communities, different operating environments, the use of information and communication technology and, where necessary, in the provision of special support. These areas must be developed by a vocational teacher as part of an ethic of continuous learning in order to keep themselves up to date with changes in education, training, working life and society. (see also Lignell, 2013, p. 67 to 68)

Table 1. Keys to teacher's competence in accessibility in their teaching and guidance work (adapted from Lignell, 2013, p. 68)

Accessibility in teaching and guidance work	
<p>Study guidance competence</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Individual study paths ✓ Flexibility in teaching situations ✓ Different learning environments ✓ Versatile teaching and learning methods ✓ Versatile evaluation methods ✓ Career guidance ✓ Cooperation with employers 	<p>Competence in planning of teaching</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Individual student needs ✓ Different learning styles ✓ Use of different senses ✓ Learning strategies ✓ Plain language ✓ Structured teaching ✓ Equipment and materials ✓ Accessible learning environments
<p>Competence for interacting with students</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Respect for people ✓ Promoting equality ✓ Value-based interaction ✓ Language and cultural awareness ✓ Caring ✓ Supporting student's agency ✓ Gender-sensitive guidance 	<p>Competence of learning communities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Attitudes ✓ Values ✓ Professional ethics ✓ Communality ✓ Supporting student well-being ✓ Multidisciplinary cooperation ✓ Inclusion
<p>Operating environment competence</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Network-based cooperation ✓ Promoting an accessible operating environment ✓ Positive discrimination ✓ Accessibility of the physical operating environment ✓ Ensuring the suitability of tools and aids 	<p>Competence in use on information and communications technology in teaching</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Accessibility ✓ Detectability ✓ Manageability ✓ Comprehensibility ✓ Using technological aids

Competence in special pedagogy	Development competence
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Knowledge of special pedagogy ✓ Inclusion ✓ Competence in pedagogical support ✓ The ability to create together and implement new solutions ✓ Multidisciplinary cooperation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Reflectivity ✓ New pedagogical solutions ✓ Anticipating the future ✓ Updating one's competence profile ✓ Developing the operating environment ✓ Development the operating culture and attitudes

Inclusiveness is a multidimensional phenomenon, and its development has been partially slowed down by a narrow conception that it relates only to the implementation of special support. Inclusion, however, is a much broader concept that relates to equality and non-discrimination, and it features in a wide range of pedagogical solutions in vocational education and working life.

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