JUMP ALONG ! Renewing early education teachers' competences to support language and socioemotional development of diverse children

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Research aims

The 3-year JUMP ALONG intervention study, funded by the Ministry of Culture and Education from 2017 to 2020, aims to respond to new challenges in preservice and in-service teacher education in line with key priority areas of the Finnish Government (see www.minedu.fi). The preventive intervention aims at fostering early education teachers' cognitive, emotional, and motivational processes in culturally and linguistically diverse Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) settings. At present there is little scientific evidence how to optimally support teachers' professional growth to enhance children's learning (Dickinson, 2011, Melhuish et al., 2015; Pianta et al., 2009).

Theoretical and conceptual framework

The main objective of the intervention study is to explore new ways of integrating theory and practice during various phases of early education teachers' professional development. The intervention focuses on teachers' pedagogical sensitivity across multiple interactional settings in order to promote 3- to 4-year-old children's language, social and emotional competence (Hamre et al., 2014). This will be strengthened by supporting leadership and effective collaboration among multiprofessional team members (Vangrieken et al., 2015) for learning practice-oriented scientific knowledge that specifically target key developmental domains of preschoolers.

Paradigm, methodology and methods

Drawing on the socio-cultural paradigm, the effects of the intervention will be explored by following up participants across a two year period using mixed methodologies and standard methods for assessing professional competence and child development, e.g. observations (CLASS Pre-K®), self-reports (HowULearn), and stimulated recall interviews.

Longitudinal design: spring-fall-spring *N*=120
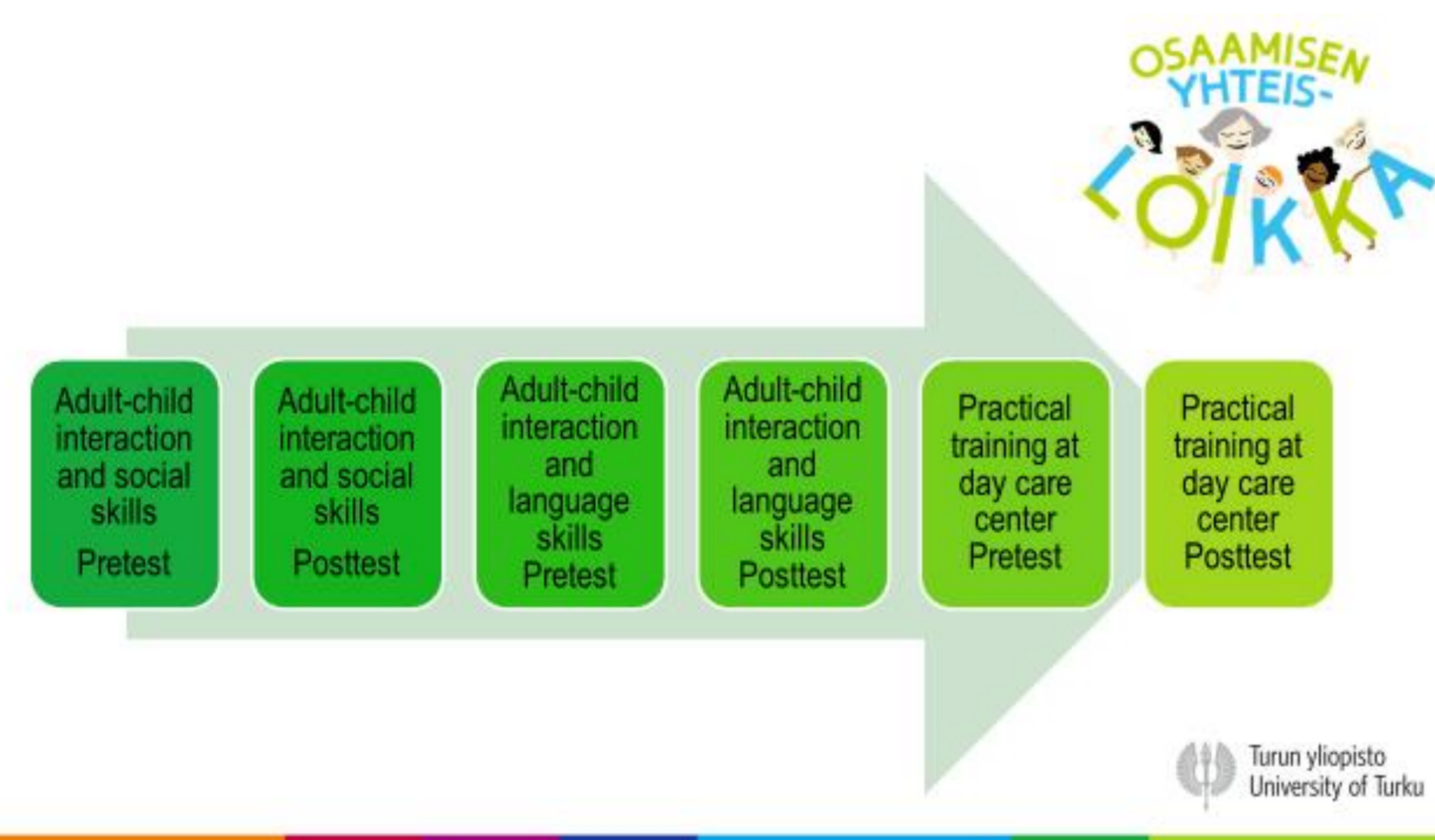
Preliminary findings

The figure shows the relationships between self-efficacy beliefs and approaches to learning among early education student teachers (*N*=130) during their first university years (for the self-report questionnaire, see Parpala & Lindblom-Ylänne, 2012; http://blogs.helsinki.fi/howulearn/). The pattern of means and correlations are comparable to previous research findings regarding motives and learning strategies (Diseth, 2011). We expect that in forthcoming path analyses these constructs mediate between student teachers' preceding and subsequent professional growth as assessed using the CLASS framework (e.g., La Paro et al., 2012).
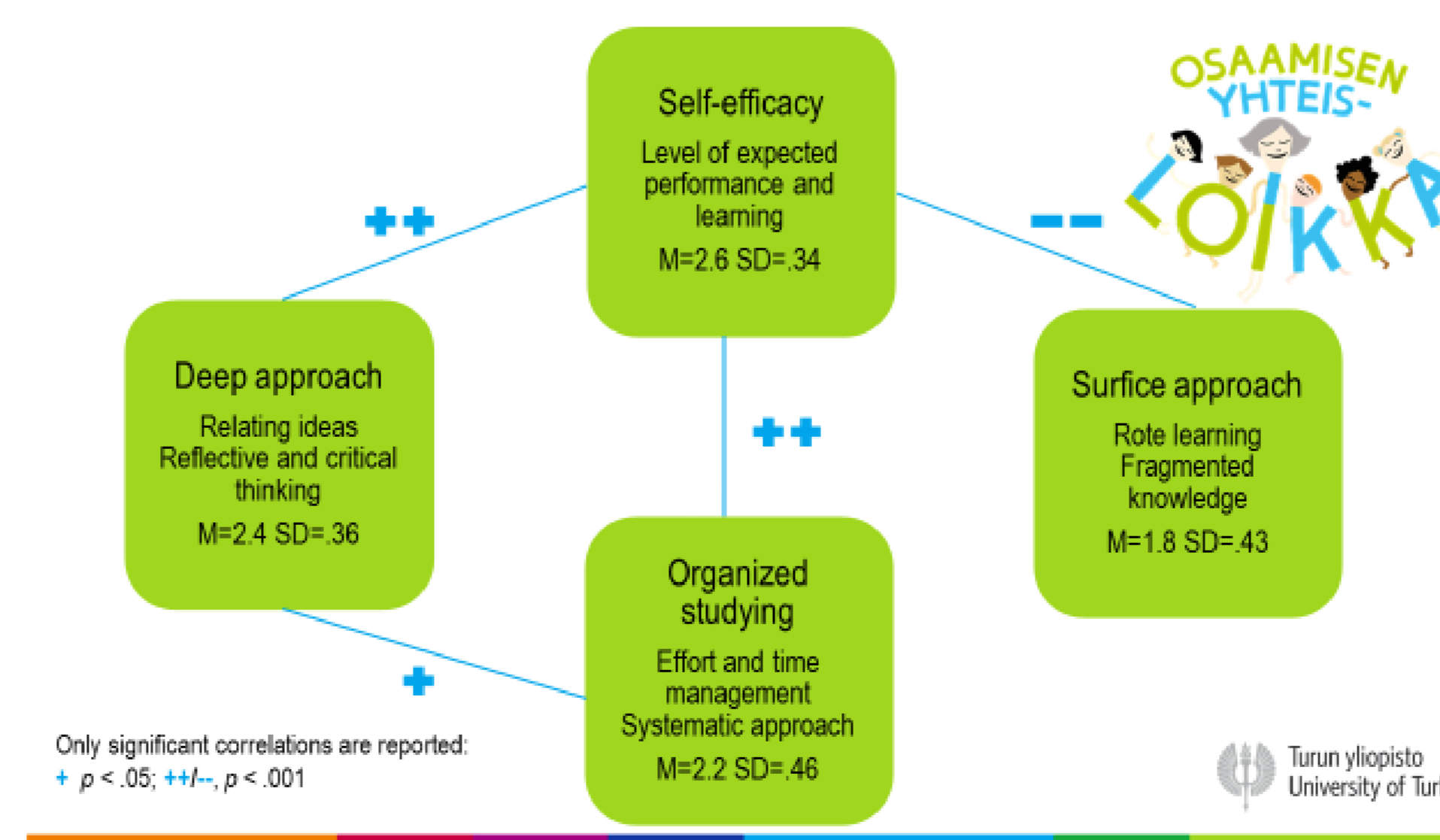
Implementation, ethical considerations, and implications

In collaboration between four universities, we have started to design multimedia materials for a web-based environment and assignments regarding reflection and mirrored dialogue (e.g. Kleinknecht & Schneider, 2013). We have piloted self-reports and different videotaped settings which stimulate self- and peer-evaluations and discussions between student teachers, their educators, and members of multiprofessional teams. Care has been taken to plan the intervention program (e.g. ethical issues concerning privacy, confidentiality, and storage) and to present the plan of implementation to the principals of day care centers located in municipalities in the south-western region of Finland. The innovations of the study has elicited national collaboration between higher education institutions and have the potential to elicit international interest in Finnish ECEC.

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Keywords

Early education teachers' professional growth and pedagogical sensitivity
Collaboration in multiprofessional teams
Promoting children's language, emotional, and social development
Supporting families