

Article

Cultural Education in Nature Through the Lens of Sámi Practitioners

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Abstract: The recent reforms in the Norwegian early childhood/primary/secondary education curriculum explicitly highlight the inclusion of Sámi perspectives across various subjects. In this context, one of several suggested educational practices is to include Sámi traditional practitioners in teaching activities. Against this backdrop, this paper explores the perspectives of five Sámi practitioners, concentrating on their experiences and pedagogical practices when engaging students of various ages and kindergarten children in Sámi culture in a nature-based setting. The study reveals the practitioners' arguments for sharing their culture and skills through such learning activities and their suggestions for inclusion in teaching practices. The qualitative-based research methodology comprises semi-structured interviews with Sámi practitioners who are involved in different cooperative projects within our region. These different practitioners offer learners the chance to engage with Sámi nature-based traditional practices by participating in activities in close collaboration with reindeer herders, *duodji* (handicraft) practitioners, coastal Sámi caretakers, and similar cultural educators in an outdoor setting. This study advocates for the significance of involving Sámi traditional practitioners and Sámi practices on all educational levels and proposes that nature-based activities are of specific value in such practices.

Keywords: Sámi culture; nature-based teaching; indigenous knowledge



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1. Introduction

Over the past few decades, the perceptions of the Sámi in both the Framework plan for kindergartens and the school curricula have undergone significant changes [1]. The recent reforms in the Norwegian early childhood/primary/secondary education curriculum have changed the way Sámi and indigenous issues are presented. Later curricula explicitly highlight the inclusion of Sámi perspectives across various subjects, both in the early childhood education (ECE) and the Norwegian school system [2]. Thus, all Norwegian children should have teachers who facilitate their knowledge about Sámi matters. Teachers across the country may face challenges when implementing this in practice [3]. One factor limiting the inclusion of Sámi perspectives seems to be a lack of knowledge about the Sámi in mainstream education [4]. Other factors could be the fear of doing anything wrong [3]. This fear might lead to increased stereotyping and exoticization. It is common that Sámi activities in kindergartens and schools are mainly limited to Sámi National Day, easily representing stereotypical, non-diverse communication about the Sámi [5].

According to this, Somby and Olsen [6] discuss how Norwegian teacher education systems should be examined to determine how they reflect the added focus on Sámi culture, and they suggest that the process of indigenization should involve inclusion. Despite challenges, teachers do have opportunities to develop teaching practices that anchor Sámi themes [7]. In this context, it is of great value to find ways to teach Sámi culture in an inclusive and culturally responsible way. One recommended educational practice is to

include Sámi traditional practitioners [8] such that the Sámi practitioners are involved in educational activities to share, teach, and communicate Sámi culture. Another proposed practice is to commit “Sámi pedagogy” [9,10]. Nature-based activities are suggested working methods to demonstrate Sámi cultural values [11–13]. Activities connected to foraging [14] and traditional Sámi cooking using natural resources [15] are also mentioned both for ECE and schools. Research on how Sámi knowledge is preserved in teacher education is so far limited [16]. Braiding Sámi pedagogy and diversity into different teacher programs is presented as an approach to this matter [17].

1.1. Sámi Pedagogy, Traditional Culture, and Values

Sámi pedagogy can be placed within the frameworks of sociocultural and cultural–historical perspectives on knowledge [3]. Sámi pedagogy is built on Sámi culture, traditional child rearing, and Sámi transmission of knowledge [10]. To implement the values of Sámi pedagogy, an understanding of these concepts is therefore necessary. Traditionally, Sámi children are reared in close connection to nature, and their cultural learning is possible with the support of an extended network of adults around the child [18]. Through activities where elders possess knowledge and guide the younger generations, knowledge, traditions, and values are transmitted within both family and community life [19]. For children of reindeer herders, the learning arenas are often outside, in nature, at the places where the various forms of work take place, in a *lávvu* (Sámi traditional tent), in houses, etc. [20]. Such a transfer of knowledge, stories, and culture and the relationship to nature through collaborative activities is commonly described as *searvelatnja* [21].

A tradition bearer in Sámi culture (*árbečeahppi*) is a person who carries on and conveys Sámi traditions, knowledge, and culture to the next generation. They can pass on oral stories, *duodji* (Sámi handicraft), traditional lifestyles (such as reindeer herding or fishing), Sámi language, and other aspects of Sámi culture. “*Árbečeahppi* is a person who is, in a profound sense, a master of traditional knowledge and skills and who is considered to have skills in his/her own field by his/her community” [22] (p. 22). Tradition bearers play a crucial role in preserving and strengthening Sámi culture and identity. Their knowledge and experiences are invaluable sources of information about Sámi history, society, and worldviews. Sámi traditional knowledge is described as *árbediehtu*. This is characterized and elucidated in various manners, encompassing both knowledge and skills. Comprehensive perspectives on knowledge and relationships with nature are also integral to this transmission process [19].

In Sámi tradition, there is no distinction made between nature (non-human-made) and culture (human-made), as humans and nature are considered equal and closely interconnected [23]. It is a Sámi value to master being in nature, for instance, through making a fire, navigating through the terrain, and handling tools [24]. The Sámi concept of *birgen* is central in this context and is further discussed by Bjøru and Solbakken [25]. Directly translated, it means to manage life in all ways [24]. In an educational context, *birgen* and *birgejummi* are understood as the ability to manage oneself in any situation, and this capability is particularly relevant for educational work in a nature-based setting [26]. Kvivesen [27] suggests that being practically involved in Sámi traditional knowledge can help to strengthen students’ connection to nature. Similarly, it is advocated for Sámi traditional knowledge as a pedagogical way to let children in ECE experience sustainable lifestyles [17]. Because a close affinity to nature is an expressed Sámi value and cultural practice, this leads us to nature-based teaching as a pedagogical approach to communicating Sámi culture.

1.2. Nature-Based Teaching and Sámi Culture

In Norwegian, non-indigenous culture there is also a strong connection to nature through the tradition of *friluftsliv*, which partly resembles different English terms, such as outdoor life and open-air activities [28]. In the educational system, the concept of *Uteskole* (outdoor school) is in Norwegian schools a frequently used concept for teaching outside of the classroom in outdoor settings, strongly influenced by the traditions of *friluftsliv* [11]. *Uteskole* is

therefore a pedagogical tool and learning area that many students will experience throughout their years of school. Therefore, further research into a more inclusive Uteskole, emphasizing the need for a special focus on cultural responsiveness as well as indigenous, particularly Sámi perspectives, is needed [11]. From this viewpoint, our study aims to contribute additional knowledge on this subject.

Warburg [29] claims there is a strong connection between traditional Sámi knowledge and the Norwegian friluftsliv practice. He discusses how views on nature, formation, and learning in the friluftsliv tradition originate from Sámi indigenous knowledge. However, there was originally no specific word for friluftsliv in Sámi languages, and the appropriateness of the term for Sámi use of nature can be debated [28,30]. Sámi culture emphasizes utilizing nature by engaging in purposeful activities, and these activities are often associated with action-oriented verbs [23]. As an example, *dolla* means campfire and *dolastit* is the associated verb “to make/have a fire”. The extensive use of the term friluftsliv might both assimilate and suppress Sámi nature culture [28]. According to these authors, friluftsliv practices may integrate and include Sámi and Norwegians into shared rural cultures. This is supported by research that indicates that Sámi educators possess an understanding of a “Sámi friluftsliv” that has clear parallels to the concept of foraging traditions and outdoor pedagogy in “Norwegian friluftsliv” [31]. Foraging practices are described as important parts of Sámi cultural values and landscape practices [32]. Thus, there seem to be entangled connections between Sámi cultural practices and the concept, understanding, and practices of friluftsliv. In this article, we will use the term *nature-based teaching* to support a wider understanding [26] of the concept of friluftsliv when adapted into the educational system. This aligns with the suggestion that the Northern Sámi words *olggonastin* (being outside in nature), *meahcástallan* (foraging activities), and *olggustállan* (doing something useful in nature) are more purposive for the Sámi cultural use of nature than the term friluftsliv [28].

Natural sciences and physical education are the subjects in the Norwegian school system that traditionally encompass the most extensive nature-based teaching. Students in natural sciences are expected to learn about Sámi traditional knowledge. Similarly, through physical education, students are expected to have acquired varied experiences in outdoor activities and cultures throughout their schooling, including activities related to Sámi culture [12]. Practical experiences are of great necessity in these matters [8]. Against this background, it is suggested that nature-based teaching and traditional Norwegian friluftsliv can be an appropriate base for engagement in Sámi culture [33,34]. This is supported by Cohn [35], who claims that incorporating indigenous ways into outdoor education will provide relevant working models within the outdoor field. He pinpoints that indigenous ways support a value-based, place-specific, and nature-centered paradigm for outdoor education. Accordingly, Nutti [36] advocates for the importance of including outdoor activities in a Sámi cultural context to secure cultural values in Sámi teacher education. This pedagogy is also highly relevant to non-Sámi educators. Kolberg and Sem [37] describe their experiences when incorporating the building of a Southern Sámi turf hut into a teacher education program. This turf hut serves as an outdoor base for indigenization of education, supporting both Sámi craft skills, cultural narratives, and cooperation with Sámi tradition bearers that could be relevant for all educational levels. Also, other studies [23,29] demonstrate how Sámi nature-based activities and the involvement of Sámi practitioners enhance the cultural understanding of students on different levels.

The Norwegian National Curriculum Regulations for Teacher Education in Practical and Aesthetic Subjects [38] concurs with this perspective, stipulating that teacher students specializing in practical and aesthetic subjects, such as physical education (PE), should be equipped to integrate practical elements from Sámi culture into their teaching. Consequently, familiarity with Sámi themes becomes pertinent for teachers engaged in subjects related to friluftsliv and other nature-based educational activities. Based on this, it seems like nature-based education may serve as an appropriate pedagogical approach to enhancing knowledge about Sámi culture through braiding of Sámi traditions and values. However, from prior studies, it is known that there is a lack of expertise and practice related

to outdoor education within schools [39]. Consequently, it is reasonable to presume that a Sámi approach to nature-based activities might also represent a fairly unfamiliar domain for PE teacher students and PE educators [40,41]. Given the significance of the Sámi culture in the Norwegian educational system, it would be of great value to identify methods that can enhance Sámi nature-based competence for educators.

1.3. Aim of the Study

Our study aims to contribute to the understanding of how to approach Sámi cultural learning both in teacher education and for teachers on various levels that use the outdoors and nature as learning contexts. In this article, we will underscore the value and importance of involving Sámi practitioners and employing nature-based, indigenous Sámi pedagogy in education. This is a crucial step to uphold the objectives concerning Sámi cultural knowledge in education in the context of the Norwegian curriculum. Our exploratory study aims to gain a deeper understanding of Sámi practitioners' perspectives on sharing and communicating their culture in a nature-based context. We delve into how these practitioners perceive their work in this area, their experiences, and their pedagogical practices. Of special interest are the practitioners' recommendations on how educators across all levels of education can engage both Sámi practitioners and the teachers themselves more effectively when teaching and disseminating Sámi culture.

2. Materials and Methods

2.1. Study Design and Conceptual Framework

Our qualitative research project was inspired by phenomenology in the sense that we were interested in the participants' perceptions of reality and how they described it [42]. This was also grounded in a view of knowledge where knowledge is perceived as socially constructed. According to Kvale and Brinkmann [42], knowledge is not an absolute or objective truth; rather, it is shaped by our social interactions and experiences. Our research approach, therefore, emphasized understanding the subjective experiences of the participants and the meanings they attach to their reality. The empirical data in our study were based on semi-structured interviews [42] with five participants, followed by a thematic analysis [43]. We aimed to explore their personal experiences and perspectives, as we consider these to be integral to the construction of knowledge. This approach allowed us to discern the nuanced ways in which the individuals perceive and interpret their world, offering deeper insight into their experiences of communicating and sharing their culture.

To ensure and uphold good quality in our research project, several strategies were employed. Reflexivity was maintained throughout the study, as we engaged in reflecting on our role and our potential influence on both data collection and analysis [44]. We ensured that all data transcripts were analyzed by both researchers, which helped in verifying the interpretations and reducing any potential bias. In addition, we obtained thick descriptions [44] from our empirical data collection. Rigor was maintained via a systematic and transparent approach to data collection and analysis. In the following sections, we give a further, detailed description of our method and our process of research.

2.2. Participating Practitioners and Ethical Considerations

We recruited five participating Northern Sámi practitioners from the county of Finnmark, northern Norway for this study, hereafter referred to as P1–P5. All of them were chosen from previous collaborations or personal relations. They are all, in different ways, engaging groups as students of various ages and kindergarten children in the Sámi culture. Four of the participants have a close affinity to Sámi reindeer husbandry, while one of them has a more distant relationship to the reindeer herding culture. Coastal culture is represented, and both women and men are represented. They are all, in different ways, engaging with both Sámi and non-Sámi visitors in their nature-based environment.

This study was approved by the Norwegian Centre of Research Data (SIKT) with specific considerations for engaging minorities in research. The participants gave their

written consent regarding their participation, and they were aware of the focus on indigenous perspectives in this study. The study was conducted with a culturally sensitive approach [45] where we, as researchers, had some previous knowledge of the field but were also aware of our lack of knowledge and were open to and curious about new insights. After the analysis, all data were anonymized to ensure the participants' privacy.

The authors of this article both identify as being non-Sámi, non-indigenous researchers. In research on Sámi matters, it is important to take into consideration the overarching elements of self-reflection, reciprocity, respect, and dialogue. The research must benefit the Sámi people, and there must be awareness of the heterogeneity among the Sámi people [46]. In our research, we have considered and paid attention to these elements, and we have done our best to conduct our research in a respectful way.

2.3. Semi-Structured Interviews

To obtain insights into the participants' overall experiences and reflections, qualitative data were collected from five semi-structured interviews [42] in the Norwegian language. Both authors conducted the interviews, with one being the main interviewer. The interviews were performed both physically and digitally. Two of the interviews were conducted at UiT The Arctic University of Norway two of them conducted in the homes of the participants, and one conducted digitally, using Microsoft Teams. They lasted around 60 min. The interviews were based on open-ended questions with a focus on experiences and reflections on the participant's practice of sharing Sámi culture. The interview guide involved questions about motivation, engagement, pedagogical approaches, educational practices, etc. Examples of questions asked are the following: "How did you initially become involved in conveying your culture? When did you start?" Another example is the following: "Can you tell us about your pedagogical thoughts and what you think is an effective approach in conveying the Sámi culture?" Throughout the interviews, we posed supplementary questions to enhance our understanding and delve deeper into the subjects discussed with the participants. Consequently, we obtained rich, thick descriptions [42] of the participants' experiences. The interviews were recorded and automatically transcribed using an online application approved by our institution. Thereafter, we performed manual checking of the transcripts and a manual analysis.

2.4. Data Analysis

The transcripts from the interviews were analyzed using concepts from collective qualitative analysis [47] where the authors worked together during the analysis to create a common understanding of the data content. The transcripts were labeled thematically and analyzed in the course of several rounds to refine the results, as suggested by Braun and Clarke [43]. The analysis process started with coding the participants' statements into three main categories based on the aim of the study. The categories we created were the following: *pedagogical practices*, *arguments for sharing Sámi culture*, and *experiences from sharing practices*. The category pedagogical practices was used when we coded instances where participants talked about their own way of sharing Sámi culture or their suggestions for how knowledge about Sámi culture should be shared or taught. The category arguments for sharing was used when we coded instances where participants mentioned any motivation or personal background for their sharing practice. When we coded instances where the participants described any experience from their interaction with different learners, we used the wider category experiences from sharing practices. Further analysis of the three initial main categories was conducted using a "bottom-up" method inspired by thematic analysis [43]. This process led to the identification of various topics that emerged in and spanned across the initial categories. Through a collective qualitative analysis [47], we refined these into four revised themes, which we now use to present our results.

3. Results

This section presents the results from our data analysis. In the analysis process, we identified four joint themes, some of which contained sub-themes. The first theme is “The Sámi way” of teaching and learning, the second is communicating Sámi culture, the third is Sámi traditional activities and values, and the last theme we present is named Sámi cultural diversity.

3.1. “The Sámi Way” of Teaching and Learning

This first theme reflects the content and meaning of the pedagogical/didactical methods and the methods for teaching, learning, and upbringing that are characteristic of the practices among the participants, named “the Sámi way” by one of the participants. “The Sámi way” comprises the methods that the participants have personal experience of from their own learning and upbringing, as well as their preferred method when sharing and communicating their culture and traditions to other learners, such as students and tourists. The participants in our study all emphasized “The Sámi way” of learning and teaching as an important foundation for their work on sharing their culture, and they would all prefer to teach Sámi culture by using “The Sámi way”. That means incorporating methods that are promoting independence, active participation, learning by doing and storytelling. The following are the key results describing “The Sámi way”, as they emerged through our analysis.

3.1.1. Independence

The participants all discussed how a crucial aspect of learning is individual thinking, figuring out things by yourself, problem solving, and gaining your own experiences to learn what works best and what does not work. For example, in the upbringing of children, you should not assist them with everything and complete tasks for them. The objective is to be independent and to manage things on your own, and, as P2 says, “That is Sámi pedagogy, if you want something you have to do it yourself!” Another primary element in “The Sámi way” is engaging in practical work from an early age to develop one’s skills and independence. In the discussions with the participants, they emphasized the significance of the extended family, including close relatives. This extended family plays a significant role in a child’s upbringing, providing an environment where children can observe and learn from elders. As the children grow older and mature, their participation and involvement in actual work increase, something that was mentioned by several participants. The sense of achievement and mastery derived from successful task completion are also crucial. It is essential for children to be attentive and to learn in an active, self-driven manner, as P3 states. P5 emphasizes the personal confidence and satisfaction derived from “knowing that I can cope and survive”. Here, they referred to *birgen* or *birgejupmi* as being self-sufficient, coping, and being independent, which are valued characteristics of a Sámi individual. These traits reflect the importance of resilience and autonomy within the Sámi culture.

3.1.2. Learning by Doing

The principle of “learning by doing” is a fundamental tenet in “The Sámi way”. All participants reiterate and underline this approach to learning and teaching in various ways. For instance, P5 asserts, “Learning by doing, using the senses and their hands, doing practical things and not theorizing”. Furthermore, P5 seeks to set a positive example, saying, “I try to be a good example, to bring people out in nature and talk about place names, traditional practices—then they hopefully will remember better what they have practiced”. This underscores the participants’ statements regarding the importance of practical learning and the potential for better retention of what has been practiced. P4 illustrates the principle of learning by doing and through experience by providing an example of teaching a child about the sharpness of a knife. Instead of instructing the child with, “Do not touch the knife, it is sharp!”, P4 informs the child, “The knife is sharp, you have to be careful with your fingers if you want to play with the knife”. If the child happens

to be cut, P4 responds, “Then they learn that it may not be OK to play with the knife”. This approach highlights the importance of experiential learning in their pedagogy and the idea that, sometimes, learning is achieved through the consequences of our actions.

3.1.3. Storytelling

Learning through storytelling is described as an old tradition and a method for teaching and knowledge sharing in “The Sámi way”. As P3 noted, “We don’t have a written history. No. We have an oral history. When we sit in the *lávvu* and at the fireplace in the evening, we don’t see each other, but we can hear the stories being told”. All participants discussed this aspect, providing various examples of stories used and the contexts in which they are shared. This practice underscores the importance of oral tradition in preserving culture and imparting wisdom, and that local sites and nature settings are used. P4 provided an example of using storytelling as a safety measure by keeping children away from potential dangers: “If you live by the river, you don’t want the kids to fall into the river, so you tell them that there is a *stállu* (mythological, scary creature) living there”, which illustrates how storytelling can serve a practical purpose (in this case, ensuring the safety of children). The narratives can sometimes be intimidating or be perceived as warnings about the consequences of certain actions. This example further emphasizes the versatility of storytelling in “The Sámi way”, serving not only as a teaching tool but also as a means of safeguarding.

3.1.4. Relation to Time

The participants also discussed how they apply a more relaxed approach to time, which is a characteristic aspect of some parts of Sámi culture. To illustrate this, P5 humorously stated, “If you are in such a hurry, why didn’t you come yesterday?” On a more practical note, the same participant described a preferred method of planning for teaching a group, emphasizing flexibility and adaptability: “Not being so strict on time and all that. . . Consider the weather, adapt to the circumstances and to be flexible on the activities, maybe we do it today even though we were supposed to do it tomorrow. . . We still can make it work, at the end of the day we have done what we were supposed to do, I hope” (P5). This approach underscores the value of adaptability and responsiveness to changing circumstances in “The Sámi way”, alongside the importance of accomplishing set tasks, albeit not necessarily within rigid timeframes.

3.2. Communicating Sámi Culture

When asked about their initial experiences of sharing and communicating their culture, all participants recalled some form of cultural sharing since childhood. Some mentioned selling souvenirs of Sámi *duodji* to tourists as their first introduction to cultural sharing. With extensive experience in this area, all participants expressed significant pride in their culture and derived pleasure from teaching and communicating their culture to students of various ages. As P4 enthusiastically stated, “I like it. It is fun!” and “I enjoy that they ask about everything they want to know when they are visiting! They are here to learn and I encourage them to ask questions”. The participants shared several stories about the feedback they have received from students who have participated in different projects. These stories included feelings of mastery, learning something completely new, the formation of lifelong friendships, and so on. This feedback clearly holds great value for the participants, reinforcing the notion that they are doing something valuable by sharing and communicating their culture. Some of the participants also mentioned that practicing and preserving old traditions and making them accessible for people to learn is important both for themselves and for the local community.

P4 stressed the importance of teaching about Sámi culture, noting that “Back in the days, people hardly knew that the Sámi existed, and the only thing they did know was that the Sámi wore *gákti* (traditional Sámi clothing) and lived in *lávvu* (traditional tent)”. This may still be the case for some; as P1 reflected: “I sometimes think about how little

knowledge there is on the Sámi, on reindeer herding in general and how things are done. It is almost scary to think about". This lack of knowledge also served as a significant motivating factor for the participants.

All participants ideally preferred to conduct teaching in their own local communities or places. The participants believed that this approach ensures the ability to share their culture and activities authentically. By directly involving Sámi practitioners in the education process, the authenticity of the cultural representation is preserved, and teaching is conducted in a way the participants found to be the ideal. This, in turn, fosters an accurate understanding and appreciation of the Sámi culture among students. This direct approach necessitates students visiting the participants' outdoor-based locations to gain the most authentic experiences and to immerse themselves in the culture and activities related to the place. The participants also asserted that the best way to learn about Sámi culture is to be taught using "The Sámi way" as much as possible. This approach reinforces the importance of direct and immersive experiences for understanding and appreciating Sámi culture. The Sámi language is unknown to most non-Sámi students. Regarding the topic of the students learning some of the Sámi words in this context, the participants expressed divergent opinions. One participant was clear that it is not necessary for non-Sámi to learn the language. On the other hand, other participants believed it would be beneficial for the students to learn some words in Sámi. This divergence may reflect varied views about the importance and necessity of language learning for cultural understanding.

Given that the participants' ideal learning context was their own local place in the community, we discussed the fact that many students in Norway, who, according to the curriculum, should learn about Sámi culture, do not have access to an authentic Sámi practitioner or a local Sámi context in which to learn. While the participants had clear ideas about the ideal teaching context, as described previously, they acknowledged that the alternative "second best" approach is for teachers to ensure their pedagogical and didactic methods have been reviewed and validated by Sámi practitioners. This ensures the use of "The Sámi way" in teaching, and the quality of the knowledge taught is then as high as possible. The quality assurance of the knowledge and information is vital, as P3 stated: "[...] information is very important. If the information is correct it is an important tool for us to live together". When the discussion went on, P3 reflected further on this quality assurance, and stated, "It is very important. Then we may implement this 'not about us but with us'. However, the 'with us' does not necessarily imply physical presence with us".

The participants encouraged teachers aiming to teach Sámi culture to adopt a humble approach demonstrating cultural sensitivity and a search for knowledge. P5 stated that when starting to teach in this field, it is recommended to begin with a few elements, rather than attempting to cover everything, as the culture contains many different aspects and elements. Some of the participants expressed challenges concerning the lack of learning resources for teachers entering this area. As P5 pointed out, "... the government must also do their part in securing resources for teaching and qualification of the teachers". The creation of short films, online teaching from Sámi practitioners, and similar resources were also suggested by the participants as valuable additions to the pool of available learning resources.

3.3. Sámi Traditional Activities and Values

The participants predominantly discussed their teaching of traditional activities, but they also highlighted the attitudes and respect for nature they aim to instill in learners. Knowledge and skill development in the preservation of natural resources for self-sufficiency, as well as crafts, were important pedagogical approaches for the participants, which are connected to "The Sámi way". The traditional activities and skills imparted by the participants included reindeer herding, harvesting natural resources both inland and by the coast, preserving reindeer and natural resources for food, creating clothing and other necessities, and the traditional use of a *lávvu*. The following sections present our findings in greater detail on these elements and the different activities discussed with the participants.

3.3.1. Reindeer Herding

Reindeer herding is a significant cultural marker often associated with the Sámi people. Several participants involved students in practical activities related to their actual work of reindeer herding. These activities can span a single day or several days, with students staying outdoors, observing, and working alongside the reindeer herders in different ways. P2 asserted that “Even though Sámi culture is diverse, reindeer herding is a vital part of the culture, both when it comes to preserving the herding business itself, but also preserving the Sámi language, traditions and knowledge”. This statement underscores the multifaceted importance of reindeer herding within the Sámi culture—it is not only a job and a way of life but also a means of sustaining language, traditions, and knowledge.

Within this context, students participate in actual activities associated with reindeer herding, such as preparing for gathering the herd in large fences, herding the pack of reindeer, recognizing the ear-markings, and selecting the animals that are going to be butchered and slaughtered. This work can be strenuous for inexperienced students, said P3, but, as P4 pointed out, “they learn quickly, and they get that experience”. It is crucial for students to be active and participate to gain the most authentic learning experience. Health and safety issues are significant concerns when students engage in work with the animals considering the strength and speed of the reindeer and the fact that students often lack prior experience working closely with large animals. Therefore, P3 emphasized that students should not feel pressured to partake in the butchering and slaughtering of the animals, as this can be sensitive for some individuals. The participants focused on the vast amount of knowledge attainable through working in close affinity with the reindeer herd. This includes understanding the detailed processes of skinning and butchering the animal, the reasons behind specific methods to preserve meat and skin for future products and *duodji*, and the various products a reindeer can provide.

Some participants also expressed the belief that actively engaging in the work provides students with a deeper understanding and respect for the entire reindeer herding industry and what it actually takes to work with the reindeer. P4 highlighted that herders work hard under all kinds of weather conditions and at all hours of the day, and this is an experience the students get when participating in the work. P3 believes it is essential to educate others about reindeer herding and to “create ambassadors” and aim to use the teaching opportunity to disseminate information and foster understanding about reindeer herding. For the participants, it is crucial that the students partake in the actual work to gain as much insight as possible into what it takes to work with reindeer. This, stated P1, includes understanding the herders’ knowledge about nature and reindeer and what it requires to manage and care for the reindeer herd.

3.3.2. Utilizing Nature’s Resources

Sharing the traditional usage of natural resources, such as fishing, berry picking, creating crafts from natural elements, including *duodji*, and similar activities, was also important to the participants. “These are also Sámi traditions”, as P3 stated and this was deeply ingrained in most of the participants. P5 talked about their upbringing and the relationship with nature, explaining how “all seasons have their doings and activities”. It is evident that P5 thinks that “All trips should have a purpose [. . .] I am raised in that way so when I go for a walk in nature, I always look for special trees, burls, berries, sedges or similar”. Learning about the use of natural resources, such as “how to make tea, how to make your own fishing equipment and that nature itself can be a pharmacy” (P1), is knowledge that the participants claimed can foster engagement and fascination among students. Sustainability is also significant in this context. P1 underlined that understanding how to create useful things from natural resources can engage students in discussions about sustainability.

When it comes to teaching Sámi craft, *duodji*, “The Sámi way” is also in this context the preferred teaching method, according to P5. Also, P4 and P2 were explicit about how *duodji* should be taught—as P4 described: “It would be practical and show the students things,

maybe make something like a leather bag for food for trips. Make things they could find useful". P2 provided another example of students creating their own fishing equipment or needle house, items that the student can use. This practice of teaching *duodji* not only equips students with practical skills; the participants believed it also instills a sense of pride in what they have made, encouraging them to value and care for it.

Almost all participants discussed how they incorporate the preparation of traditional Sámi food into their sharing and communication of the culture. Teaching how to preserve reindeer and utilize all parts of the animal that can be used in meals is an important Sámi tradition and skill among reindeer herders and their families. P4 talked about the joy of having students participate in preparing *biđus* (reindeer stew) and making blood pancakes and other foods based on different parts of the reindeer. P4 clearly stated that it is enjoyable for students to experience how both the meat and other parts of the animal, such as the intestines, blood, and fat, can be used to make good food: "They think it is exciting to taste all these new flavors" (P4).

3.3.3. Knowledge of the Setup and Use of the *Lávvu*

The traditional Sámi tent, the *lávvu*, is often used when the participants host learners in their own locations in the landscape. The use of the *lávvu* in communicating Sámi culture is enhanced as an available and essential means by the participants. P4, P2, and P3 discussed learning about the traditional use of the *lávvu*, how it is set up and used, and how the family and people visiting have designated places to sit. They also discussed the tradition of specific locations within the *lávvu*, such as where the kitchen is, where the dog should be, and other rules when using the *lávvu*. This also includes storytelling related to, for example, safety surrounding how to behave around the fireplace, as P4 described: "Children should not poke with a stick in the fire, then I tell them it could make their reindeer-calves go blind".

3.4. Sámi Cultural Diversity

From our discussions, we see that the participants aim for learners to gain a deeper understanding of the diversity of Sámi culture. In their teaching, it is important for them to be supportive and inclusive and to make learners aware of the various cultural expressions within the Sámi culture. Even though cultural identity markers may not be as visible in some Sámi contexts and cultural expressions as in others, P5 strongly asserted that "there are many ways of being Sámi" and that it is important to communicate this diversity. This notion of diverse Sámi identities was also emphasized by P4, who stated, "Sámi is not just reindeer herding, and Sámi is not only the ones that have reindeer. No. There are all sorts of Sámi, sea Sámi, forest Sámi and reindeer herding Sámi".

4. Discussion

Our study focuses on the perspectives of five Sámi practitioners by exploring their thoughts and reflections on sharing and communicating their culture and traditional activities in a nature-based context. We have examined the methods these practitioners employ to disseminate their culture, as well as their views and reflections on Sámi knowledge being taught by non-Sámi teachers and outside of a traditional Sámi location and context. In the following section, we discuss our findings related to the aim of the study, and we discuss some potential implications

4.1. "The Sámi Way"—The Core Pedagogical Approach to Teaching

Regardless of who imparts Sámi knowledge, our findings suggest that "The Sámi way" of teaching and learning is the didactic approach that should be adopted. As depicted in the literature, "The Sámi way", being the Sámi pedagogical method or Sámi pedagogy [10,13], is characterized by its holistic, practical, and active nature, which is closely intertwined with the environment [18,21]. This pedagogy holds an inherent value with regard to nature, human perspective, and how things should be conducted. Being educated in this

type of pedagogy will provide additional value and will also teach the culture through the method of teaching. The transmission of traditional knowledge and skills (*árbediehtu*), independence, self-sufficiency (*birgen/birgejupmi*) [25], and the use of storytelling are integral components of “The Sámi way” [18,21]. Our analysis emphasizes the importance of a comprehensive understanding of these elements in gaining insight into this unique approach and perspective on Sámi pedagogical practices. The depth and breadth of such an understanding are critical for fully appreciating and effectively applying these practices. Another facet in our results is the collaborative nature of all learning activities discussed with the practitioners. This aligns with *searvelatnja* [21] in Sámi pedagogy. In comparison, cooperative learning is a frequently used method of organizing learning in outdoor contexts, in friluftsliv education, and in nature-based learning activities [48]. Collaborating and student active learning approaches when, for example, planning friluftsliv excursions and doing practical tasks have proven their value in enhancing learning and understanding [49]. By emphasizing this as also being a Sámi tradition, the Sámi way of organizing activities can also be braided [50] into the learning context.

Teaching Sámi topics in a genuine Sámi context will provide the learners with deep insight into and experiences of many aspects of the culture [13]. The principle of “Not about us but with us”, as stated by one of the participants, ensures the preservation of cultural authenticity and the quality of the knowledge shared and taught. The participants have a genuine understanding of the culture, as they have been raised and are living in the culture themselves. Our analysis reveals that doing the teaching themselves in their local context is the preferred practice and an ideal for the participants. Where this is not possible, the participants do prioritize the accuracy and qualitative correctness of Sámi content. They stress the importance of disseminating this knowledge to the majority population, aiming to educate individuals and create ambassadors with a deeper understanding of the culture’s breadth and diversity, as also suggested by [4]. Given that Sámi culture and knowledge are integrated into the school curriculum for all students [2], our study indicates that not everyone has access to local Sámi practitioners. Excursions and teaching in such an environment may not be available for all students in Norway. As a result, teachers with non-Sámi backgrounds and/or lacking access to local Sámi practitioners might find themselves teaching Sámi culture [3]. This situation poses one of the significant challenges in disseminating knowledge to the broader school community and teacher education institutions. Also, the current state of available knowledge and learning resources presents a challenge to teacher education and teachers in meeting these requirements. Even in the absence of Sámi practitioners during teaching, they can still play a role in verifying and ensuring that the method used, and the content delivered, are accurate. This involvement would serve as a method for quality assurance and include the Sámi practitioners in the process.

Understanding the Sámi language may pose a challenge when gaining insight into Sámi matters. The Sámi language is a vital part of the culture, and reindeer herding is especially important for maintaining the language [51]. Many written resources are only in Sámi. Language skills may be both a barrier and a resource when sharing and learning about Sámi culture. Although there were some divergent opinions among the practitioners in this regard, gaining understanding and learning some Sámi words and phrases can also be included in the learning situation and give insight into the culture. The Sámi language is an official language in Norway. This status is reflected in the country’s school curricula, which contain statements indicating that knowledge about the official languages in Norway is part of what students are expected to learn. This means students are encouraged to gain familiarity with, and understanding of, the Sámi language as part of their comprehensive education [52].

For teachers aspiring to educate students about and in Sámi culture, it is strongly recommended to acquaint themselves with the characteristics of the desired pedagogical approach. This understanding will make it more feasible for teachers to utilize pedagogical elements and educational thinking that align as closely as possible with “The Sámi way”.

One of the key aspects when individuals develop their Sámi knowledge and teaching is to approach the task with both humility and cultural sensitivity. Humility relates to acknowledging one's own level of expertise, while cultural sensitivity concerns reflection on Sámi history, the potential for exoticizing the culture, and the propagation of stereotypical notions [53]. Sámi culture exhibits a considerable degree of diversity, as highlighted by our participants. The languages, traditions, and lifestyles differ across regions [53]. Communicating this diversity is of paramount importance to the participants in the study and is considered a key element in communicating the culture [7]. While practical teaching may only cover a small portion of the culture, it is still crucial to discuss and highlight the diversity within it to create an understanding of the many facets of Sámi traditions and culture.

4.2. Nature-Based Activities to Promote Sámi Knowledge

To share and communicate Sámi traditions and knowledge, this study highlights several activities that often take center stage. Our participants are themselves engaged in such activities, all of which are well-suited to a learning context in the outdoors and in a natural environment. This supports suggestions about including outdoor activities in a Sámi cultural context for teacher education programs [36] and including indigenous land-based Sámi pedagogy [13] to ensure a deeper understanding of Sámi culture for all children.

The traditional use of the *lávvu* (traditional Sámi tent) serves as a setting and activity that can incorporate many elements of the culture. This way of living has long-standing traditions. Many educational institutions have access to a *lávvu*, and the modern ones are a commonly used item in friluftsliv and nature-based activities in Norway. Kindergartens, schools, and tourist operators often use this Sámi tent as a gathering place and as a place to cook and serve meals and engage in conversation. There are many opportunities to weave in stories, artifacts, and knowledge about Sámi culture related to the use of the *lávvu*, much like traditional learning occurs in the Sámi culture [20]. A Sámi turf hut project at Nord University [37] was described as a possible cradle for knowing, creating, and learning based on South Sámi knowledge, and the use of a *lávvu* in an educational context can serve a similar purpose. Utilizing the context of the *lávvu* can make stories, Sámi mythology, and everyday life in a Sámi community more tangible for learners. It can spark conversations and activities that provide more insight and knowledge.

Sámi food traditions and outdoor cooking are activities that many practitioners employ when teaching Sámi culture. Gathering around food preparation, gaining knowledge about how typical Sámi dishes are made, and hearing the stories associated with them provide practical insight into the culture. Food traditions related to the fisheries at the coast, reindeer herding, and gathering culture contribute to enhancing students' understanding. This understanding extends to food traditions, how reindeer and other ingredients can be utilized, and how these practices can be viewed from a sustainability perspective, as also suggested by [15]. Earlier studies have shown that traditional Sámi cooking activities are engaging students [34,50].

Different harvesting/foraging practices also engage students and provide insight into the culture. The participants mention activities related to the harvesting and use of *gámasuoidni* as practical and useful knowledge to possess. *Gámasuoidni* is dried sedges traditionally used in footwear to stay warm and dry, and it requires a process of harvesting and preparation before it can be used. This traditional activity is suitable for teacher students to gain practical insight into the Sámi language, explore inquiry learning, and gain hands-on experience in the tradition [8]. Traditional harvesting of edible resources from nature is mentioned. Foraging practice is a shared culture between Sámi and Norwegian culture [31] and may lead both to cultural understanding, cultural sustainability [54], and nature connectedness among children [55] as well as adults.

The use of nature as a learning arena is highlighted in several subjects in the Norwegian school system. Natural environments are relatively easily accessible in Norway, and the

use of nature-based teaching can promote practical learning, exploration, physical activity, and learning about sustainability and environmental considerations [11]. Our study shows that the use of nature and natural resources is important for conveying Sámi culture, and the inclusion and braiding of Sámi themes [50] in this type of education should be emphasized in both teacher education, in the schools and in ECE. The methods should incorporate a culturally sensitive approach that aligns with Sámi pedagogy and involves active participation from Sámi practitioners. Such an approach respects and acknowledges the rich Sámi culture and heritage and ensures that it is accurately and appropriately incorporated into the Norwegian education system.

4.3. Limitations of the Study

This study, while providing valuable insights, has certain limitations that should be acknowledged. These limitations arise from both the qualitative method employed and the content of the study. To address the potential subjectivity inherent in qualitative research, we employed strategies as described in the Materials and Methods section. Regarding the content and results of the study, the language and the translations may pose a limitation. Four of the participants have Northern Sámi as their mother tongue, and even if they speak quite fluent Norwegian, it might be that they would express themselves better in Sámi. The language translation made from Norwegian to English may also have influenced the interpretation of the results. In addition, we acknowledge that Northern Sámi reindeer husbandry is strongly represented among the participants, and this might contribute to a slightly biased understanding of Sámi culture. Despite the mentioned limitations, we believe that the study provides valuable insights that contribute to the existing body of knowledge.

5. Conclusions and Implications

Our study indicates that when it comes to teaching and sharing Sámi culture, practitioners ideally prefer to do this themselves within an authentic and genuine Sámi context. Where this is not possible, a valuable alternative is to use qualified teachers who have acquired knowledge and can employ Sámi pedagogy and methods in their teaching. We argue that outdoor, nature-based settings are highly suitable for learning about Sámi culture, as many of the practices and activities are closely linked to nature and require activity and practical work. Braiding and including Sámi pedagogy and culture into existing nature-based teaching appears to be a beneficial strategy for enhancing the inclusion of Sámi culture in both teacher education and school instruction.

The implications for teacher education involve instructing teacher students in both the pedagogical understanding of “The Sámi way” and knowledge of traditional Sámi activities. The students should also learn about the history and objectives of this approach and how to incorporate it into their teaching. We recommend that teachers and educators explore this approach.

Another implication of our study underscores the necessity for further research to strengthen knowledge and understanding of how to teach and what to convey when it comes to sharing Sámi culture in a culturally sensitive and inclusive manner, particularly when carried out by teachers with non-Sámi backgrounds. This also includes the need for increased availability of quality-assured resources for teaching Sámi culture.

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