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# **Kielikeskus tutkii 5**

**Mike Nelson (toim.)**

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# **Kielikeskus tutkii**

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## Foreword

As we all know, the corona virus changed a lot of plans in March 2020, and in turn it affected our teachers' ability to work on anything else but surviving the overnight change to teaching online with all the challenges that brought. Once teachers and students began their return to campus, and life 'normalized' our thoughts returned to publishing. Thus, Kielikeskus tutkii 5 was rescheduled for autumn 2023. In this latest journal we present seven new articles on a broad range of topics related to language centre teaching. The themes reflect more traditional aspects of our teaching and the changing times we have gone through. The scope of the articles ranges from the role of language and communication skills in supporting future careers, to how Swedish is being used in the modern workplace to the expectations of students of Swedish at university. The changing nature of the language centre as a workplace is represented by articles on learning objectives for the digital age, and on the experiences of student teachers during the corona years. Cultural issues are explored in relation to exchange students' experiences of Finland and we also hear the student voice, from the Spanish perspective.

In the first article, Chell and Raita discuss the use of guest speakers in the EAP/ESP classroom to help first-year students bridge their studies with future careers and envision future possibilities in their field. The aim of their project was to demonstrate the role and importance of language and communication skills for future academic research or careers, and to explore the impact of guest speakers on students'

feelings of connectedness, community, and their ability to bridge university experiences with future possibilities.

Kuosa, Åberg and Lindroos then report on their research project SVAR (Svenska i arbetslivet), the aim of which is to gather current information about the use of Swedish in the workplace through surveys and interviews targeting Finnish-speaking respondents. The project involves researchers and teachers from the University of Turku who are interested in how Swedish is used in the workplace and as a specialized language and aims to use the knowledge generated to develop specialized language studies in Swedish at both at the University of Turku and potentially also other universities and Universities of Applied Science. The project aims to contribute to bilingualism in Finland and support language policy discussions and curriculum planning.

Nelson and Raitaniemi researched learning objectives for the digital age and their application in course planning and curricula development. They report on a survey conducted of language centre teachers to discover their perceptions of learning objectives in a digital environment. These objectives were categorized into five principal areas: skills, meta-skills, knowledge, secondary learning objectives, and the affective domain. They found a clear disparity between the perceived importance of digital learning objectives by teachers and their actual implementation in course descriptions. The authors highlight the importance of communication skills and digital social skills as learning objectives in the online environment and offer examples of them from the 2digi2 website.

In her article, Numminen investigates the thoughts, expectations, and concerns of university students regarding the mandatory Swedish courses at the University of Turku, with the intention of improving teaching and pedagogy for future courses. The focus is on understanding the students' attitudes and language choices in describing their thoughts about the course, as well as their expectations and fears.

The paper also explores whether there are differences in the language used by students in their responses and if it has any impact on their attitudes towards Swedish and motivation for the course. The goal is to create a positive learning environment that supports students through external motivation, such as learning methods, deadlines, and feedback, as well as internal motivation by allowing them to influence activities and tasks and achieve set goals. Numminen highlights the ongoing effort to improve teaching methods and encourage positive learning, leading to improved knowledge of the Swedish language.

Bridget Palmer looks at the experiences of student teachers during the transition to online teaching in the spring of 2020. Her research focuses on understanding how student teachers adapted to the challenges and uncertainties of online teaching and the lessons they learned from this experience. The paper also aims to highlight the importance of cooperation and collaboration among student teachers and their colleagues during the stressful period of online teaching.

Jeremy Palmer's article explores the experiences of exchange students with Finnish language and culture in a major university in Finland. The research adopts a simplified qualitative methodology based on thematic networks to investigate the exit questionnaires and present the most common themes related to Finnish language and Finnish culture. In doing so Palmer aims to provide a snapshot of how exchange students experienced the language and culture in Finland.

In the final article, we hear a student's perspective. Vila Rosas explores the didactics of gamification in language learning and the development of intercultural competence in the classroom. The paper focuses on the effects of gamified learning environments on students' motivation in Spanish as a Second Foreign Language. It presents a proposal that incorporates an escape room activity based on the Prado Museum to promote language learning, cultural understanding, and collaboration among students. Vila Rosas reports on her teaching



ideas that seek to provide a dynamic, challenging, and enjoyable learning experience and that encourage active participation and increase learners' motivation and engagement. These methods, she argues, benefit learners from diverse cultural backgrounds, different age groups, and individuals with varying language goals and motivations.

In all, we present a detailed and diverse look at the work we do here at the University of Turku Centre for Language and Communication Studies. It has been a pleasure working on this latest volume and again, we hope you enjoy it.

Mike Nelson

Turku, December 2023

# **Guest speakers in the EAP/ESP classroom: a tool for bridging engineering first-year studies with possible futures**

**Geraldine Chell and Kelly Raita University of Turku**

## **1. Introduction**

The first year of studies often poses challenges for undergraduate students as they grapple with connecting coursework and future careers. In Finland, many programmes mandate English for Specific Purposes (ESP) classes even though students typically write their final thesis in their mother tongue. This discrepancy between the predominant language of study and the required English courses can lead to a lack of motivation among students on English courses, as they question the courses' relevance to their prospective careers or studies. To address this challenge, the practice of 'bridging' (Russell et al., 2014; Favier et al., 2021) has become commonplace. Bridging incorporates, for example, inviting guest speakers to a course. Numerous studies have extolled the benefits of this practice for all participants, underscoring the influence that guest speakers wield on strengthening the connections between instructors and students and aligning student needs with course learning outcomes (Zou et al., 2019). However, there is a paucity of research focusing on guest speakers in the ESP classroom and the impact that guest speakers have on first-year engineering undergraduates.

To investigate the impact of a guest speaker on undergraduates, the authors, both higher education English teachers, invited a doctoral

researcher into an English for Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) course. The course comprised first-year students studying mechanical and materials engineering. The guest speaker had been awarded multiple grants for their research into solar chip coatings and the design of a machine to produce wafer-thin chips. During the talk, the speaker provided an overview of their educational background, and their route into engineering, research, and entrepreneurship. Moreover, they highlighted the importance of English in the field. The study combined data collection to explore the impact of guest speakers on STEM students' perceptions as future engineers, and the perceived value and limitations of the guest presentation in the classroom. This study addressed two research questions: i) to what extent did the guest speaker help students bridge their university studies with future career scenarios; and (ii) what were students' perceptions of the guest speaker?

## **2. Higher Education English Courses**

Typically, university programmes provide English for Academic Purposes (EAP) and/or English for Specific Purposes (ESP) classes. EAP furnishes undergraduates with the communicative and study skills required for their academic journey and beyond. For example, courses may include note-taking skills, presentation skills for different audiences, language for discussion, research, reading, and academic writing skills. In contrast, ESP aligns content and English based on a more discipline-specific approach. ESP draws on the seminal work of Swales' (1990) genre analysis approach and introduces students to the language, vocabulary and conventions of their discipline. Using authentic materials, such as academic research articles and academic lectures or podcasts, ESP courses equip students with the tools for recognising and decoding the generic conventions of their discipline, such as the meta language, lexis, and rhetorical moves. A well-planned ESP course should aim to provide students with an understanding of four different types of genre knowledge (Tardy,

2009) so that students can effectively communicate in an academic environment. Formal genre knowledge provides knowledge of text structures, patterns, typical moves, and the lexico-grammar of their discipline, rhetorical genre knowledge introduces the discipline's current epistemologies, beliefs and typical discourse features, process knowledge introduces students to the processes needed to compose an academic text, for example, research skills, meaning making, and understanding academic genres, content knowledge refers to the content specific knowledge that students acquire. Finally, at the core of these genre knowledges, ESP courses should introduce students to the idea of an academic community of practice (COP) (Wenger, 1998, 2003). In other words, what resources are available to assist in their acquisition of genre knowledge and who (e.g., graduates, professors, academics) can they connect with to develop awareness of current developments in their discipline. According to Schmidt-Unterberger (2018), EAP/ESP instruction is central to developing the necessary linguistic skills students require to articulate their subject matter knowledge throughout their university studies as well as in their future careers.

### **3. Bridging**

The value of inviting guest speakers to lectures has been well-documented, and points to mutual benefits for the student, guest speaker, educators and the academic institution (Metrejean et al., 2002). Guest speakers provide students with access to information about 'real life' knowledge of their field and future profession and, in particular, the personal experiences of guest speakers (McCleary & Weaver, 2002; Soiferman, 2019). Research in the field advocates guest speakers as being key to meaning making (Casper & Balgopal, 2020), providing increased enthusiasm for classes (Kamoun & Selim, 2007), and having an impact on students' future academic and professional successes (Zou et al., 2019). Guest speakers are therefore a powerful tool in bridging the gap between classroom and

the real world of work life or a career in academia. A body of research points to the need for undergraduates to experience and carry out research in content classes early on in their studies to provide a connectedness between studies and future careers (see for example, Wiegant et al., 2017; Russell et al., 2014). The current study believes that inviting guest speakers to talk about their research in ESP classes can only enrich the undergraduate experience provided in their content classes.

#### **4. Selecting & preparing the speaker**

In this study, several factors needed to be accounted for when selecting and preparing the speaker. To guide the process, a systematic review by Zou et al. (2019) proved invaluable. In the review, Zou et al. (2019) delineate best practice for selecting and preparing a speaker based on what they term the 5Ws, i.e., who the guest speaker should be, what the guest speaker should present, where the guest speaker should present, when and what role the guest speaker should play. Another principal factor for selecting the speaker was communication skills, i.e., the speaker needed to have the ability to incorporate anecdotal language, personal stories, and scenarios to engage and evoke emotive responses (Casper & Balgopal, 2020). Providing students with a storytelling experience can assist in human connectedness and an individual's ability to process their values (Jones & Crow, 2017). An additional factor in selecting the speaker was background. Whilst Roberts & McCracken (2022) advise guest speakers from an industry background, Ji et al. (2021) advocate recent graduates and alumni who offer an insight into career advice, tips on networking and narratives of the speaker's background and journey. Given all these factors, the guest speaker chosen for this study was a good fit: a doctoral researcher of engineering, an entrepreneur, and a consultant within industry. This was ideal in offering students a bridge between the academic Community of

Practice (COP) in the university, and an insight into the world of industry and entrepreneurship.

## **5. Context**

The two authors are both higher education teachers of EAP and ESP at a university in south-west Finland. The idea behind the current study arose because the two authors wanted to work together to restructure and improve the content of an existing course. Feedback from previous students participating in the mandatory Academic English for STEM course revealed a lack of connectedness between the English course, content courses and future possibilities in their field. Therefore, the authors collaborated to create a course that integrated more discipline-specific content (including sustainability) and aligned a reading task and an assessment with the guest speaker. The guest speaker, a doctoral researcher of material science at the university, was invited to give a presentation to the students and a meeting was set up to discuss the content beforehand. It was agreed that the speaker should present a narrative of her background, academic journey including challenges and successes, her research and entrepreneurship, and an insight into the importance of English in the field of engineering. The guest speaker also agreed to bring 'realia' in the form of her coated silicon wafers to demonstrate how small they were to participants.

## **6. Participants**

The two authors invited two groups of first-year undergraduate students (N=57) to participate in the study. All the students were enrolled in the mandatory Academic English for STEM course. All fifty-seven students from the two courses agreed to be participants in this study. Of these participants, twenty-four were from materials

engineering, thirty-one from mechanical engineering, one from ICT, and one from cyber security. Prior to the data collection, signed written consent was provided by all fifty-seven participants.

## 7. Methods

This small-scale qualitative study can be coined as action research, (see Fig. 1., below). This participatory action research comprised members of the same academic community, equally formative to the research process (Greenwood & Levin, 2007). The anticipated outcomes of the research sought to benefit and empower all of those participating. According to Cohen et al. (2018), being both a teacher and researcher can be considered the strength of the study since it contributes to the naturalness of choosing familiar environments for research.

**Figure 1** The Action Research Cycle (Scribbr.com)



## **8. Data Collection**

Three types of data were collected for this study: a small group task based on the adapted Know Want to Know Learn (KWL) reading technique (Ogle, 1986), a student critical response which was a mandatory course assignment that encourages notetaking and critical reflection, and a course feedback questionnaire.

### **Adapted KWL Technique**

Before and after the guest speaker's presentation, participants completed a small-group reflection using the adapted KWL reading technique. Students were organised into groups of four to five and equipped with marker pens and A1 paper. Before the presenter entered the classroom, the students formed small groups of four to five. The student's first task was to discuss and write on the A1 paper about what they knew (K) about current research at the university in the field of materials engineering, and what they wanted to know (W) about the speaker and current research in the university. During the presentation, the students took individual notes. After the presentation, the student groups discussed and pooled their notes to write down what they had learnt (L) on the A1 paper. Finally, the small groups of participants were asked to write down three to five adjectives to sum up how they felt after the presentation.

## **9. Critical Response Task**

Following the guest speaker's presentation, participants completed a mandatory critical-response task, (see Fig. 2, adapted from Bolster & Levraj, 2022), based on their notes from the guest speaker's presentation and the speaker.



**Figure 2** Mandatory critical-response task (adapted from Bolster & Levrai, 2022)

**Critical Response**

**Assignment Overview**  
You are going to make notes about a lecture and write your response to it.

**Assignment specifications**

- Your notes can be in any style but should be able to give a reader a comprehensive overview of the talk/article.
- Your response should be approximately 400 words long (1 – 2 paragraphs)

**How to do well**  
Your notes should be written so that someone who had not seen the lecture/read the article would understand the main points and some details. You may use any style that you wish (e.g. key words and phrases in linear style, mind map, tables, flow charts) provided that it is clear and coherent for your reader. Full sentences are discouraged as they are not in note form.

The response should be your reaction to talk/article, written in an academic style. Your response should consider the reliability of the talk/text, evaluating the points made and evidence provided. There might be things you think are missing from the talk/text, or disagree with, or feel are really important points. A strong response would bring in information from other sources (another lecture or an article) to support what you think or build on your previous knowledge of the topic.

## 10. Course Feedback Questionnaire

Finally, participants were asked to complete an end of course feedback questionnaire (see Appendix 1.) which included a section dedicated to feedback on the Guest Speaker. Students were asked to use a Likert scale of 1 (yes, absolutely) to 5 (no, not at all) to respond to statements, e.g. *The guest speaker raised my awareness of the link between my current studies and future career or graduate studies.*

## 11. Analysis

To prepare the data for analysis, the two authors carefully inspected the group KWL task, identifying the participants and their fields. Thematic analysis was conducted by importing chunks of text to a shared excel spreadsheet and together the authors looked for certain patterns, isolating repetitive themes to realise the direction of analysis. Coined by Gibson and Brown (2009) as segmentation, this thematic analysis helps to understand the why and the how of participants' feelings and actions. Iterative examination of the data led to a certain messiness before codes and categories emerged (Cohen et al., 2018). Further examination of the data in this back-and-forth manner led to discussions and decision making of five to six final categories by the two authors. The same thematic analysis and iterative approach was used with data collected from the critical response task and the final course questionnaire to triangulate findings.

## 12. Findings

**The aim of this study was to investigate the impact of a guest speaker on undergraduate STEM students in the ESP classroom.** More specifically, we wanted to establish the effect of the guest speaker, namely (i) to what extent did the speaker help students bridge their university studies with future career scenarios (ii) what were students' perceptions of the guest speaker?

The findings of this study are based on data collected from three sources: the KWL Group Reflection, Critical Response, and Course Feedback Questionnaire.

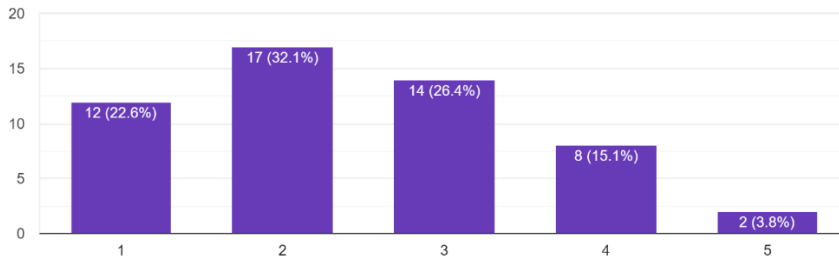
- (i) **The extent that guest speaker helped students to bridge their university studies with future career scenarios**

Based on the data analysis, the guest speaker clearly enabled most students to perceive their futures as engineers i.e., enabled them to bridge their studies with their futures. In the post-course feedback, out of the 57 students that responded, over half (N=29) ‘strongly agreed’ or ‘agreed’ with the statement that the guest speaker raised awareness of the link between their undergraduate studies and their future careers or graduate studies as engineers (Fig 3).

**Figure 3** Student responses to the impact of the guest speaker on bridging their studies with the future

The guest speaker raised my awareness of the link between my current studies and future career or graduate studies (research, Masters' thesis):

53 responses



To investigate the effect of the guest speaker on student bridging, the critical response task was analysed further. Here, students highlighted that several factors had facilitated their ability to bridge studies with future scenarios as engineers. Of these factors, students commonly noted that the speaker had increased their knowledge of the diverse opportunities offered by engineering after graduation, stating for example:

*Now I know more about engineering and what I can do for a living after a few years .... (P42)*

and

*This helped to raise our awareness of the research going on in the university and possible career paths as a doctoral researcher (P14).*

In addition, many students noted that the speaker had **raised their awareness** and **widened their perspectives** on opportunities in engineering, noting for example that:

*Getting to know a part of physics that I didn't before even think about did definitely broaden my knowledge.....it might help me see and understand things from different points of views in the future(P5).*

These findings are synonymous with the findings of other studies investigating the impact of guest speakers.

Another factor students noted was that the guest speaker had helped them to **contextualise and connect** different fields of engineering and envisage future scenarios for example:

*It presented a career opportunity that would be possible for me as a mechanical engineering student as well. (P11).*

Students also noted that the guest speaker had prompted them to **engage in future thinking**, which P7 expresses as:

*the presentation was a good way to introduce some future possibilities for where our studies might lead us, which in her case was researching ways to prevent degradation on silicon wafers (P7).*

Although most students emphasized that the guest speaker had influenced their ability to bridge studies with their future careers, one in five students 'strongly disagreed' or 'disagreed' (N=10) that the guest speaker had helped them to bridge their studies with the future. Several reasons were expressed. The first reason related to the relevance of the speaker's field. Most of the students who disagreed were first-year mechanical engineering students. As such, they may

have failed to see the **relevance of the guest speaker's field** (materials science) to that of their field of mechanical engineering. This finding is synonymous with other studies that have noted the importance of aligning a guest speaker's field with that of the field of study of the (student) audience (Zou et al., 2019). For example:

*Because X has studied material sciences, her presentation perchance gave more for material engineers than mechanical engineers (P18).*

Whilst some students could follow the new content presented by the guest speaker:

*Her enthusiasm got me interested in silicon wafers and I learned a lot more about them and the research being done at the department (P44).*

Others expressed concern that the content of the talk was beyond their knowledge as first-year students:

*.....as a first-year student, I did not fully understand everything, so perhaps I would have preferred simpler explanations from the start (P20).*

The specific vocabulary was also difficult for some students:

*but some of the terms she used to explain the specifics of her work were a little complicated, at least for me to perceive (P43).*

## **(ii) Student's perceptions of the guest speaker**

### **Relevance and background of the speaker**

Preparations for the guest speaker had considered the value to both mechanical and materials engineers, hoping to emphasise the connection between the two fields of engineering. The responses were surprising, and clear distinctions of the value between the two

fields were noted. Positive responses from materials engineers confirmed feelings of the guest speaker's relevance and an opportunity to traverse disciplines and gain a wider perspective, for example:

*Materials Sciences and engineering have a strong link between each other. (The guest speaker) discussed the connection by giving a real-life example from her research projects (P25).*

In contrast, some mechanical engineering students highlighted that the guest speaker was from materials engineering and considered this as limitation:

*someone like me who doesn't have anything to do with the subject and isn't interested in a career in academia it felt like a waste of time (P9).*

*half of the audience were studying something completely different than materials engineering of physics(P18).*

**Credibility** and the **reliability** of the guest speaker were also noted as an important factor for students. Surprisingly, in assessing the value of the talk, some students had even researched the background and credentials of the speaker, noting that:

*The fact that she has multiple patents and has over a dozen peer-reviewed publications in her field speak for her reliability (P5).*

*I actually had to visit her LinkedIn profile page as well as taking a look to her publications and recent work. It didn't have any fallacies or gaps in reasoning in her presentation (P29).*

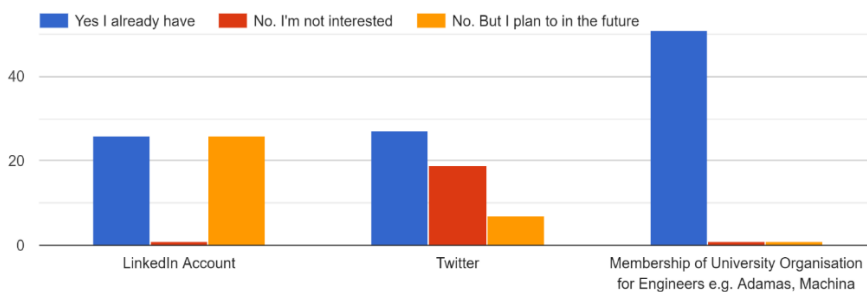
### **Career and Professional Life Orientation**

The guest speaker also impacted students' attitude to professional identity. Prior to the guest speaker's visit, half of the respondents

reported that they did not have a LinkedIn account but that they would create an account due to the guest speaker emphasising the importance of networking (Fig. 4).

**Figure 4** Responses to the question about student attitudes to networking

The guest speaker mentioned networking. Tick the boxes below that apply to you.



*For me, the most important tip was to use your known person to get more information. For university, use professors. Don't fear to ask questions (P61).*

[A surprising, and positive finding from this study was that many students evaluated the guest speaker not only on their expertise and the content of the talk but also based on the speaker's skills as a presenter. Many of the references to the **quality of the guest speaker's presentation** demonstrated that it consolidated certain learning outcomes of the course, for example, the students were aware of the characteristics of an effective technical presentation, noting that:

*[the speaker] held the attention of the audience (P5).*

the way [the speaker] engaged the audience and made people think was great (P2).

In addition, the student comments highlighted the value of introducing a guest speaker to authentically demonstrate technical presentation skills using a real-world scenario. As the speaker was a member of the university research community, students also became aware of the research being carried out by the faculty of engineering.

*It was also motivating to know that the studies we are doing now have use in real life scenarios (P7).*

*This helped keeping up my ability to concentrate and absorb the huge amount of information given in the presentation (P9).*

Students also valued the speakers' **enthusiasm and charisma**, stating:

*The presentation itself was captivating, with a good balance of information regarding the highly technical details of the process, and some light-hearted humour well placed in between.*

*[The speaker] nailed it and I immediately fell in love with her spirit and power of speech (P30).*

*[The speaker's] enthusiasm got me interested in silicon wafers and I learned a lot more about them and the research being done at the department (P21).*

The most common theme emerging from the data was that students valued the importance of 'showing not telling', matching presentations to the level and needs of the audience, story-telling, and creating interaction.

*There were a couple of examples which was good because it helped to audience understand the topic better (P12).*



*nice to be able to see the processed materials live during the presentation. This gives a better grasp of the application as I was able to see the difference it made with my own eyes (P10).*

*made decent connection with the audience by for example showing the actual materials which she works with and answering questions (P27).*

Another surprising outcome from the guest speaker talk was that students were reluctant to ask questions during the 'live' presentation yet noted them in their critical response to the talk. Many of the questions demonstrated that the talk had led some students to critically think and bridge the talk with factors beyond the immediate topic of the presentation. These questions would have been an excellent opportunity for creating a dialogue between the speaker and students had they been asked at the end of the presentation. For example, students noted:

*While I found the numbers impressive, there were some things that raised questions in my mind, such as energy consumption of defect reduction process and environmental effects of chemicals used in anti-reflective coating (P13).*

*Since these technologies are most likely yet to be adopted in large scale commercial applications, the net effect on the environment remains to be seen (P14).*

### **13. Conclusions**

With regards to research question one, this study found to a great extent that the guest speaker helped students bridge their university studies with future career scenarios. In addition, the guest speaker motivated many of the students. These findings substantiate the

perception that guest speakers provide a powerful bridge for students to connect academic studies with prospective career paths (Zou et al., 2019). The participants' enthusiasm for the guest speaker's 'narratives' and experiences demonstrate the significance of 'real life' knowledge in shaping their future careers (McCleary & Weaver, 2002; Soiferman, 2019).

Regarding the second research question about students' perceptions of the guest speaker, many students perceived the guest speaker as a credible, reliable and valuable source of information. However, mechanical engineering students struggled to discern the relevance of the guest speaker's research to their own field. This underscores the importance of carefully selecting the guest speaker (Zou et al., 2019). In addition, some students struggled to understand the technical vocabulary used by the guest speaker, emphasising the need to provide scaffolds to facilitate their understanding of the specialised vocabulary of their fields (Met, 1998). Furthermore, to ensure that students can construct understanding of the content of the guest speaker's presentation, exploring the linguistic demands of the guest speaker talk would be warranted prior to the talk (McGuinness, 1999). Indeed, this area of guest-speaker research remains underexplored, particularly in ESP contexts.

### **Future Considerations**

In conclusion, the findings of this small-scale research align with previous studies underscoring the advantages of guest speakers for students, guest speakers themselves, instructors and educational institutions (Metrejean et al., 2002). A noteworthy discovery was that the guest speaker consolidated specific learning outcomes related to academic presentations. Students employed insights from previous lessons, akin to a peer review, showcasing their understanding of the key attributes of an effective technical presentation. This outcome suggests that the future integration of guest speakers is a valuable approach to assessing student presentation skills and course content. Moreover, this allows doctoral researchers to gain an authentic

audience for their research presentations subjected to peer review by students of the same institution. By affording doctoral researchers with authentic presentation practice the institutions' research is also disseminated, laying the foundations for a Community of Practice (COP) among undergraduate students (Wenger, 1998, 2003).

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## Presentation av forsknings- och utvecklingsprojektet SVAR – Svenska i arbetslivet

Anne-Maria Kuosa, Anne-Maj Åberg & Kim Lindroos

### 1. Inledning

I denna artikel presenteras projektet SVAR – Svenska i arbetslivet<sup>1</sup> samt projektets datainsamling, metod och respondenterna. Projektet har startats av svensklärarna vid Centrum för språk- och kommunikationsstudier vid Åbo universitet under läsåret 2022–2023. Syftet med projektet är att skapa ny information om finskspråkigas användning av svenska i arbetslivet för att få en uppdaterad bild av bruket av svenska på olika arbetsplatser inom den privata och offentliga sektorn. Den här nya kunskapen kommer att användas i planeringen av de svenskstudier som ingår i olika studieprogram vid Åbo universitet. Projektet strävar efter att utveckla fackspråksstudier i svenska och för att öka såväl språklärarnas som studenternas språkmedvetenhet och motivation. Ett centralt syfte med projektet är således att identifiera utvecklingsområden inom fackspråksstudier. Projektet utgör ett delprojekt inom nätverket *Svenskan i Åbo – Ruotsi monikielisessä Turussa*<sup>2</sup>.

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2 Nätverket *Svenskan i Åbo – Ruotsi monikielisessä Turussa* grundades våren 2022 av forskare och lärare vid Åbo universitet som är intresserade av hur svenska används i arbetslivet och som fackspråk i Åbo. En del av deltagarna är verksamma inom läroämnet Nordiska språk vid Institutionen för språk- och översättningsvetenskap och en del vid Centrum för språk- och kommunikationsstudier vid Åbo universitet.

Språk- och kommunikationskunskaper spelar en stor roll i dagens samhälle. Därför riktas det också stora förväntningar på de språkstudier som ingår i universitetsexamina. Målet med dessa språkstudier är att studenter under sina studier ska nå sådana kunskaper som är nödvändiga med tanke på det egna studieområdet och behoven i framtida arbetsuppgifter (Statsrådets förordning om universitetsexamina 794/2004, 6§). Dessa fackspråksstudier erbjuds av vid språkcentren vid universiteten. I arbetslivet behövs experter som kan fungera i ett föränderligt samhälle på flera olika språk (Pyykkö 2017), och detta bidrar fackspråkundervisningen vid språkcentren till.

Syftet med projektet är att få aktuell information om användningen av svenska i arbetslivet genom en enkät och intervjuer riktade till finskspråkiga respondenter som använder svenska i sina arbetsuppgifter. Projektets frågeställningar kan konkretiseras närmare i följande forskningsfrågor:

1. I hur stor utsträckning använder respondenterna svenska i sina arbetsuppgifter?
2. I vilken typ av kommunikationssituationer använder respondenterna svenska?
3. Hurdan är svenskanvändningen i de olika kommunikationssituationerna i arbetslivet?
4. Hur upplever respondenterna att studierna i svenska motsvarar arbetslivets behov?
5. Finns det variation i användningen av svenska inom de olika branscherna?

Genom dessa frågeställningar ämnar vi öka lärarnas kännedom om behovet av svenskkunskaper i arbetslivet i synnerhet för studieprogrammen vid Åbo universitet.

## 2. Behovet av svenska i arbetslivet

Vi betraktar användningen av svenska i arbetslivet ur en funktionell och pragmatisk synvinkel och utgår ifrån att språkanvändningen på de olika arbetsplatserna är mångfacetterad och komplex (se t.ex. Kuosa 2020). Denna funktionella syn på fackspråket framhäver språkanvändningen i arbetslivet som ett kontextbundet fenomen (se t.ex. Vaattovaara 2017). I arbetslivet behövs mångfacetterade och varierande språkkunskaper. Till exempel informella möten med kunder förutsätter andra språkliga färdigheter än upprättandet av ett formellt avtal. Avtalsvillkor kan vara komplicerade och komplexa, och därför behöver kunden en förklaring för att kunna förstå innehållet i avtalet. I fackspråksforskningen betonas också sambandet mellan kunnandet på det egna området och språkkunskaperna (Douglas 2005). Ett exempel är det juridiska språket. Språket och juridiken är sammanflätade och juristerna kan förstå verkligheten endast genom språket (Engberg 2013; Nordman 2008). Sambandet mellan det egna området och språkkunskaperna är utgångspunkten i de fackspråksstudier som ingår i universitetsexamina: studierna ska motsvara behoven inom det egna området (Statsrådets förordning om universitetsexamina 794/2004, 6§).

De finskspråkigas användning av olika språk har tidigare undersökts i akademiska yrken (Karjalainen & Lehtonen 2005; Vaattovaara 2017), inom teknologibranschen (Rontu 2010) och bland jurister (Grönqvist 2013; Kuosa 2020). Även om svenskan inte nödvändigtvis används dagligen i akademiska yrken, uppskattas kunskaperna i svenska fortfarande i arbetslivet, och svenskan används både inom den offentliga och privata sektorn.

Inom den offentliga sektorn i Finland har var och en enligt språklagen rätt att använda sitt eget språk hos myndigheter (Språklagen 423/2003, 2§, 23§). Därför ska de som avlagt en lägre eller högre högskoleexamen påvisa kunskaper i både finska och svenska i en statlig anställning (Lag om de språkkunskaper som krävs av offentligt anställda 424/2003, 6§). Myndigheternas språkanvändning styrs



således av språklagstiftningen medan valet av språk inte på samma sätt är reglerat inom den privata sektorn. Engelskan är ett viktigt språk i synnerhet inom den privata sektorn (se t.ex. Rontu 2010), men kunskaper i andra språk som till exempel i svenska är fortfarande viktiga i arbetslivet. Detta har till exempel Barner-Rasmussen (2011) och Lassus och Tanner (Tanner & Lassus 2018; Lassus & Tanner 2019) konstaterat när de har forskat i språkanvändningen i affärslivet. Svenskan används både i den interna och externa kommunikationen i vissa företag och dessutom är Sverige fortfarande en av Finlands viktigaste handelspartner (Tanner & Lassus 2018; Lassus & Tanner 2019).

### **3. Studierna i svenska som en del av högskolestudier**

I alla universitets- och högskoleexamina ingår studier i det andra inhemska språket och minst i ett främmande språk. Enligt examensförordningar både vid universiteten (794/2004, 6§) och vid yrkeshögskolorna (1129/2014, 7§) ska studerandena i samband med sina studier uppvisa att de har sådana kunskaper i finska och svenska som krävs av offentligt anställda (424/2003, 6§) och som behövs på det egna området eller i yrket. Både muntliga och skriftliga kunskaper bedöms enligt nationella nivåbeskrivningar som är förankrade i den europeiska referensramen (EVK 2003; CEFR 2018). I samband med högskolestudier ska studerandena uppnå minst nöjaktiga kunskaper på nivå B1 i både muntliga och skriftliga färdigheter (Elsinen & Juurakko-Paavola 2006). Därmed styrs fackspråkstudierna i svenska både av lagstiftningen och av nivåkraven. Innehållet i och syftet med studierna planeras i enlighet med varierade behov inom olika studieprogram.

Åbo universitet utbildar kandidater och magistrar i åtta olika fakulteter (humanistiska, pedagogiska, matematisk-naturvetenskapliga, tekniska, medicinska, juridiska, och samhällsvetenskapliga fakulteten samt Åbo handelshögskola). I

projektet SVAR fokuserar vi i synnerhet på de krav som arbetslivets behov ställer på svenskundervisningen vid dessa fakulteter. Universitetets rekryteringstjänst driver kontinuerlig uppföljning av hur de utexaminerade placerar sig på arbetsmarknaden. I rapporten Työura 5 vuotta valmistumisen jälkeen presenteras resultaten av en enkätundersökning bland magistrar utexaminerade från Åbo universitet åren 2007, 2009 och 2011. Av respondenterna får 44 % sysselsättning i Egentliga Finland, 32 % i Nyland och 22 % i övriga Finland och 3 % flyttar utomlands. De största arbetsgivarna är inom den offentliga sektorn (kommunerna 41 %; staten 8 %), 28 % arbetar i privata företag och 7 % i föreningar, stiftelser och liknande. Universiteten och högskolorna sysselsätter 9 %. (Turun yliopiston rekry.) Fakulteterna vid Åbo universitet utbildar således experter både för den privata och offentliga sektorn.

Enligt tidigare forskning har en del av högskolestudenterna svårigheter att nå den språkfärdighetsnivå som förutsätts i studierna (t.ex. Juurakko-Paavola 2009; Juurakko-Paavola & Åberg 2018; Åberg 2019). Universitetsstudenter har dock ofta hög motivation att lära sig svenska som en del av sina studier (Jauhojärvi-Koskelo & Palviainen 2011), och motivationen är en avgörande faktor i språkstudierna. Arbetslivsorienterade språkstudier stödjer motivationen vilket till exempel Sahlstein (2017, 2018, 2020) har konstaterat i sin forskning om finsktalande medicinstudenters syn på svenskans betydelse i det blivande läkaryrket. Genom att utveckla svenskundervisningen utgående från arbetslivets behov kan man öka motivationen att studera svenska och uppmuntra studenterna till att använda svenska senare i arbetslivet.

De svenskstudier som ingår i examina är begränsade. Till exempel vid Åbo universitet omfattar svenskstudierna vid de olika fakulteterna 3–12 studiepoäng. De medel som anvisats till språk- och kommunikationsstudier bör således användas effektivt och ändamålsenligt, så att studenterna oberoende av förkunskaper ska kunna utveckla beredskapen att klara av sina kommande arbetsuppgifter på svenska samt senare självständigt kunna stärka sin

språkliga kompetens i arbetslivet. Eftersom samhället är under ständig förändring och bruket av svenska i arbetslivet är mångfacetterat, förändras också behovet av språkkunskaper. Därför behövs en kontinuerlig utredning av behovet av svenskan.

För att kunna främja effektiv inläring under de fackspråksstudier som ingår i högskoleexamen bör läraren vara förtrogen med arbetslivets behov inom områden där studerande kommer att arbeta i framtiden samt med teoretiska synvinklar på språk och inläring. Detta kan definieras som forskningsbaserad undervisning (se t.ex. Borg 2010). Därför är det viktigt att kartlägga de specifika och varierande språkkrav som ställs på experter inom olika områden. För att språkstudierna som ingår i examina ska kunna förbereda studerande för arbetslivets krav behövs aktuell kunskap om behovet av språkfärdigheter som stöd för utvecklandet av språkundervisningen.

#### **4. Datainsamling och metod**

I projektet SVAR granskar vi användningen av svenska inom olika branscher utifrån en enkätundersökning samt semistrukturerade intervjuer. Enkätfrågorna utformades utifrån tidigare enkäter (Kuosa 2020; Tanner & Lassus 2018) och tidigare forskning om användningen av svenska i arbetslivet<sup>3</sup>. Enkäten innehåller både flervalsfrågor och fria svar om informanternas språkanvändning på arbetsplatsen, vilka färdigheter språkstudierna har gett inför arbetslivet samt några frågor om respondenternas bakgrund och arbetsplatser. Därtill innehåller enkäten en fråga om deltagande i intervjun. Endast samtycket för att delta i undersökningen och bakgrundsfrågorna är obligatoriska. I samband med bakgrundsfrågorna anges dock också alternativet "Jag vill inte svara". I de övriga frågorna kan man lämna frågorna

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<sup>3</sup> För att skapa enkäten har vi samarbetat med projektet Finlandssvenskarna skrivande i arbetslivet (Lassus & Tanner 2017–). Vi vill tacka Jannica Lassus och Johanna Haapala för all hjälp med enkäten.

obesvarade och i de flesta frågorna har man möjlighet att välja ett eller flera alternativ.

Vårt val av respondenter baserar sig på tidigare forskning samt våra kontakter med och kännedom om olika arbetsplatser. Därtill vänder vi oss till alumner utexaminerade från Åbo universitet. Som respondenter väljer vi finskspråkiga anställda som använder svenska i sina arbetsuppgifter eller har möjlighet att arbeta på svenska såväl inom den privata som den offentliga sektorn. Inom den offentliga sektorn granskar vi exempelvis rättsväsendet, museicentralen och hälsovården medan den privata sektorn representeras av ett urval av företag. Inbjudan att besvara Webropol-enkäten riktades vid årsskiftet 2022–2023 och våren 2023 till ett flertal företag i Åbonejden, domstolar i Åbo, museicentralen vid Åbo stad och till alumnlistan vid Åbo handelshögskola.

Semistrukturerade intervjuer utförs för att få mera detaljerad information om finskspråkigas användning av svenska. Intervjun innehåller följande teman: den upplevda användningen av svenska och användningen av strategier, svenskans ställning på arbetsplatsen, nordiskt samarbete, tillräckligt bra kunskaper i svenska i arbetslivet och utvecklandet av svensk kunskaperna i arbetslivet. Hittills har 11 intervjuer inom finans- och försäkringsbranschen, 3 intervjuer inom domstolsväsendet och 3 intervjuer inom museibranschen utförts.<sup>4</sup>

För att finskspråkigas användning av svenska ska kunna kartläggas på en djupare nivå analyseras frågorna i enkäten och i intervjuerna både utifrån en kvalitativ och kvantitativ ansats. Det kvantitativa materialet består av numeriska enkätsvar. Dessa svar analyseras med icke-parametriska metoder för små data (se t.ex. Metsämuuronen 2010) och resultaten presenteras med hjälp av frekvenser. De transkriberade intervjuerna och de fria enkätsvaren kommer att

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<sup>4</sup> Vi tackar Senni Toikka, studerande vid Nordiska språk vid Åbo universitet, för värdefull hjälp i genomförandet av intervjuerna.

analyseras med hjälp av kvalitativ materialbaserad innehållsanalys. Enligt den här metoden kommer data att kategoriseras, abstraheras och tolkas på en högre abstraktionsnivå. Vi letar efter upprepade, överraskande och intressanta teman som kommer fram i svaren. (Se t.ex. Mayring 2010; Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2018.)

I undersökningen följer alla lärare och forskare forskningsetiska principer. Vi ber alla informanter ge ett skriftligt tillstånd till att deras svar får användas som forskningsmaterial och de deltar frivilligt i undersökningen. Bakgrundsinformation (t.ex. arbetsplats, ålder, utbildning) kommer att samlas in från respondenterna. Alla uppgifter och forskningsresultat behandlas anonymt enligt dataskyddslagen och endast projektets forskare kommer att ha tillgång till uppgifterna. Deltagarna kan inte identifieras i forskningsprojektets resultat, utredningar och publikationer. Tills forskningsresultaten har publicerats lagras enkätsvaren och intervjuarna i molntjänsten UTUSeafire vid Åbo universitet, vilken är skyddad med lösenord, och därefter i Åbo universitets materialarkiv. Resultaten av undersökningen kommer att användas för att utveckla studierna i svenska språket inom Åbo universitets utbildningsprogram och för vetenskaplig forskning. Direkta citat från materialet kan användas så att respondenten inte kan identifieras.

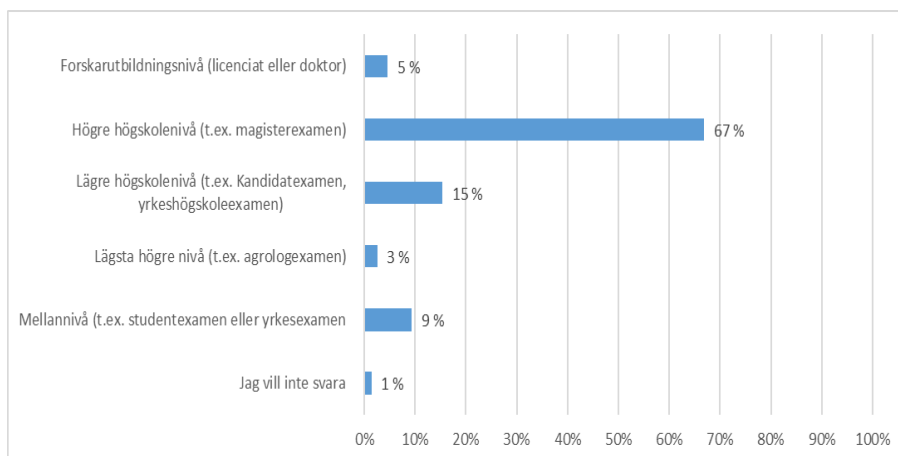
## **5. Respondenterna på enkäten**

Sammanlagt 352 informanter har svarat på enkäten under våren 2023. Av dessa hade 344, dvs. 98 %, finska som modersmål, vilket framgår av tabell 1. Tre respondenter hade svenska som modersmål och en respondent thai. Fyra var tvåspråkiga och meddelade både finska och svenska som modersmål.

**Tabell 1** Respondenternas modersmål.

| Modersmål               | n   | %        |
|-------------------------|-----|----------|
| Finska                  | 344 | 97,73 %  |
| Svenska                 | 3   | 0,85 %   |
| Annat                   | 1   | 0,28 %   |
| Både finska och svenska | 4   | 1,14 %   |
| Sammanlagt              | 352 | 100,00 % |

I figur 1 presenteras respondenternas utbildningsnivå. Som högsta utbildningsnivå rapporterade ca 5 % licentiat- eller doktorsexamen, 67 % högre högskoleexamen, 15 % lägre högskoleexamen och 3 % examen på lägsta högskolestadiet (institutnivå). Cirka 9 % hade endast yrkesexamen eller studentexamen på mellannivå.

**Figur 1** Respondenternas utbildningsnivå.

Som framgår av tabell 2 hade de flesta, 64 %, utbildning inom handel och administration, 9 % inom humanistiska och konstnärliga områden, 7 % inom juridik och 6 % inom samhällsvetenskapliga områden. Endast enstaka respondenter hade angett övriga områden.

Cirka 86 % av respondenterna hade studerat svenska som en del av universitets- eller högskoleexamen.

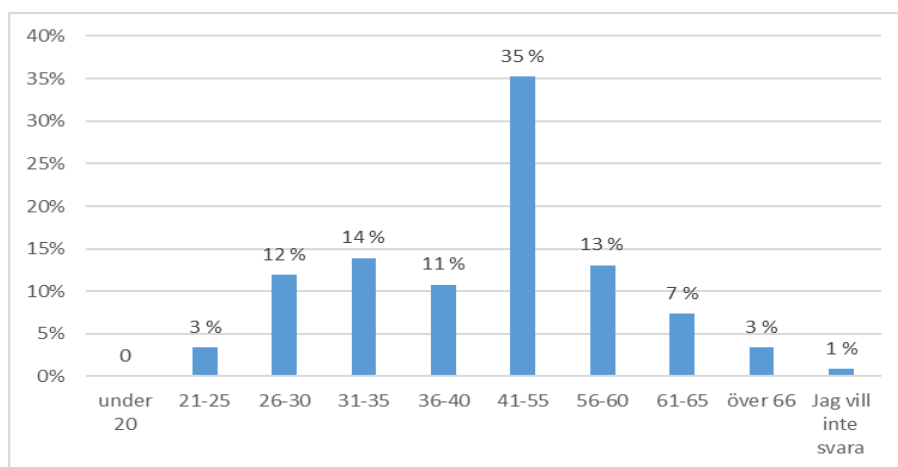
**Tabell 2** Respondenternas utbildningsområden.

| Utbildningsområde                         | n          | %               |
|---|------------|-----------------|
| Handel och administration                 | 225        | 63,92 %         |
| De humanistiska och konstnärliga områdena | 31         | 8,81 %          |
| Juridik                                   | 23         | 6,53 %          |
| De samhällsvetenskapliga områdena         | 20         | 5,68 %          |
| Tjänstebranschen                          | 18         | 5,11 %          |
| De tekniska områdena                      | 8          | 2,27 %          |
| De pedagogiska områdena                   | 6          | 1,70 %          |
| De naturvetenskapliga områdena            | 6          | 1,70 %          |
| Databehandling och kommunikation          | 4          | 1,14 %          |
| Hälsovård och välfärd                     | 4          | 1,14 %          |
| Jag vill inte svara.                      | 4          | 1,14 %          |
| Övriga eller okända                       | 2          | 0,57 %          |
| Lant- och skogsbruk                       | 1          | 0,28 %          |
| <b>Sammanlagt</b>                         | <b>352</b> | <b>100,00 %</b> |

Utbildningsområden följde i huvudsak Statistikcentralens klassificering av nationella utbildningsområden från år 2016 (Nationellt Utbildningsområde 2016; jfr. Tanner & Lassus 2018).

I figur 2 presenteras respondenternas ålder. Den största andelen respondenter på 35 % tillhörde åldersgruppen 41–55 år. Cirka en tredjedel var under 41 år och en tredjedel över 61 år.

**Figur 2** Respondenternas ålder.



Hälften av respondenterna hade varit över 20 år i arbetslivet medan ungefär en fjärdedel hade varit 11–20 år och en fjärdedel mindre än tio år i arbetslivet.

De största näringsgrenar som respondenterna meddelade som organisationens primära näringsgren var finans- och försäkringsverksamhet på 18 %, offentlig förvaltning på 14 %, informations- och kommunikationsverksamhet på 12 %, handel på 11 %, tillverkning på 10 % samt kultur, nöje och fritid på 9 %. Även näringsgrenarna baserar sig på Statistikcentralens klassificering (Näringsgrensindelningen 2008; jfr. Tanner & Lassus 2018). I tabell 3 presenteras respondenternas yrken.



**Tabell 3** Respondenternas yrken.

| Yrkesklassificering               | n   | %       |
|-----------------------------------|-----|---------|
| Specialister eller experter       | 183 | 51,99 % |
| Chefer                            | 74  | 21,02 % |
| Kontors- och kundtjänstpersonal   | 58  | 16,48 % |
| Service- och försäljningspersonal | 31  | 8,81 %  |
| Jag vill inte svara               | 4   | 1,14 %  |
| Annat                             | 2   | 0,57 %  |
| Sammanlagt                        | 352 | 100,00% |

Till yrket var 52 % specialister eller experter, 21 % chefer, 17 % kontors- och kundtjänstpersonal och 9 % service- och försäljningspersonal. Indelningen följer Statistikcentralens yrkesklassificering (Yrkesklassificeringen 2010; jfr. Tanner & Lassus 2018).

Antalet anställda var större än 250 i 42 % och färre än 250 i 56 % av organisationerna medan de resterande 2 % inte ville kommentera antalet anställda. Respondenterna kunde välja flera språk som organisationens officiella interna språk. Finska som internt språk hade valts av 289, svenska av 77 och engelska av 120 respondenter. Fem respondenter hade angett något annat språk (tyska, franska, polska).

## 6. Framtidsutsikter

Enkäten har hittills besvarats av ett stort antal respondenter. Det är dock fråga om en mycket utvald grupp av respondenter och därför kan resultaten inte generaliseras att gälla användningen av svenska hos alla finskspråkiga arbetstagare. Undersökningen bidrar ändå till ökad förståelse av användningen av svenska inom olika branscher och ger således en gedigen grund för vårt forsknings- och utvecklingsprojekt. I fortsättningen kan vi analysera materialet ur

olika synvinklar och granska exempelvis olika områden eller arbetsplatser.

Enkätsvaren har redan delvis analyserats och de preliminära resultaten visar att finskspråkiga inom handelsbranschen använder svenska relativt mycket: drygt en femtedel av respondenterna uppgav att de använder svenska regelbundet dvs. dagligen eller varje vecka (Åberg & Kuosa 2023). För att producera mer detaljerad kunskap om användningen av svenska inom den här branschen behövs dock en närmare analys av enkätsvaren och intervjuerna. Som nästa steg kommer projektet att analysera den data vi har samlat in inom rättsväsendet och i museicentralen i Åbo. Genom att kartlägga användningen av svenskan och att analysera de möjligheter och utmaningar som finskspråkiga har i arbetslivet inom olika branscher genererar vi mångsidig kunskap om finskspråkigas användning av svenska.

Rapporteringen av resultaten sker på olika nationella och internationella språkvetenskapliga och pedagogiska konferenser samt som artiklar i vetenskapliga publikationer. Artiklarna skrivs tillsammans, vilket stöder språkcenterlärarnas forsknings- och utvecklingsinsatser. Resultaten inom handelsbranschen har redan presenterats på konferensen Svenskan i Finland våren 2023 (Åberg & Kuosa 2023). Hösten 2023 presenterades analyser av museicentralen, domstolsväsendet och ett företag inom den privata sektorn på konferensen Svenskans beskrivning (Kuosa, Saloranta & Åberg 2023). Eftersom resultaten kommer att gagna också arbetslivet ämnar vi rapportera om vårt projekt i fackorganisationernas tidskrifter samt eventuellt i arbetslivsseminarier organiserade till exempel av Finlands juristförbund och Finsk-svenska handelskammaren. Detta kan bidra till ökat samarbete mellan Åbo universitet och arbetslivet.

Den nya kunskap om finskspråkigas behov av svenska i arbetslivet som projektet SVAR genererar, används främst för att utveckla fackspråksstudier i svenska vid Centrum för språk och kommunikationsstudier vid Åbo universitet men kunskapen kan även

användas vid andra universitet och yrkeshögskolor. Forskningsbaserade och arbetslivsorienterade fackspråksstudier kan öka studerandenas språkmedvetenhet och motivation och detta ämnar projektet att bidra till. Därtill kan resultaten av projektet stödja tvåspråkigheten i Finland: resultaten kan användas i språkpolitisk diskussion och undervisningsplanering i Finland och bidra till en levande två- och flerspråkighet inom samhällelig verksamhet.

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## **Language centre teachers and learning objectives for the digital age**

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### **1. Introduction**

Since March 2020, the landscape of language and communication teaching has seemingly permanently shifted. Pre-Covid, our teaching was still predominantly classroom-based. The recurring lockdowns meant that teachers expanded and explored their teaching in a digital environment to encompass distance, hybrid and multimodal methods of delivery to students. Whilst all these methods have existed for some time, the pandemic forced every teacher to approach them head-on. With this change the question has arisen whether the learning outcomes and objectives we have been using earlier are still relevant to students or if we need new outcomes and objectives for the digital age. This article addresses this question by charting the development and work of the 2digi2 'learning objectives' group over a two-year period 2022-2023. This group was a part of the broader 2digi2 project, the aim of which is to assist teachers in this transition to the digital environment.<sup>1</sup> The research took advantage of a survey of language centre teachers carried out in autumn 2022, which was used to gather data on teacher perceptions of learning objectives and

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<sup>1</sup> The 2digi2 project has four main thematic areas related to learning in a digital environment: learning objectives, generic skills, special needs and relationship building. <https://2digi2.languages.fi>



outcomes for the digital age. The survey addressed a number of questions related to learning objectives in a digital environment: are there learning objectives specific to the digital environment; how important do teachers see them to be and how widespread was awareness of the digital environment in curricula planning currently in language centres. The overall aim of the research was to use the results to give guidance and support to language centre teachers. In this article, we firstly present a brief review of the literature to show how discussion of digital learning objectives are grounded in a long-standing tradition of 21st Century skills. We then describe how the 2digi2 learning objectives group developed over the two-year period and present the results of the teacher survey in detail. We conclude with some suggestions for future development and give examples of materials that are available for teachers to develop their digital learning objectives on the 2digi2 website.

## **2. Review of the literature – learning objectives in a digital environment**

In a language centre setting, 'The design of teaching activities starts with the setting of learning objectives. These are based on degree goals and the curricula. The teacher determines what the students must learn, as well as the skills and knowledge that are essential to the content' (Löfström et al. 2006: 18). This is one example that shows the long history in the literature that points to the need for clear and well-defined learning objectives in all forms of language teaching (Richards and Rodgers 2001; Harden 2002 Kirschner et al.; 2009 and 2018; Kerr 2015; and Koehler et al., 2013). As approaches to language teaching and learning have changed, so too have the learning objectives associated with them. Wallinheimo (2016: 50) charts the change from a focus on grammar and teaching in the early 1970s to the role of communication and learning in the 2000s. Yet before any

in-depth analysis of the literature, it is first necessary to define what we mean by learning objectives as opposed to learning outcomes as these terms have often been used interchangeably. Richards and Rodgers (2001) defined learning objectives as statements that specify what the teacher intends to teach or what the students are expected to learn, while learning outcomes are statements that describe what the students are expected to be able to do as a result of instruction.

Likewise, the differences between these two terms were discussed by Harden (2002) who noted that objectives are more concrete and ‘the concept of an outcome is more closely linked to the learning and assessment process’ (Harden 2002: 154). In our work we focus on learning objectives as concrete pathways that teachers can provide for their students in the process of course design and curricula planning. Our focus is also specifically on discovering those learning objectives that can be seen to belong to the digital teaching environment. We here review earlier discussions or models of learning objectives, both in the explicit sense and also where competencies for language learning in a digital environment are referred to.

This review inevitably involves reference to and analysis of 21<sup>st</sup> century skills in language and communication (Lankshear and Knobel 2006; Binkley et al., 2012), and leads us, via the TPACK model (Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge Framework) of Koehler et al. (2013), adaptive learning (Kerr 2015) and the CEFR companion scale (2018) to the exploration of new digital genres (Belcher 2023). We also briefly look at how external factors can influence learning objectives with cognitive load theory (Kirschner, Paas and Kirschner 2009) and loss of communication and creativity in a digital setting (Brucks and Levav 2022). A common theme of all literature related to all learning objectives and outcomes is a general recognition of their importance for teaching and learning. This is also

the case when considering those learning objectives particular to the digital teaching and learning environment.

### **2.1 21<sup>st</sup> century skills and digital literacy**

The starting point for discussing learning objectives in the digital environment is embedded in the notion of digital literacy for both teachers and students, which in turn is one of the key of 21st century skills (Lankshear and Knobel 2006; Bawden 2008; Binkley et al., 2012). The KSAVE model of Binkley et al. (2012) has been influential in the discussion of 21st-century skills in language learning and assessment. It presented ten key skills grouped into four main areas: ways of thinking, ways of working, tools for working and living in the world (2012:36). In terms of learning objectives for language learning in a digital context, the 'tools for working' section is perhaps the most relevant (information literacy and computer skills literacy), but equally both 'ways of thinking' and 'ways of working' are central to the skills students need for working life. The 'tools for working' encompasses digital literacy, which has a long history of research, beginning with Gilster (1997) who stated that it is 'The ability to understand and use information in multiple formats from a wide range of sources when it is presented via computers'. (Gilster 1997:1). Later, Eshet-Alkalai (2004) noted that 'Digital literacy can be defined as a survival skill in the digital era. It constitutes a system of skills and strategies used by learners and users in digital environments.' Eshet-Alkalai (2004:102). Spante et al. (2018) highlighted the importance of a clear definition of 21st-century skills, including digital literacy, in order to develop effective assessment and teaching strategies. Thus, it is essential, by inference, that digital literacy, in all its forms plays a central role in the formulation of learning objectives and outcomes for students.

## **2.2 Frameworks for language learning objectives in a digital environment**

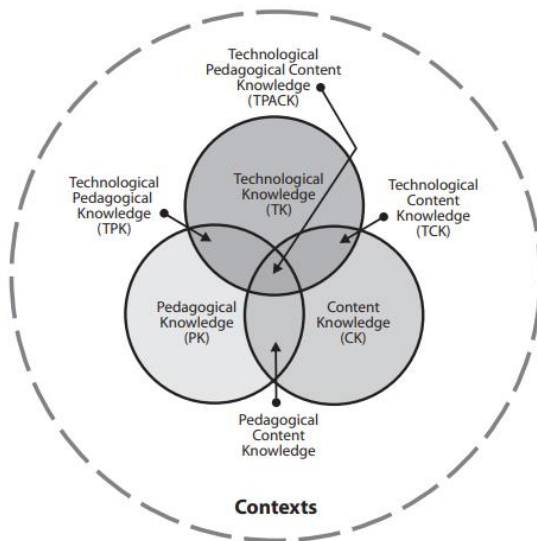
The importance of the digital environment in language learning has been widely written about in the literature and in this next section we look at some examples that we can relate directly to the language centre teaching environment. One of the most well-known of these frameworks was Churches (2008) and his re-working of Bloom's original taxonomy to create Bloom's digital taxonomy. The categories included remembering, understanding, applying, analyzing, evaluating, and creating. Each of these elements focus on the students' use of digital technology in a language learning environment providing a framework by which teachers can integrate digital tools into their teaching. These in turn can be used as the basis for the development of key learning objectives for language students. More recently, Voigt et al. (2020) revisited the digital taxonomy by applying it in a blended learning situation.

The Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge (TPACK) is a framework for teachers and teacher educators (Mishra and Koehler 2006, Koehler et al., 2013) discussed the challenging issue of how teachers can effectively integrate technology into their teaching. They note that this can be challenging: 'Describing what teachers need to know can be difficult because teaching is an inherently complex, multifaceted activity which occurs in varied settings' (2013:2). In their model they propose four areas where teachers need to have knowledge: the first three are technological, content and pedagogical knowledge. The intersection of all these results in a fourth dimension of knowledge: TPACK which stands for Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge.

They state that 'TPACK describes the synthesized knowledge of each of the bodies of knowledge described above, with a focus upon how technology can be uniquely crafted to meet pedagogical needs to

teach certain content in specific contexts’ (2021:4). Once again, learning objectives play a key role as they suggest that digital integration in education should be guided by a clear understanding of the learning objectives or outcomes that are intended for the learners. This means that teachers should start by defining the learning goals and objectives that they want to achieve, and then consider how technology can best be used to support and enhance these goals. The use of digital technology should be aligned with the learning objectives and should be selected and used in a way that enhances the learning experience and supports the achievement of the desired learning outcomes.

**Figure 1** The TPACK model (Koehler et al. 2013)



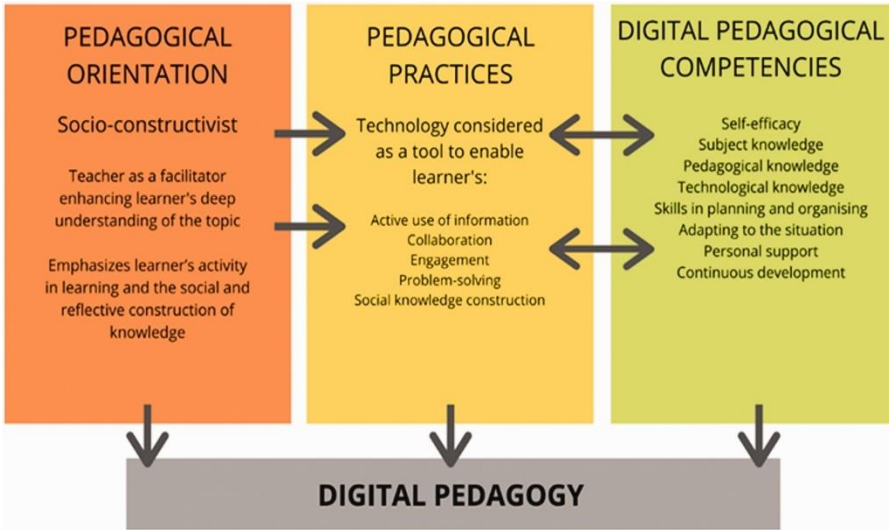
The adaptive approach that the TPACK model promotes for teaching and learning was reiterated by Kerr (2015). Adaptive learning is defined as ‘a way of delivering learning materials online, in which the learner’s interaction with previous content determines (at least in part) the nature of materials delivered subsequently. The process is

automated, dynamic, and interactive. Its purpose is to generate a personalized learning experience' (2015: 89). Kerr (2015) suggests that adaptive learning can be used to support the development of 21st century skills, such as critical thinking, problem solving, and digital literacy, by providing learners with customized and relevant learning experiences. This highlights the importance of considering the needs and goals of the individual learner in the assessment and teaching of 21st century skills. Another landmark work on digital learning was the CEFR Companion Volume with New Descriptors (2018) which provides a comprehensive overview of the different learning objectives for online interaction in a foreign language. They note that 'Online communication is always mediated through a machine, which implies that it is unlikely ever to be exactly the same as face-to-face interaction' (2018: 84), thus necessitating a separate delineation of learning objectives for students online. These include online conversation and discussions and goal-oriented online transactions and collaboration. These place communicative events, such as introducing, describing, and adapting register into an online context.

Väätäjä and Ruokamo (2021) conducted a literature review of models of digital pedagogy, analysing twelve research articles, from which they created a model for digital pedagogy including three key dimensions: pedagogical orientation, pedagogical practices and digital pedagogic competencies provided to the teacher (see Fig. 2). They suggest that in order for technological integration to be successful, it should have a constructivist or student-centered orientation rather than being traditional and teacher-centered: 'Digital pedagogy should involve more than the simple use of technology in the classroom; the use of technology should be based on problem solving and developing higher-order thinking skills' (2018:8). They also argue that teachers need certain competencies such as technological knowledge and content knowledge, along with

high self-efficacy skills and strong peer collaboration abilities in order to blend digital technologies effectively into their teaching practices.

**Figure 2** Conceptualization of dimensions and a model for digital pedagogy. Väättäjä and Ruokamo (2021:7)



As teaching has changed due to digital tools, so has the nature of the communicative situations in which teaching and learning can take place. Belcher (2023) investigated digital genres asking what they are, what they do, and why we need to better understand them. She discussed the concept of digital genres and their impact on learning and teaching in the digital age, arguing they are a new form of communication that has emerged as a result of the digital revolution, and that they have the potential to greatly impact the way that people communicate and learn. These genres include blogs, wikis, social media, podcasts, and online forums. These digital genres offer new opportunities for communication and learning, allowing users to engage with content and information in novel and innovative ways.

At the same time, they also pose challenges for educators and learners, who need to adapt to the unique characteristics of these new forms of communication. It is thus clear that as educators we need to have a clear vision of those learning objectives relevant to the digital environment and be able to use them in our planning in a clear and structured manner.

At the same time, we need to be mindful of other factors that can play a role in digitally-based communication. Kirschner et al. (2009) have applied cognitive load theory to collaborative and by extension virtual learning. Cognitive load refers to the amount of information the working memory can hold at any given time based on a variety of different factors. They suggest that teachers should take into account the cognitive properties of the learners, the complexity of the task and the make-up of the group when designing collaborative tasks. They state that ‘Without this consideration the outcomes of collaborative learning environments will remain unpredictable and mixed.’ (Kirschner et al., 2009: 229). In a further interesting study, Brucks and Levav (2022) examined the efficacy of communication when carried out in a virtual setting. They found that videoconferencing markedly reduced the level of creativity in the participants when compared to face-to-face meetings. They suggest that the physical narrowing of visual field, from a room of people to a screen can affect creativity. ‘This narrowed focus constrains the associative process underlying idea generation, whereby thoughts ‘branch out’ and activate disparate information that is then combined to form new ideas.’ (Brucks and Levav 2022: 108).

This brief review of the literature provided a backdrop for the work of the learning objectives group that began in 2022. The following section looks at the process of how the group approached this issue.



### 3. The 2digi2 learning objectives group

Within the 2digi2 project the goal of the learning objectives group was to look at learning objectives and determine if and how they need to be modified in the digital era. The group initially explored the field of relevant learning objectives for language courses in the digital environment by creating a mind map. In the mind map a central division was first created by reference to both learning objectives and learning outcomes (Harden 2002). The difference was not at first clear-cut, but for pragmatic purposes, we defined the learning objectives as pathways that teachers can provide for students in the process of course design and curricula planning. Thus, the nature of learning objectives was seen as processual. In contrast, learning outcomes were seen as the final product: the result of what learners achieve along the learning path.

If we look at objectives and outcomes from the perspective of the teachers' daily work, we can position the objectives at the start of planning the teaching: they are a part of the planning of larger curricula and of single courses to be taught. Outcomes are the results of the learning process that teachers need to be able to assess at the end of the course or unit.

A collaborative analysis of the mind map led to putting forward the notion that learning objectives in the digital environment covering traditional skills and knowledge can be categorized into five main areas: skills, meta-skills, knowledge, secondary learning objectives, and the affective domain. (see Fig.3).

**Skills:** The *skills* that form the learning objectives for language and communication studies consist of one or several skills in the target language: listening, reading, speaking and/or writing. It is possible to create learning objectives according to a given scale, such as the CEFR scales. However, when teaching skills in learners' native language, we

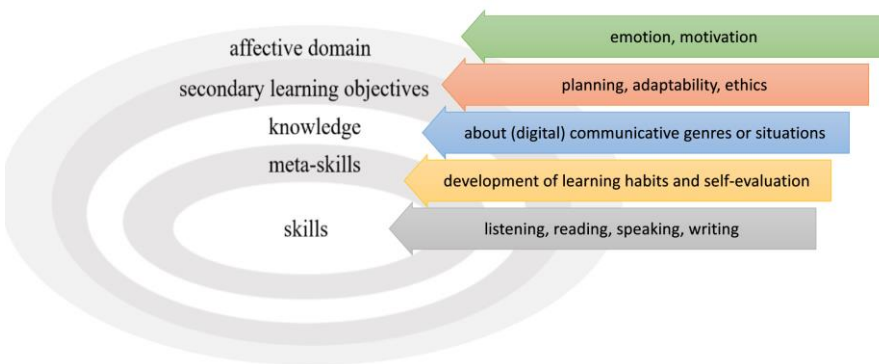
do not necessarily set the language skill learning objectives on a scale as is often done in the second and foreign languages. Instead, it is rather useful to set more specific objectives, such as oral skills in academia (of a given field of expertise). Thus, we would like to propose that the skills domain is a central objective in any language and communication learning context, online as well as in the classroom.

**Meta-skills:** *Meta-skills* in the language learning environment comprise a vast field, (Spencer and Lucas 2021) so they needed to be limited for the survey. The group chose the following areas: the general ability to independently develop one's own learning habits in the digital environment; the ability to analyse and use various text genres and communicative genres and the ability to self-evaluate one's own language skills. Self-evaluation is important for understanding what skills one already has and how to develop them further. This is an important element of *self-efficacy* espoused by Väättäjä and Ruokamo (2021).

**Knowledge:** The *knowledge domain* covers knowledge about the target communicative genres or situations. In our view this is only the starting point for the knowledge obtained in the digital learning environment. We believe some further elements to be equally present in the digital learning environment and that learning objectives cover communication "in the real world", meaning knowledge needed in university studies and in working life. When teaching digitally, the digital learning environment necessarily adds the digital environment per se to the relevant, targeted areas or knowledge. Hence, it seems logical to add the digital learning environment communication situations where the participants are immersed to the learning experience, and therefore also to the knowledge domain learning objectives. These communication situations include interaction over learning platforms and video conference tools as well as any further platforms used to convey

messages and interaction between any actors during a course. To give one example, on a French course it may take some effort for the students to understand the terminology of videoconferencing in the target language and it should be recognized by the teacher as one of the many learning objectives.

**Figure 3** Levels for Learning outcomes in digital language learning.



**Secondary learning objectives:** Additionally, we recognize the need for awareness of other more generic domains of learning objectives. We have labelled these “themes that learning objectives should address or incorporate” as **secondary learning objectives**. These can include ethics, strategizing and planning or flexibility and adaptability. They are not specific to language learning, but for instance within flexibility and adaptability we can identify subdomains such as self-direction, cross-cultural skills or productivity. All of these seem relevant for the self-regulated development of language and communication skills. Our suggestion for secondary learning objectives is merely as an example and it can be extended, but this is not actually within the scope of this project.

**Affective domain:** In our view all the above-mentioned domains should be accompanied by the *affective domain*. We base this on the need to demonstrate to the learners that striving towards learning objectives is often influenced by affective elements and steps on the learning path can be loaded with emotional impact. This seems particularly relevant in online interaction since the learners do not have immediate contact to each other. Some learners might experience negative feelings due to the indirectness or lack of peer and teacher feedback. (Niinivaara & Lehtonen 2023: 9) Even if affect is an integral part of all human social interaction, we would like to propose it plays a rather special role in digital language learning, the implications of which are yet to be fully researched.

After this initial work, the group created and conducted a survey with language teachers who had experienced the prolonged lockdown from spring 2020 to spring 2022. The survey was designed by collecting ideas from the project group, based on the background literature and their own mind-map and the next section looks at the results in detail.

#### **4 The learning objectives teacher questionnaire**

The group next collaborated on the creation of a questionnaire designed to ask teachers their perceptions of the range and need for learning objectives in the digital environment. The survey consisted of 17 questions divided into five main sections:

1. Tools available in digital environment
2. Exposure to language outside classroom
3. Information Literacy
4. Changing Nature of Communication
5. Health-related Learning Objectives

The survey was launched in October 2022, distributed to all Finnish language centres and remained open for a period of three weeks. The survey was delivered in three languages: English, Finnish and Swedish. In total, 74 responses were received, which is well in line with other similar surveys carried out for the 2digi2 project. Of the respondents, the largest group were English teachers (38%), followed by Swedish (19%) and Finnish written communication teachers (18%). For each of the five main themes, the survey presented learning objectives and asked teachers to assess their importance and also whether these objectives are already mentioned in their own course descriptions. Each learning objective was then targeted by a series of more detailed questions to gain a more detailed picture of teachers' views. In the next section we analyze the results gained from each of these themes.

**LO1: The learner can use the tools available in the digital environment in a way that is relevant to their language learning and us.** Of the 74 respondents, 90% (67) saw this as being important for students, whilst 2 respondents said it was not important and 3 were unable to say. Conversely, only 22 teachers (29%) include this objective in their course goals.

**Table 1** Teacher use of digital tools

|                  |                          |
|------------------|--------------------------|
| Moodle 97,3%     | Screencast-o-matic 33,3% |
| Word 95,9%       | Grammarly 30,3%          |
| Zoom 88,6%       | Google translate 25,4%   |
| PowerPoint 78,9% | Whatsapp 24,2%           |
| H5P 63,8%        | Duolingo 17,7%           |
| Padlet 63,1%     | Miro 10%                 |

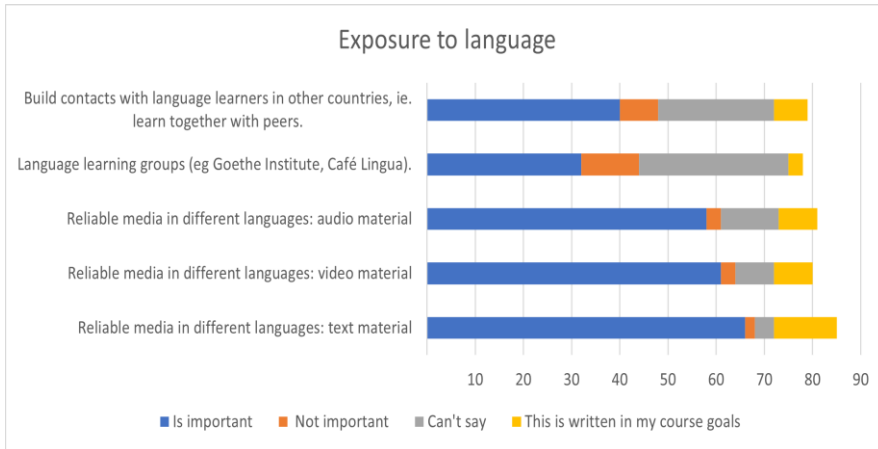
|                   |                            |
|-------------------|----------------------------|
| Quizlet 60%       | Instagram 8,8%             |
| Kahoot 60%        | Facebook 8,4%              |
| Youtube 58%       | Twitter 8,2%               |
| Google Docs 56,9% | Facebook messenger<br>3,4% |
| Doodle 46,4%      | Google classroom 1,6%      |
| Teams 41%         |                            |

Additionally, the results showed that teachers tended not to use online translation tools in their teaching (these were used by only 35.4% of respondents), nor did they use online corpora. The results also show (see Table 1) that whilst certain programs are used by the majority of teachers (Moodle, Word, Zoom) social media platforms were rarely used. It was noted in the teacher comments that although the survey asked the importance of the tools, it did not enquire as to how teachers use the tools.

**LO2. Exposure to language outside the classroom: The learner can benefit from exposure to language and culture in the digital environments outside the classroom. The aim is for the language to become a natural part of the learner's daily life and work routines.**

Exposure to language outside the classroom was seen as being important by 90% of the respondents, whilst only 4% considered it to be unimportant. Despite the overwhelming recognition of its importance only 18% reported having outside learning in their course goals.

**Figure 4** Results of the key features of the exposure to language outside the classroom



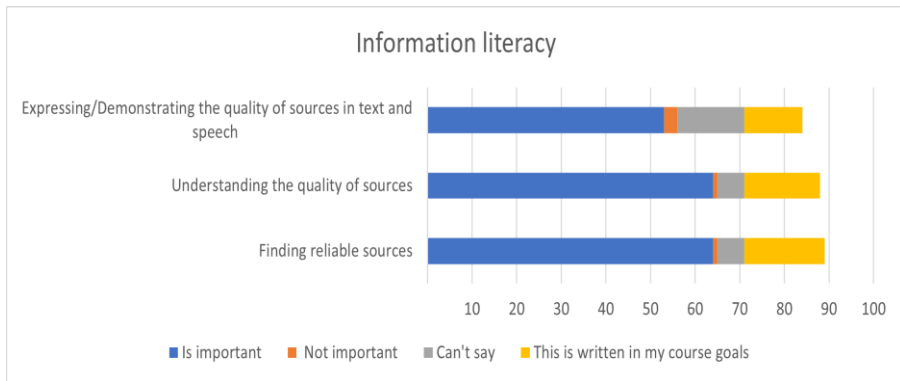
Analysis of the results displayed in Fig. 4 shows the varying degrees of importance teachers attached to each of the learning objectives. Despite the high numbers of teachers who saw these areas as being important, it is surprising to note that, for example, not all teachers see the importance of trustworthy media (text, video and audio). One respondent also stressed the importance of ‘non-reliable’ media in language learning:

*Consuming unreliable media online is also important. Students are driven by their own interests, and the reliability of the source is not the first thing on their minds, because language is then a tool for knowledge acquisition, rather than a skill to be improved.*

### **LO3 Natives or advanced language learners can develop their information retrieval skills in the digital environment.**

Of the respondents, 83% felt that this learning objective is important and yet again only 28% had included this in their course goals. Although this is slightly more than in the previous section on outside classroom learning, it can still be considered to be relatively low.

**Figure 5** Results of the key features of the information literacy learning outcome



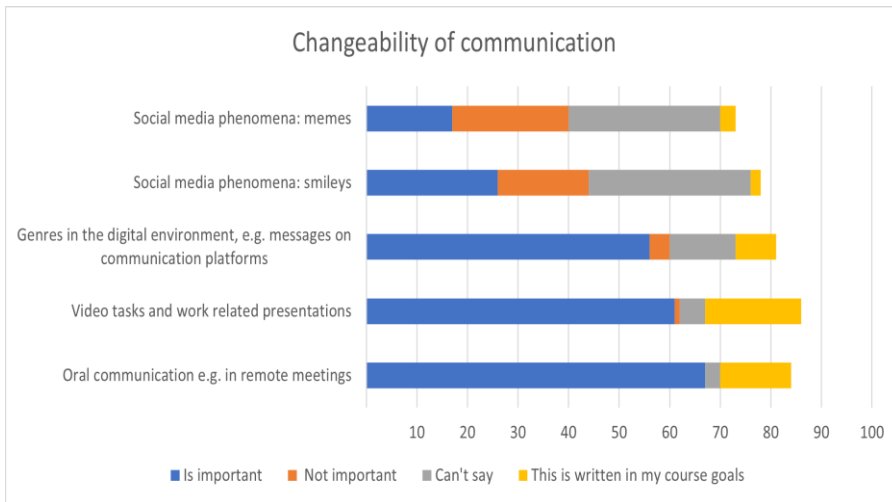
When looking at the more detailed learning objectives, 88% said that finding reliable sources and understanding the quality of sources is important, but only 72% said that showing the quality of sources in text and speech is important. Perhaps the question was not understood in the way it was intended, but it is interesting to note that while the majority think that it is important to be able to find and understand appropriate sources, 15 respondents do not know and 3 respondents directly agree that it is not important to convey an understanding of the quality of the source in the text or speech to the recipient.

**LO 4: Changing Nature of Communication: The learner is aware of the changing nature of communication in the digital environment and can adapt to changing communication styles (in any culture or situation)**

We see here again the same disparity between perceived importance (82%) and whether the outcome has been written into course goals (14%).



**Figure 6** Results of the key features of the adapting to change learning objective



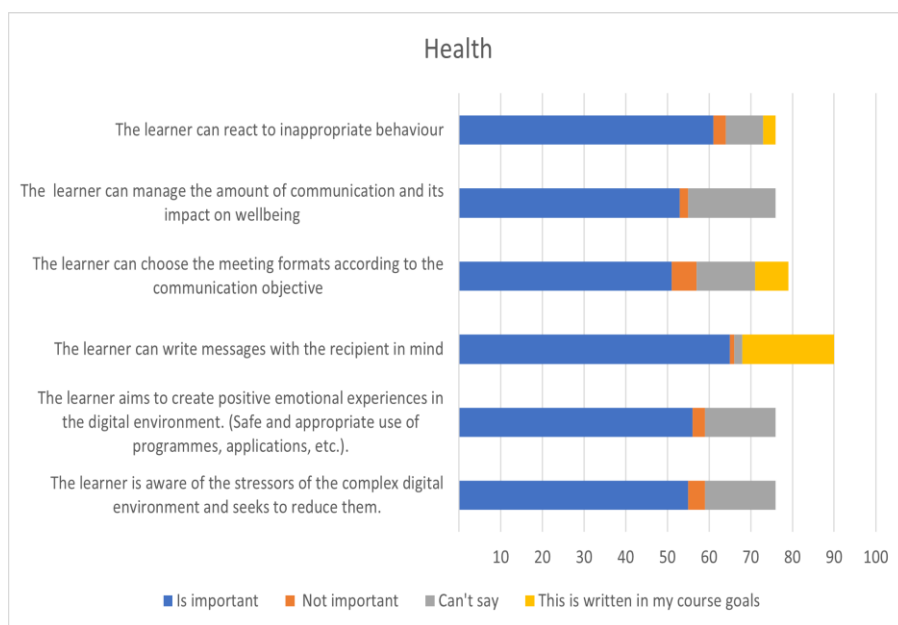
The results of the more detailed analysis shown in Fig. 6 indicated the overwhelming perceived importance of communicating in virtual meetings and being able to perform video tasks and give presentations at a distance (Zoom). A deeper analysis showed that the use of social media platforms in language learning situations is not seen as important. Comments by teachers also mentioned the utilization of digital tools to coordinate and manage work in dispersed teams. It was also considered vital to understand the importance of shared responsibility between team members in collaborative teamwork online.

**LO 5: Health: The learner can adopt healthy working habits and be aware of the impact of working in a digital environment on brain health and work performance.**

In the results of this learning objective we can see the starkest disparity between perceived importance (76%) and uptake of usage

in course goals (0%). The area seen as most important was the learner being able to write messages with the recipient in mind (88%), followed by being able to react to inappropriate behaviour (82%). Two respondents, however, did not see this as being important and nine were unsure (did not know).

**Figure 7** Results of the key features of the health learning objectives



### **LO Open question: “Is there any other learning objective that is relevant to the digital learning environment?”**

The last section of the questionnaire was an open field where respondents could add learning objectives that had not been included in the survey. We received 19 answers, and these were analyzed to contain roughly 24 different points. The most dominant content areas are related to communication skills (9 mentions) and self-management (6 mentions). The other comments given either express satisfaction with the learning outcomes in the survey or give single

mentions of additional outcomes such as ethics, copyright and information literacy.

The following two answers cover both communication skills and self-management:

*Media and digital skills, digital interaction, digital social skills, online conversation skills, self-management, time management, managing complexity, copyright issues.*

*... students should be made aware how the work on the course has an impact on their future work. Stress on professional communication.*

Both answers are oriented towards working life skills and the requirements of teamwork. The mention of “digital social skills” was not included in the learning outcomes survey as such, but clearly that it is a central part of the online environment and closely connected to communication skills. Communication skills are elucidated in the following answer:

*Listener responsibility, audience responsibility. In a digital learning environment, the listener should be able to show that they are listening and also be able to articulate it, both verbally and non-verbally. The listener also has the responsibility to ask questions if they do not understand.*

Here it becomes clear that the teacher or the person speaking in a video conference needs support from the listeners and the social contact needs to be constructed in one way or another. The need for participant signals when understanding is not clear is an essential point: signals need to be given, and this responsibility lies with the recipient. Naturally the speaker can also ask for thumbs up, pose control questions directly to the participants or use other means of comprehension assurance. However, the recipient is responsible for communicating when things are not working for them. In a video

conference, this seems a vital skill and it is crucial for successful communication.

The need for self-management as a learning objective is made clear in the following answer:

*The emphasis on learning in a self-directed way, i.e. taking responsibility for your own learning, is greater than in face-to-face teaching, where the teacher is involved in guiding the activity. It requires in particular stamina, i.e. the ability to persevere until the end of a long course. (comment 18)*

In comparison to classroom-based learning, taking responsibility for every step of one's own learning clearly represents a core skill, but we consider this to be more of a generic skill, rather than one specific of digital language learning only.

## **5. Discussion**

The title of this article refers to language teacher perceptions of the learning objectives needed by students in this post-Covid, digitalized era. The results of the work of the 2digi2 learning objectives group and the results of the survey carried out present a somewhat ambivalent picture. On the one hand, teachers very clearly saw the need for the learning outcomes presented to them in the survey, but on the other, for the most part they had not yet at least included these same outcomes in any of their own course goals. This was apparent in all the five main thematic areas covered in the survey: using tools in the digital environment 90% indicated importance, but only 29 included the matter in course learning outcomes; benefiting from exposure to digital environment outside the classroom 90% - 18%; digital information retrieval skills 83%-28%; awareness of the changing nature of digital communication 82%-14%; and healthy

working habits online 76%-0%. Several points can be seen to arise from these results. Firstly, teachers pointed out in the open section comments that whilst each of these objectives can be considered to be important, but they may not necessarily be relevant to any given course. Thus, the fact they are not included in course goals does not necessarily mean that they have been ignored. However, the numbers are so overwhelming that we feel we can safely point to this being a key area that teachers could incorporate into their planning in the future.

Some of the survey results were arguably unsurprising, for example, that social media is little used in teaching, and also that use of corpora still has to make a breakthrough in mainstream teaching outside of specialist English academic writing courses. However, the survey uncovered some quite surprising results. Not all teachers saw the necessity of providing students with trustworthy media, and when asked about the importance of showing the quality of sources in text and speech to students, 15 did not know if it was important and 3 respondents explicitly stated it was not. Only 82% of respondents believed that it is important for students to be able to react to inappropriate behaviour online with 2 respondents not seeing it was important and 9 who were not sure. It is difficult to analyze the reasons for these answers. What can be said is that the vast majority of teachers believed in the importance of the main learning objectives presented in the survey: tools 90%, exposure outside the classroom 90%, retrieval skills 83%, awareness of the changes in communication styles 82% and healthy working habits 76%. Additionally, teachers gave further insight into learning objectives they thought would be important to include. Naturally, communication-related matters formed the biggest group of comments and these were quite diverse in focus. The themes of communication in many forms and self and time management were stressed by many, but the diversity of the answers points to the size of this vast area of study. In order to cope

with this, the main goal now must arguably be to facilitate the uptake by teachers and institutions of these digital learning objectives into course planning at a grass roots level.

## 6. Conclusion

As we have seen in this paper, there is a clear disparity between the perceived importance of digital learning objectives by teachers and their application in course planning and curricula development. In order to promote the use of new learning objectives for digital learning, the group has created a bank of ready-made objectives for teachers to use that will be situated in the forthcoming 2digi2 website. Below are some examples that can be freely adapted and modified.

*The learner can use digital tools to support their language learning.*

*The learner can benefit from exposure to language and culture in digital environments outside the classroom.*

*Natives or advanced language learners can develop their information retrieval skills in the digital environment.*

*The learner is aware of the changing nature of communication in the digital environment and can adapt to changing communication styles.*

*The learner can adopt healthy working habits and is aware of the impact of working in a digital environment on brain health and work performance.*

It is hoped that these will encourage teachers to include these learning objectives in their lesson and curricula planning in the future. We are aware of the restrictions some units have when creating course descriptions and understand that not all of this fits the small

space given to learning objectives. Acknowledging this we hope that some of the proposed learning objective statements can be used in various ways to support the development of digital language courses. However, the group feel that it is not enough to provide individual teachers with help for course descriptions; rather, these objectives need to be taken up at an institutional level and be included in the regular instructions given for curricula planning. We therefore recommend that language centres take advantage of the resources created in this 2digi2 project in relation to learning objectives and through these to the broader resources created by the whole project.

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2digi2 website. URL: <https://2digi2.languages.fi/>

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# Förväntningar, förhoppningar och farhågor inför en kurs i svenska som ingår i examen

Nina Numminen

## 1. Inledning

Vad får oss att lära oss nya saker? Hur inverkar läraren, individerna, gruppen på inläringen? Lika viktigt som att välja en färg på tuschpennan som syns längst bak i klassrummet, är att hitta inlärningsmetoder och en inlärningsmiljö åt studenterna som fungerar både på individnivå som på gruppnivå. Som lärare funderar man efter varje kurs, efter varje möte med studenterna på vad som fungerade och vad som inte fungerade. Kursplanering är ett kontinuerligt vidareutvecklingsarbete där man försöker förbättra och hitta inlärningsmetoder som uppmuntrar till inläring. Enligt Forsberg et al. (1984) är det viktigt att skilja mellan undervisning och lärande, där undervisning representerar att man planerar en inläringssituation med målsättning att uppnå inläring, medan lärande handlar om att studerande lär sig något och utvecklas. Inläring är enligt denna definition "en aktiv process som sker inom individen" (Forsberg et al., 1984). Därför är det viktigt att skapa en inlärningsmiljö där studenterna får stöd och yttre motivation i form av inlärningsmetoder, deadlines och återkoppling till uppgifter de gör under kursen. För att stödja den inre motivationen vore det även bra att ge möjlighet att inverka på aktiviteter och uppgifter samt att uppnå uppsatta mål. För att uppnå lärandemål måste man i planeringen av utbildningen ta i beaktande till exempel vilka förutsättningar kursdeltagarna har och på så sätt åstadkomma en trygg miljö för inläring. (Forsberg et al., 1984). Denna artikel är en

del av arbetet att försöka förbättra och hitta metoder som uppmuntrar till lärande och genom det förbättrade kunskaper i ämnet svenska för att uppnå språkraven för högskolestuderande enligt förordningen 481/2003 om bedömning av kunskaper i svenska inom statsförvaltningen.

Kursen i svenska som ingår i examen är något som många studenter verkar känna stor stress inför men samtidigt ha stora förväntningar inför. I denna artikel kartläggs vilka studenternas tankar är i början av en kurs i svenska. Detta för att i framtida kurser kunna förbättra och förnya undervisning och pedagogik. Tanken med arbetet är att då studenternas tankar och förväntningar finns kartlagda kan dessa bättre tas i beaktande i planeringen av kurser i svenska hörande till examen.

Att samla in material i början av kursen och att sedan analysera, sortera och bedöma materialet ger läraren stöd att koncentrera sig på det centrala i kursfordringarna och samtidigt försöka möta kursdeltagarnas olika behov. Detta är något som lärare gör hela tiden i sitt arbete, men avsikten med denna undersökning var att synliggöra kursdeltagarnas tankar inför kursen i svenska och att få material för att utveckla kurserna att passa deltagarna bättre.

### **1.1 Syfte och problemformulering**

Syftet är att klargöra och redogöra för universitetsstudenters förväntningar och farhågor inför kursen i svenska som hör till examen vid Åbo universitet. Arbetet har avgränsats till att endast titta på med vilka ord och uttryck studenterna har valt att beskriva sina tankar inför kursen i svenska. Finns det skillnader beroende på vilket språk man valt att använda i sina svar? Vilka förväntningar och farhågor har kursdeltagarna inför själva kursen? Med vilka ord och uttryck har de valt att uttrycka sina känslor? Har kursdeltagarna färdiga inlärningsstrategier eller tillvägagångssätt för att uppnå kursfordringarna?

## 2. Bakgrund (och teorier)

Till kursdeltagarna skickas ett välkomstmeddelande i början av kursen där alla hälsas välkomna och en kort beskrivning om vad innehållet på den första lektionen är. Detta för att alla ska ha en möjlighet att känna sig avslappnade och trygga i situationen och inte behöva stressa i onödan. Det underlättar inläringen om man vet i förväg vad som kommer att hända och inte behöver oroa sig för överraskande situationer som man kan hamna i och där man känner sig obekvämt. Den allmänna inställningen till kursen influeras av hur läraren presenterar och tydliggör målsättningar, kursfordringar och diskuterar arbetsformer med studenterna (Hedin & Svensson, 2009).

Den första lektionen är det första mötet mellan lärare och kursdeltagare och handlar mycket om praktiska saker men också om att gruppen bildas. Då tas de första viktiga stegen för en fungerande gruppdynamik där inläring kan ske. En undervisningssituation handlar inte bara om att lära och att lära sig, utan det handlar också mycket om att få till stånd en lärmiljö där alla kan känna sig trygga, vågar försöka och även misslyckas tillsammans med de andra i gruppen. Enligt Elmgren och Henriksson (2013) optimerar man studenternas möjligheter till lärande då man tar hänsyn till och visar intresse för deras förkunskaper, erfarenheter och bakgrund och på så sätt bidrar till en positiv inlärningsmiljö. Undervisningen utgår från en utvecklingsinriktad pedagogik där lärandeprocessen handlar om bland annat inre motivation, en aktiv studeranderoll och där läraren erbjuder val mellan olika arbetssätt och även uppmuntrar till eget ansvar för lärandet (Hedin & Svensson, 2009).

Alla kursdeltagare får under den första lektionen ta del av kursens läroplan, tidtabell och bekanta sig med material om nivåkrav för det andra inhemska språket, de s.k. KORU-kriterierna (Elsinen & Juurakko-Paavola, 2006). På kursens Moodleplattform finns små övningar och videoklipp som handlar om inre och yttre motivation och dess inverkan på inläring. Den första hemuppgiften är att titta på dessa videoklipp och att reflektera över den egna situationen.

Tanken är att kursdeltagarna reflekterar över den egna startnivån, nivåkraven för språkexamina för högskolestuderande (Elsinen & Juurakko-Paavola, 2006) och arbetsbördan innan de svarar på den öppna frågan om vilka tankar de har i början av kursen.

För läraren är denna information viktig, eftersom varje student lär sig utgående från sina egna utgångspunkter och läraren måste i sin undervisning hela tiden samverka inte bara med den enskilde studenten utan också se till att gruppen fungerar som helhet. (Elmgren & Henriksson, 2013) Enligt Elmgren och Henriksson är även öppenhet och diskussion med studeranden ett villkor för att få ett fungerande samspel med bästa möjliga samverkan (2013).

### 3. Metod och material

Alla grupper fick samma fråga under läsåren 2021 - 2022 och 2022 - 2023. Respondenterna kom från två olika fakulteter och gemensamt för dem alla var att kursen i svenska var obligatorisk och ingick i deras kandidatexamen. Att svara på frågan, efter den första introduktionslektionen, har varit helt frivilligt och anonymt. Instruktionen har varit att studenten själv väljer om hen vill svara på finska eller svenska. Innan de svarar på frågan har kursens första introduktionslektion redan varit och de har träffat läraren och övriga kurskamrater. De har bekantat sig med kursmaterial m.m. innan de svarar på frågan. Den öppna frågan var:

*”Förväntningar, önskemål, farhågor inför kursen. Skriv dina funderingar här. Fundera också på hur du planerar dina studier.*

*Du svarar anonymt. Du kan också skriva under med ditt namn, om det är någonting sådant som du vill att jag ska veta om just dig.*

*Svara gärna på svenska, men det går lika bra på finska.*

\*\*\*

*Odotukset, toiveet, pelot kurssin alussa. Kirjoita mietteesi tähän. Mieti myös miten suunnittelet opintosi.*

*Vastaa nimettömästi. Voit myös allekirjoittaa vastauksesi, mikäli siinä on jotain sellaista tietoa, jonka haluat minun tietävän juuri sinusta.*

*Vastaa ruotsiksi tai suomeksi.”*

Eftersom kursdeltagaren fick svara hemma i lugn och ro och anonymt, valde några att inte svara, men överlag var mängden svar god. Mer än 2/3 av kursdeltagarna svarade på frågan. I min analys har jag tagit med slumpmässigt svar från de olika grupperna under de två läsåren. Det totala antalet respondenter var 135 och av dessa hade 78 respondenter valt att svara på finska, 53 svarade på svenska och resterande 4 respondenter svarade på båda språken.

I min textanalys försöker jag dels analysera med hurdana ord som respondenterna valde att uttrycka sig, om de kunde ses som positiva, negativa eller neutrala. (Melin & Lange, 1999) När man analyserar text finns närmast alltid ett tolkningsproblem, eftersom vissa ord och termer borde tas upp i alla betydelser de har (Bergström & Borélius, 2005). Om ett ord eller ett uttryck kunde ses som positivt eller negativt var i denna kartläggning ganska enkelt. Respondenterna hade valt att uttrycka sig på ett sådant sätt att det inte blev tolkningsproblem. En intressant faktor var även vilket språk som respondenten valde att använda i sitt svar och om det hade en betydelse för attityder mot svenskan och motivation för kursen. Eftersom respondenterna svarade på en öppen fråga och svaren var anonyma, varierade svaren och längden på svar ganska mycket. Svarslängden varierade allt från ett ord till en halv sida text. Svaren grupperades utifrån de typer av tankar som kom fram i texterna.

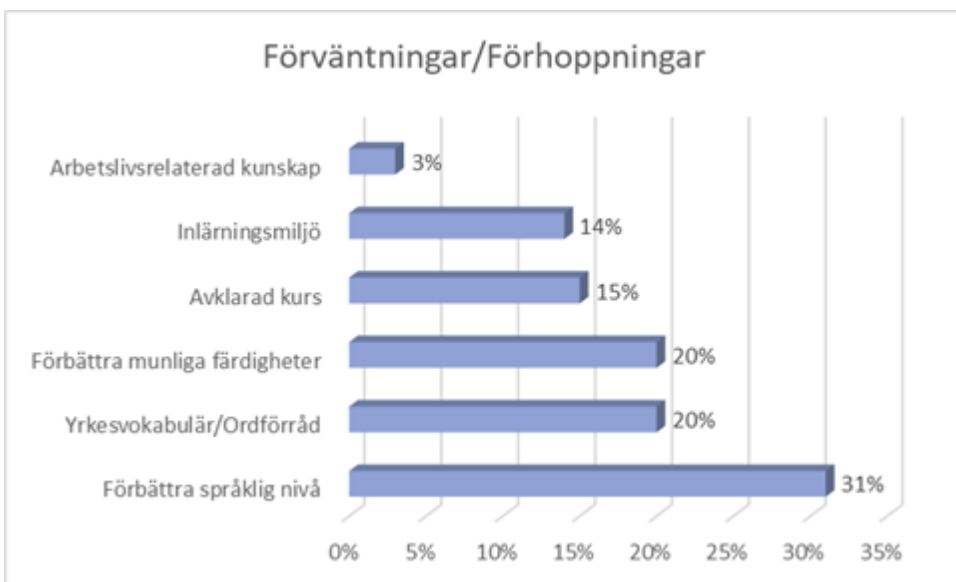
## 4. Resultat

I denna analys har jag valt att inte titta på om det finns skillnader mellan de olika studentgrupperna. Detta även för att enskilda svar inte ska kunna kännas igen. Eftersom respondenterna själv fått välja vilket språk de svarar på har jag valt att behålla de båda språken i min analys. Detta för att se om det eventuellt fanns några skillnader mellan attityder och språkval.

### 4.1 Förväntningar och förhoppningar

Totalt hade 127 respondenter uttryckt någon form av förväntning eller förhoppning i början av kursen.

**Bild 1**



Av respondenterna uttryckte 28% en allmän önskan om att förbättra sin språkliga nivå på något sätt. 20% av respondenterna hade uttryckt en specifik förväntning att förbättra sin yrkesvokabulär och/eller sitt allmänna ordförråd. En lika stor grupp uttryckte en önskan om att förbättra sina muntliga färdigheter. I denna grupp fanns en stor

spridning på skalan, allt från att våga tala svenska till att bli helt flytande i svenska. De som uttryckligen hade önskemål relaterade till den avklarade kursen var cirka 15% av respondenterna. I denna grupp var den största förhoppningen att komma igenom kursen på nivå B1, men där fanns även några som ville få bra vitsord eller att komma igenom på första försöket.

Den brokigaste gruppen, som utgjorde 14%, var de som hade förhoppningar eller önskemål för kursens utformning och atmosfär. Ungefär hälften uttryckte en önskan om en avslappnad och trevlig miljö där man vågar försöka och också misslyckas. Andra önskemål var bland annat att inlärningsmiljön skulle vara positiv, mångsidig och stödja inläringen. Enstaka önskemål var att även finska skulle användas av läraren, att få jobba i mindre grupper, att det skulle finnas empati och förståelse för svagare studenter och att kursen inte skulle vara alltför tidskrävande.

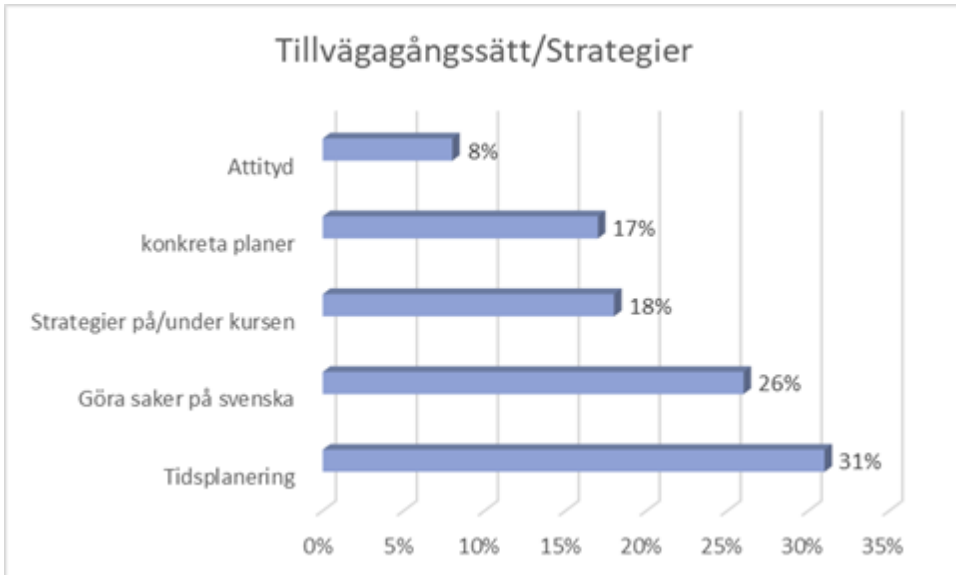
Några respondenter (3%) uttryckte även önskemål om arbetslivsrelaterade kunskaper. Sådana var till exempel att kunna använda språket i text (e-post, referat mm) och att kunna utnyttja vetenskapliga artiklar på svenska i sitt yrke.

#### **4.2 Strategier och tillvägagångsätt**

Många av respondenterna (n 159) hade skrivit om hur de tänker arbeta på kursen och vilka strategier de hade för att uppnå sina mål. I denna kategori har svaren grupperats enligt saker som man tänker göra på svenska under kursen, konkreta planer för att förbättra något delområde, strategier på/under kursen, tidsplanering och attityder.



Bild 2



Tidsplanering (31%) var den största enskilda strategin som omnämndes. Här fanns både tankar om att hålla tidtabeller/deadlines och att använda extra tid på att öva sina språkkunskaper. Därefter fanns strategier att göra saker på svenska för att aktivera språket (26%). Strategier som man tänkte använda var till exempel att titta på tv/filmer, lyssna på poddar, radio eller musik på svenska. Till denna grupp hörde även de som tänkte läsa böcker/nyheter och att använda svenska mer i vardagen. Många tänkte även satsa på göra kursuppgifter noga och vara aktiva på lektionerna (strategier under kursen, 18%) som tillvägagångssätt att klara av kursen. En strategi som omnämndes var att satsa på att göra sitt bästa och att vara motiverad (attityder, 8%).

### 4.3 Övriga förväntningar och farhågor

Förväntningar och farhågor som uttrycker någon form av känsla fanns i 106 svar. Här har avgränsningen varit att gruppera i positiva och negativa känslor och tankar samt en blandning av de två. Sådana svar som till exempel "jag kan inte svenska" har lämnats utanför, eftersom

det skulle ha krävt en tolkning om konstaterandet är positivt eller negativt.

### Bild 3



Farhågor som uttrycktes var i en majoritet (n 75) och här kunde man även se en skillnad i på vilket språk respondenten hade valt att svara. Av de som uttryckte farhågor valde 75% att uttrycka sig på finska. De absolut största farhågorna var att man kände rädsla inför kursen, att man inte skulle komma igenom och att tala inför klassen eller i gruppen.

Positiva förväntningar (n 21) uttrycktes av 67% på svenska. Förväntningar var till exempel att man såg fram emot kursen och att man var inspirerad och motiverad att få använda svenska.

De blandade känslorna (n 10) var närmast positiva gentemot att få studera svenska, men med farhågor och rädsla för att arbetsbördan skulle bli för stor.

## 5. Diskussion och sammanfattning

Det som framkom klart och tydligt var att många studenter känner sig nervösa och oroliga inför kursen i svenska och att de också är oroliga för att inte klara av kursen dels på grund av nivåkraven och dels på grund av arbetsbördan. Muntlig framställning och att tala svenska var något som man uttryckte oro för och var stressad över. Samtidigt fanns en önskan om att kunna tala bättre svenska eller att till och med bli flytande i att tala svenska.

Det som däremot lyste med sin frånvaro i svaren var att man skulle vara negativt inställd till svenska språket. Den stora bilden som svaren ger är att överlag är studenterna motiverade att lära sig svenska. Rädslan för att arbetsbördan skulle bli för stor, berodde mycket långt på de egna baskunskaperna i språket. Fanns en önskan om att verkligen lära sig svenska eller var det mer den yttre motivationen som styrde? Svårt att säga. Det man måste komma ihåg är att respondenterna styrs av föruppgifterna i kursen i sina svar. De ombads att titta på kursfordringar, tidsplan och den egna nivån innan de svarade på den öppna frågan. Så resultatet måste ses ur det perspektivet och analyseras endast som vad det är, d.v.s. ett svar till den som ansvarar för kursplaneringen.

Studenternas svar grundade sig på deras tidigare kunskaper, erfarenheter och värderingar och reflektionen gav dem möjlighet att få inflytande över undervisningens innehåll och upplägg, vilket ger dem ett större ansvar för sin inläring och medverkan i undervisningen. Enligt Plengier Gaàl (2005) är ett vuxenpedagogiskt förhållningssätt en bra grund för högskolestudier och passar även bra för högskolestuderanden. I denna kartläggning gick det att se att studenterna var och är intresserade av att både påverka sin inläringssituation och kursens utformning. Detta kräver av läraren en förmåga att vara lyhörd för studenternas åsikter och att själv ingå i läroprocessen och skapa inläringssituationer i samspel med studenterna som anses som viktiga och nyttiga. (Plengier Gaàl, 2005).

Som Wilhelmson (2006) konstaterar är det viktigt att skapa positiva läroprocesser och som en del i detta är det en god lärmiljö viktig. Samspel mellan inte bara lärare och studenter utan även studenter emellan har stor betydelse för en positiv lärs spiral (Wilhelmson, 2006). Svarsenkäten i början av kursen och till den hörande föruppgifter är ett steg i att skapa en positiv lärmiljö där varje individ är en påverka och bidra utifrån de egna förutsättningarna så att inläring sker kollektivt och på individnivå.

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Övriga källor:

CEFR = Common European Framework of Reference for Languages.  
Learning, Teaching, Assessment. Council of Europe.  
<https://rm.coe.int/1680459f97> (hämtad 2023-20-06)

Språklag 2003/423. <http://finlex.fi/sv/laki/ajantasa/2003/20030423>  
(hämtad 2023-05-30)

Statsrådets förordning om bedömning av kunskaper i finska och svenska  
inom statsförvaltningen 481/2003.  
<https://www.finlex.fi/sv/laki/alkup/2003/20030481> (hämtad 2023-  
10-12)

# **Finnish student teachers' experiences during the coronavirus pandemic school shutdown in Spring 2020**

*Bridget Palmer*

## **Introduction**

The World Health Organization declared a global pandemic on 11 March, 2020, spurring a chain reaction of events affecting populations, industries, and activities across the globe (WHO, 2020). Governments in many countries around the world responded within days of this declaration by partially or completely closing schools (Onyema et al., 2020). In Finland, primary, secondary, and tertiary schools ended contact teaching on 18 March and moved instruction online (Figueroa & Rawkins, 2020).

This sudden shutting down of schools and shifting to online teaching was disruptive to school administrators, teachers, parents, and children (Parpala & Niinistö-Sivuranta, 2022; Sahlberg, 2020). In Finland, the period between the WHO's declaration of a global pandemic and the closure of schools was one week; however, the decision to close schools was announced only two days beforehand, on the evening of 16 March. This left only one weekday – 17 March, a Tuesday – for schools in Finland to conduct any last in-person preparations necessary for the shift to online teaching on 18 March.

During this period of schools shutting down, students majoring in Classroom Teacher Education at a university in Finland were in the

midst of completing their required teaching practicum at a local elementary school. This teaching practicum takes place during the students' second year of studies and lasts around eight weeks. The teaching practicum in 2020 began in January under somewhat normal circumstances, with the COVID-19 situation building globally but not yet affecting larger societal institutions such as schools. When schools in Finland closed on 18 March 2020, the student teachers still had 1-2 weeks of their practicum to complete. The practicum is a required element of the Classroom Teacher Education major and while it was theoretically possible that the university and/or elementary school would cancel or modify that requirement in the spring of 2020 under unprecedented circumstances, they did not do so.

Therefore, the Classroom Teacher Education students were required to complete their student teaching "as normal," in anything but normal circumstances in the spring of 2020. This rapid shift from a routine degree requirement to teaching amid unprecedented modalities and methods had a great impact on these student teachers' experiences completing their practicum.

## **1. Methods**

This research focuses on the experiences of five university students majoring in Classroom Teacher Education during the spring semester of 2020 and seeks to describe the answers to two questions: 1. what happened during their teaching practicum in spring 2020; and 2. what lessons did they learn to apply to their future careers? The five university students involved in this research were completing their teaching practicum period at a local elementary school in the specified time period of spring 2020. This teaching practicum assigns the university students to teach a specific class at a local elementary school, and they are mentored by the classroom teacher, who oversees and guides the university students. The mentor teachers and student teachers have a great degree of autonomy in organizing their

practicum period, but a minimum number of teaching, observation, and feedback hours must be met to fulfil the requirements set by the degree program.

In order to answer the research questions stated above, I conducted semi-structured interviews (via Zoom) with five university students who completed their practicum period at the local elementary school in February-April 2020. The questions asked during the interview were: 1. What happened during your student teaching?; 2. How did this affect you?; and 3. What lessons did you learn that you could apply to your future working life? The interviewees were free to add more information if they desired, and I asked relevant follow-up questions as the situation required. In this paper, names and other identifying details have been removed from any interview or communication excerpts. The participants in the interviews volunteered for the task. The Zoom interview sessions were recorded, after which I typed up transcripts and sent them to the interview participants to be approved. I then reviewed the transcripts and my notes to reconstruct and describe the experiences of the student teachers during the school shutdown in spring 2020 and answer the research questions.

## **2. Establishing a timeline**

In order to reconstruct the events of spring 2020 that affected the five university students at the center of this research, I examined correspondence between:

- elementary school leadership and staff/student teachers
- elementary school teachers and parents
- student teachers and parents
- university administration/leadership and university students



This correspondence/communication took place via email or through the elementary school communication platform, Wilma, in March and April 2020.

As the situation regarding school closures evolved very rapidly in mid-March 2020, it is useful to examine the overall timeline of developments relevant to this research more closely.

*January 2020:* The second-year cohort of students majoring in Classroom Teacher Education begins the English course taught by me. We have five lessons of the English course, held in-person, on the university campus. The course plan is that lessons will pause while the practicum takes place and then continue at the very end of March/beginning of April.

*Wednesday, 11 March, 2020:* The WHO declares the global COVID-19 pandemic.

*Friday, 13 March, 2020:* The university students completing their teaching practicum are informed that student events and elementary school swimming lessons are cancelled, but that the practicum should continue as normal. (In fact, schools would close just five days later.)

*Sunday, 15 March, 2020:* The university students are informed that contact teaching at the elementary school will be discontinued and all practicum teaching will move online. As of now, student teachers cannot come to the school and all further contact with mentor teachers (regarding how online teaching will go, etc.) should take place online only, with further instructions to come. (Interestingly, this announcement comes one day before the Ministry of Education and Culture's official declaration of school closures. It is unclear whether the university made this decision on its own, or whether it knew the Ministry would declare the same policy on the following day.)

*Monday, 16 March, 2020:* One student teacher sends a message to parents saying they have practiced using videoconferencing tools

such as Teams and Zoom with the class (sixth-graders). At 18.30, the elementary school principal sends a message informing parents and teachers that the school will close, that all teaching will move online starting on 18 March, and that 17 March will be the last day the school is open.

*Tuesday, 17 March, 2020:* The sixth-grade mentor teacher sends a message informing parents how online teaching will work, including how to set up Teams and send chats to the student teachers. The elementary school principal sends a message reminding parents that distance teaching starts tomorrow and gives some tips/best practices. Separately, the elementary school vice principal sends a message to all practicum teachers outlining general guidelines for distance teaching, such as what a lesson plan might look like for online lessons and how to mentor students from a distance.

*Wednesday, 18 March, 2020:* The sixth-grade mentor teacher sends a message to parents reviewing how the first day of online teaching went and gives instructions for how to mute Teams notifications on school-provided devices (such as an iPad or laptop) at night.

*Friday, 20 March, 2020:* A student teacher sends instructions for a PE lesson for the children to complete on their own.

*Sunday, 22 March, 2020:* The elementary school principal sends a message reviewing the past week of distance teaching and says cooperation between the home and school is more important than ever.

*Monday, 23 March, 2020:* The elementary school vice principal sends a message congratulating student teachers on a successful week of distance teaching and gives clarifications on some previous instructions regarding lesson plans and cooperation with mentor teachers.

*Mid-April 2020:* The teaching practicum period ends and the student teachers say goodbye to their classes via Zoom/Teams.

*Thursday, 14 May, 2020:* Schools in Finland re-open.

*Saturday, 30 May, 2020:* The school year in Finland ends and schools close for the summer.

### **3. Back to “normal” in the English courses**

I first met this cohort of second-year Classroom Teacher Education students in January 2020, before they began their teaching practicum. They completed their practicum during a break from the course and I next saw them at the very end of March/beginning of April 2020. As established by the timeline described above, during just a few short months, they experienced a rapid shift from normal, in-person teaching at the elementary school, to online teaching only. They experienced this unprecedented change not as seasoned professionals with years of experience, but as untested, novice, pre-professional student teachers. The differences in the students that I observed when comparing their January/February selves to their March/April selves was almost palpable. They came back to the course after their teaching practicum shell-shocked and Zoom-weary, having had experiences that they (and all of us) were unprepared for and which varied from student to student. Our English course lessons were now online, since the university had closed, and while I overheard fragments here and there of what they had gone through during the end of their practicum teaching, we kept our (Zoom) classroom discussions to other, less tender topics and left recent events largely unexamined.

After the summer break, in Autumn 2020, the now third-year students began their second English course, also taught by me, and still online due to the continued closure of the university. At this point, the university students were six months removed from their tumultuous teaching practicum period, and cracks were starting to appear. They were clearly struggling to cope with the lingering emotional and

academic effects of that experience, while also dealing with present-day stresses and changes demanded by online studying at the university. They were active and energetic during Zoom lessons but there was a sadness that lurked behind the tiles of their faces on my screen. Near the end of the semester in November 2020, one group of students presented an overview of the pandemic-related changes and instability they'd endured in their own studies, including the teaching practicum, since the beginning of 2020. It was a rare moment of reflection and I determined I would find out more about what they had experienced during their teaching practicum at the local elementary school in spring 2020.

## **4. Results**

The five students I interviewed all had slightly different experiences during their teaching practicum in spring 2020 due to two factors. First, they were all assigned to different mentor teachers in different grade levels. And second, the mentor teachers and the student teachers are all given a very high degree of autonomy to plan and carry out their teaching. The student teachers have been given the pseudonyms Adam, Chris, Samantha, Mark, and Kevin. Their experiences are as follows.

### **4.1 Adam**

Adam felt like a true colleague of his mentor teacher in the classroom. Therefore, when it became apparent in mid-March 2020 that the school would be closing, the mentor teacher gathered the student teachers together and they worked as a team to create a plan for the remaining days they would have with the children. The teachers (mentor and student teachers) felt a tremendous responsibility toward their first-graders: they knew it was up to them to, in just a few short days, equip the children with the skills they would need to get through an indeterminate period of online learning amid greater

societal uncertainty and upheaval. How to log on to Zoom, how to work with an iPad in a Zoom classroom – these practical skills became their focus with the seven- and eight-year-olds in those frantic two days before the school shut down.

The team of teachers in this first-grade classroom made two crucial decisions early on that helped the rest of the distance learning period progress as smoothly as could be expected, even for the littlest children at the school. First, they created QR codes that would automatically open up the classroom Zoom sessions. Then they taught the children how to capture the QR code with their iPad camera and showed how it would automatically join them to the Zoom session – no need to read instructions (at this age, many children in Finland are still learning to read). Separately, they provided complete instructions to the parents written out in full.

The second decision they made was to split the class into smaller groups and assign a student teacher to each one. Each teacher ended up responsible for about four students, grouped loosely by personalities and ability levels that fit together well. Some of the student teachers had technically finished their required practicum hours by this time, but they, too, felt an obligation to these children and pitched in to help with the small groups on Zoom. There was a feeling that they were all in this together. Adam reports that they “focused on what [they] could do, now, and that was successful for [them].”

A typical Zoom session for the first-graders in those hectic weeks looked something like this: thirty minutes of teaching, followed by a fifteen-minute break. If they could accomplish a lesson activity on Zoom, they did it; if they couldn't, they didn't. The children caught on quickly and coped quite well, even those students who sometimes had had trouble focusing in class. Adam found that students were joining the Zoom early, and in those few minutes before “class” began, they talked about everyday life. Adam was aware that the children could sense the change happening in their world, and in some

ways, it made them more focused on whatever form of school they could attend.

At every stage, the first-grade mentor teacher kept watch over the flock of student teachers and children in her care. Adam and his fellow student teachers felt supported by their mentor teacher, and if the stress or planning got to be too much, she stepped in to help with the teaching. In fact, Adam estimates that the mentor teacher became even more involved after the school closed, compared to her role in the classroom beforehand.

And Adam was doubly-blessed, in a way: not only did he have a particularly involved mentor teacher, he had a group of fellow student teachers whose skills complemented one another's. One person's weakness was another's strength, and in this way, they were able to band together to create a united, skilled team to care for and educate their first-graders.

#### **4.2 Samantha**

Samantha was assigned to a fourth-grade classroom and had almost completed her required student teaching hours when the schools closed down. She remembers her mentor teacher being confused, like everyone else, but supportive. In her classroom and in others at the elementary school, there was a general consensus to encourage the student teachers to do the best they could but to not demand perfection in such a new learning environment as Zoom or Teams. Samantha's mentor teacher was adept at using the various technology platforms and that proved to be a great support for her and her fellow student teachers.

Samantha recalls teaching being easier and less stressful, somehow, in the first days of the transition to online. It was only as the days dragged on and she became more familiar with working on Zoom that the situation got more complicated. Without the distraction of the newness of the situation, the reality shone through: Zoom lessons with no end in sight. And when the student teaching period ended,

there were none of the hugs or last chats with the children that they would have had in normal times. Instead, they said goodbye, awkwardly, via one another's Zoom tiles.

### **4.3 Chris**

Other student teachers had a rockier transition to online learning. Chris, for example, found himself bogged down in problems: tech problems, cooperation problems, communication problems. Trying to solve the problem of how to collect student work, Chris spent hours creating an elaborate system of subject- and student-delineated folders on a Google Drive – only to have one parent refuse to allow their child to create credentials so they could log in, rendering the entire effort useless. In the end, the students were given their assignments through Wilma and told they could submit the hard-copy assignments whenever they came back to school – even though at the time, there was no clear indication of when, exactly, that would be.

Chris at once felt pressure to find solutions to these kinds of logistical problems, as well as pressure to fix any and all tech problems. To Chris, trying to diagnose and fix a tech problem over Zoom felt like “doing surgery blindfolded” – and very much outside the scope of his original role as a student teacher. At the same time, Chris suddenly felt a little more inside his comfort zone – the technical sphere was a place where he felt at home, in some ways more at home than he had felt in the physical classroom. Getting all the students into a Zoom classroom felt like a victory – something he hadn't felt when teaching in person. Where other student teachers were struggling to conceive of how their teaching might take place online, Chris felt set free in a context and learning environment that matched his skills and areas of interest.

### **4.4 Mark**

Mark, assigned to a third-grade classroom for his teaching practicum, recalls feeling, even early on, that a shutdown of the schools was inevitable. From his point of view, thinking of all the necessary

preparation for such a closure, it was unfathomable that the mentor teacher would choose to spend their last days in-person with the children reading books together. And yet, that is exactly what happened. Mark felt an urgency to teach the kids how to use the technology tools they would need over the coming weeks and months, as Adam did, but the mentor teacher disagreed. It is hard to judge this mentor teacher harshly; there is a certain warmth and care in the idea of a teacher and their students reading together before walling themselves off from each other in Zoom tiles for the foreseeable future. But from a practical point of view, Mark's feelings of frustration are equally understandable.

#### **4.5 Kevin**

Kevin, in another classroom, was given almost full autonomy by the mentor teacher and was able to teach somewhat effectively on Zoom thanks to his considerable skills in IT. Even with the technical aspects ironed out, however, both Kevin and Mark experienced difficulties teaching hands-on subjects such as Physical Education and Handicrafts. They tried to assign handicraft tasks that could be carried out completely independently, like making little cows out of pinecones and assigning self-directed origami projects. They managed to get through their lessons in part by being willing to give up the idea of everything going as planned, and instead doing the best they could with what they had. And, like Samantha, they endured an awkward good-bye Zoom session that seemed like too little, too late after what they'd been through together with the children.

### **5. Conclusions**

The experiences of Adam, Samantha, Chris, Mark, and Kevin during spring 2020 illustrate the varying effects of the shift to online teaching on student teachers. In answer to the first research question of what happened to them during their teaching practicum: they experienced



the rapid shift from in-person to online teaching as students in a mentee position to more experienced classroom teachers, while also being in a position of authority and leadership over the elementary school students. They were therefore forced to think quickly and efficiently about the solutions – technological and pedagogical – that would best suit their classrooms. They solved problems, encountered new ones, and solved those, too. Their mentor teachers offered support in different ways, giving the student teachers more autonomy, or perhaps less, since each circumstance was unique. The student teachers spent their last days with the kids preparing them for online learning – successfully or not – or else focusing on enjoying close physical proximity for the last time. They completed their teaching practicum to the required amount and standard; or, they were encouraged to do the best they could even if it meant allowing a few hours or procedures to slip here and there.

During the interviews with the five student teachers, two major themes emerged for lessons learned for future working life:

1. They hope to carry with them into their future careers the attitude of flexibility they developed during spring 2020. They learned how to stay calm in unpredictable situations and how to teach lessons in new ways. They feel this adaptability will serve them well in “normal” times as well as in precedented or unprecedented circumstances in the future.

2. They hope to find colleagues with good cooperation and collaboration skills. During the stress and rapid change they experienced in spring 2020, they found that teamwork was more important than ever – and having a good team in the trenches of online teaching was essential.

It is of course hoped that a pandemic such as the one that began in the spring of 2020 will not happen again and therefore the lessons learned will not be needed in the future. But should something similar happen, resulting in the closure of schools, it will at least be

precedented, and those who were pre-professional practitioners in 2020 will be established in careers by any hypothetical future date of onset of calamity and can draw upon their past experiences. They may, in fact, be mentor teachers themselves and can offer any hypothetical student teachers under their care the benefit of their own lessons learned from their experiences in spring 2020.

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**“Finland has got method, and that is priceless.”  
Exchange students and their experiences with  
Finnish language and culture**

Jeremy Palmer

**1. Introduction and Background**

Every year an increasing number of international students come to study in Finnish institutions of higher education. Finland is a particularly attractive destination owing to its reputation as an innovative and effective leader in education. Interestingly, the instruction these students receive is primarily conducted in English, though Finland’s national languages are Finnish and Swedish. The international students appreciate the excellent education in Finland, though the sometimes have difficulty meeting local people.

Although meeting people is only one issue related to language and culture learning, some background on the topic is necessary to understand the difficulty some foreigners can face in Finland. One website explained that foreign students often “keep mainly with their own kind, and there’s little contact with the natives. And in Finland students can experience challenges connecting with their Finnish counterparts” (Liebermann, 2011, para. 12). This issue was also stressed in a recent press release from E2 Research about international talents in Finland. The release stated that “many have difficulties making friends with Finns” (E2 Research, 2023, para. 9). Thus, there seem to be some challenges for foreigners who want to make friends with Finns in Finland. Although this topic concerns

anyone coming to Finland from the outside, the scope of this present research focuses on exchange students who come to Finland temporarily. As will be seen, scant research about exchange students in Finland exists.

Although the field of study abroad and language learning is growing around the world (Kinginger 2013; Diao & Trentman 2021), few academic articles explore the issue of Finnish culture and language among exchange students. Nevertheless, some research has investigated specific groups of students and their identity while on exchange in Finland. For example, Dervin (2011) found that identity among French Erasmus students in Finland was rather fluid and difficult to define in concrete terms, although physical and mental separations between us (the French students) and them (Finns) was frequently mentioned in research interviews. In a wider ranging article about international students interacting with exchange students in Finland, Mendoza et al., (2022, p. 112) reported on how lecturers in the country viewed international students and their interactions with Finnish students. The authors found some evidence of binary categorization among lectures in terms of both domestic (Finnish) and international students and therefore recommend considering rethinking (and “unthinking”) about both groups to promote opportunities for interaction and internationalization. Finally, Mendoza et al. (2012) recommended providing, rather than forcing, more organic approaches for all students to meet and interact on a level(er) playing field. Thus, previous research has investigated more general cultural experiences among exchange students, though no academic articles specifically about language learning were found. The present research seeks to partially fill this gap in academic literature about exchange students in Finland and their experiences with the Finnish language and culture.

## 2. Methodology

This research investigates experiences with the Finnish language and culture among exchange students at a major university in Finland. The data in this research was harvested from questionnaires completed by outgoing international students at a large university in southern Finland. These questionnaires contain responses from 14 academic semesters beginning in 2011 and ending in 2019, with a total sample size of 889 students. The items in the questionnaires covered a wide range of topics related to the students' experiences during their exchange as well as the services offered at the university. The open-ended nature of many questions elicited some noteworthy commentary about the overall experiences as well as remarks about language and culture. Interestingly, the questionnaires never explicitly ask the students about Finnish language or culture, though students spontaneously shared their thoughts on these topics.

A preliminary reading of the comments yielded several themes including a type of tension between general positive feelings and a lack of closeness that some respondents experienced in Finland. For example, comments such as: "Everyone has been really nice to me and I have felt very comfortable with (F)innish society" to: "sometimes I felt there was a wall between them (Finns) and the exchange students" are fairly representative of the conveyed feelings. Further analysis confirmed this tension and explored themes that flowed into general patterns that help understand the role that the Finnish language and culture may play in the lives of exchange students. Such commentary about language and culture are the focus of the present study. The formal research questions are presented below, after which the methodology is explained.

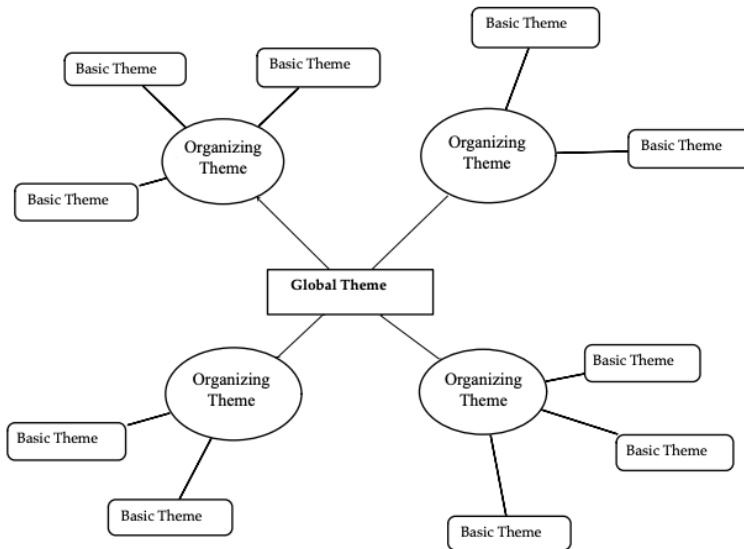
- 1) What do exit-survey responses mention about the Finnish language?
- 2) What do exit-survey responses mention about the Finnish culture?

The questionnaires were examined based on a framework of thematic analysis in search of comments related to language and cultural issues. Using the qualitative software program NVivo, relevant comments were highlighted and categorized into themes that will be introduced below. Due to the exploratory scope of this research, only open-ended comments in the last item in the questionnaires were investigated. This last question appeared in several forms over the 14 academic semesters but essentially read as ‘tell us in your own words about your experience at the University of Turku’. The questionnaires do contain other open-ended items that mention issues related to language and culture, though these items remain beyond the scope of the current research. It is hoped that future research will investigate these additional items. Additionally, only comments that clearly related to the language and culture were included in this work. For example, selected comments had to contain certain words (Finland, Finnish etc.) or evidence that linked them explicitly to Finland. Thus, a comment such as ‘my experience was great!’ were excluded from this research since they lacked specific references to Finnish language or culture.

The approach in this data analysis follows a simplified version of Attride-Stirling’s (2001) qualitative techniques in thematic networks. In this method, qualitative data is first analyzed for unique topics, or basic themes, that appear during the initial reading. Such topics are then coded to track repetition and similarity before the next step. However, in this research about Finland, the basic themes were somewhat pre-determined by the research questions and related to language and culture. Such an approach does remain within the realm of thematic network analysis. Therefore, this research includes some information about basic themes, but focuses more attention on the second step of organizing themes or groups of related topics. At this level of analysis, the themes essentially become the general impressions or main ideas of the data. The final step, creation of global themes, produces one or more arguments, theory, or interpretation of the overarching message in the data. Such macro ideas are “both a summary of the main themes and a revealing

interpretation of the texts” (2001: 389). Figure 1 depicts the original framework of a thematic network.

**Figure 1** From Attride-Stirling’s (2001)



The following section presents the results from the thematic analysis in this research.

### 3. Results

During the coding of the responses, several subcategories -or organizing themes - emerged that relate to the Finnish language and Finnish culture. Interestingly, these subcategories cursorily revealed a pattern of binary tension between positive and negative experiences that will be explored below. Note that any given comment in the exit questionnaires could contain reference to multiple topics, each of which would be marked as unique entries in the relevant themes.



What this means in practice is that one student's comment in the survey could contain more than one topic of interest. However, a student mentioning the same topic repeatedly in one entry would only be counted as one instance. In the remainder of this article, student comments are written as they were originally and not corrected for spelling or grammar.

Following the order of the research questions, language related issues are first presented followed by cultural considerations. As will be seen, comments related to the Finnish culture outnumbered those about the Finnish language. For this reason, the first research question about the Finnish language is only briefly considered. Thereafter, the second research question about Finnish culture is presented in more detail.

## Q1 Finnish Language

As for the first research question "What do exit-survey responses mention about the Finnish language?", a total of 18 comments in the data reference something related to learning the Finnish language. Of these comments, 14 were neutral or positive, while four were negative. Although this number of entries may seem minor, these exchange students were never specifically asked about Finnish language experiences. Therefore, the fact that students explicitly mentioned the Finnish language is remarkable and indicates that they were exposed to something other than English during their sojourn in Finland. For example, one positive remark about the language was: "The sheer amount of Finnish I picked up is praiseworthy on it's own." Another comment about the language was: "I will miss the melody of the Finnish language...". Yet another simply included the information about the student's learning opportunities: "I had an opportunity to study Finnish language here and to know Finnish culture better." An example of a comment that was categorized as negative is: "... the Finnish language is very hard." These samples portray some of the feelings that were expressed in the data.

In addition to comments about the Finnish language, some students demonstrated their knowledge of the language in writing. In the data, 21 comments contained actual use of the Finnish language, such as: “kiitos” (thank you) and: “Minä rakastan Suomea” (I love Finland). For the purposes of this analysis, the actual use of Finnish in the responses can be interpreted as a positive sign. These students were never asked to demonstrate their knowledge of the Finnish language, so the fact that some chose to use it is notable and such occurrences are therefore included in the positive category in the results.

Commentary about the Finnish language could be organized into the four basic themes: positive, neutral, negative, and actual use of the language itself. These four themes could be further collapsed into fewer groups or organizing themes. However, due to the lack of more responses about the Finnish language, no detailed description of a thematic network is presented, as will be for the next research question. Nevertheless, the comments about the Finnish language reveal a general trend that English is not the only language used in Finland and that more students expressed positive experiences with the language than the alternative. Perhaps a possible global theme for the first research question could be preliminarily expressed as “The outlook of exchange students about the Finnish language is generally positive.”

## Q2 Finnish Culture

### Step 1: Coding material (culture)

Statements in the data related to the second question “What do exit-survey responses mention about the Finnish culture?” provided more material for analysis than that available for the first research question. In total, 57 comments mentioned something related to the Finnish culture. These comments included a variety of topics relating to the students’ experiences and interactions in Finland. In this research, the definition of culture includes comments related specifically to the Finnish culture, whether referencing people or inanimate objects and

concepts. This section includes various comments from the students that indicate their overall impressions.

Multiple students mentioned how they enjoyed living in Finland. For example, one student wrote: "Finnish society is well organized, it complies with the order and the rule. And of course, the sauna is a kind of sacred place for them, which I also really like." Other comments also mentioned how Finland is well-organized and a peaceful place to live. One student expressed positive feelings along with some frustration:

*The university is really friendly and great. Sometimes it's difficult to approach finnish students (running away pretty fast) or teachers when we would like to have their point of view on some question or understand what the subject means in Finland. But I guess It's a cultural thing of Finland.*

Although this student appears at ease in Finland in general, they indicate that more interaction with the local Finnish students would be desirable. In fact, this issue of interaction, or lack thereof, appeared repeatedly in the data, as demonstrated by the following comment "It was a bit hard to find some Finns to stay [spend time] with because there are not really talkative so you never know if it is because they don't like or just because they respect you".

While certain comments reveal that some students seek more interaction, the reason behind the lack thereof remains unclear. This issue is unresolved in the data, as differences in experiences were found. However, a lack of interaction was not always universal as many comments did reveal some contact among groups of students. For example, one student wrote: "Finnish people are very kind and try to be helpful in every situation". This sentiment was found in other comments as well. In fact, more positive commentary about Finns than explicitly negative was found in the data.

Data revealed that comments were often about Finnish people themselves, or something about the culture that may or may not be

alive. Although this article considers Finnish people a part of the Finnish culture, the two themes can be considered separately. As with issues related to the Finnish language, reading through the data for comments about the Finnish culture -non human - revealed sentiments that could be categorized into similar groups as before: positive, neutral, and negative. Applying these three labels to the topics of both the Finnish culture (i.e., positive, negative, and neutral) in general and the Finnish people (i.e., positive, negative, and neutral) provides six basic themes. As with the previous case of language however, all neutral comments will be combined with the positive because the act of mentioning something – even impartially – reveals some sort of an impression that was made. Thus, the four basic themes emerge: Finnish culture (positive and negative) and Finnish people (positive and negative).

### Step 2: Organizing themes

After establishing the four basic themes, the data was further considered in terms of grouping. Two natural groups, or organizing themes, were made based on the results. These themes are first, interactions with Finnish people, and second, interactions with the culture that avoided a specific mention of humans. In this research, any use of the term ‘society’ is paired with a sense of overall culture rather than humans, even though it may or may not include human interaction. This distinction is, however, imperfect, because a comment mentioning Finnish society could have human associations. Such instances, however, were few. Thus, the two organizing themes below remain as human and non-human interaction.

As for distinct entries that mentioned Finnish culture including some sort of interaction with humans, a total of 38 were found. Of this total, 27 of the entries were positive (or neutral) in nature. One representative comment of this positivity was: “I am delighted with Finland, Finnish people, and the education system...”. Another stated: “Finland is an amazing country with amazing people that never ceased to surprise me (in a positive way)”. Such positive remarks more than

doubled the negative comments in the data. In fact, only 11 entries were found that expressed negativity toward Finnish culture and humans. One such negative comment (also written in the introduction of this article) expressed frustration about the inability to engage with Finnish students: “sometimes I felt there was a wall between them (Finns) and the exchange students”. Another comment expressed the sentiment more diplomatically: “I would have liked more contact with Finnish students”. Interestingly, the lack of interaction with Finnish students did not necessarily lead to overall negativity. For example, one student wrote: “Great country, nice city!!” but also: “Too bad don’t know a lot of Finnish people!!!”. This student seemed to enjoy the experience overall, although their lack of interaction with Finns seems apparent.

The next organizing theme concerns Finnish culture without specific mention of human interactions. Out of a total of 19 entries, 17 were positive (or neutral), meaning that only two entries commented on non-human Finnish culture in a negative manner. The negative comments will first be considered. Both of these two negative entries related to cultural differences: one mentioning a desire to be more integrated into society and the other being simply the comment: “I guess It’s a cultural thing” after expressing difficulty engaging students and teachers in deeper discussions.

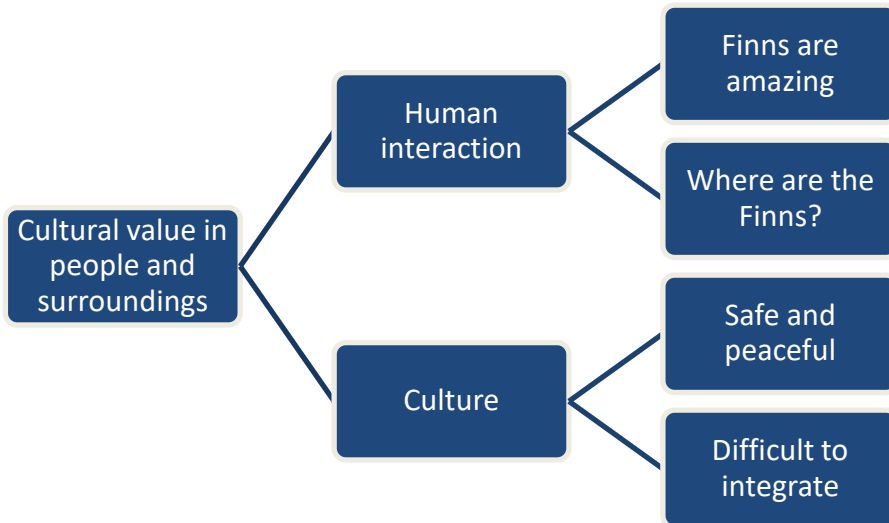
The positive comments about culture in Finland included statements such as: “love the culture here. Finland is nice place for people to live. it is so peaceful” to “Excellent both as an educational and as a cultural experience” to another about how people are treated: “shows the professionalism of Finnish society”. Moreover, another comment mentioned how students: “fall in love in the Finnish nature and culture and they will come back for Holidays and visiting friends in the next years”. Thus, the culture and the people seemed to make a substantial impression on some students. As a final example, one student wrote: “The Finnish culture is completely different than my home, which is exactly what I was hoping for. This has been the time of my life”.

These two organizing themes - interactions with Finnish people and interactions with the culture – indicate a variety of experiences though it is possible to infer a general leaning toward positivity. The next section considers these issues on a wider scale.

### Step 3: Global themes

Overall, exploring student comments revealed evidence that students enjoyed their time in Finland, though life was not always perfect. In general, more comments were found that were positive than negative in nature about both Finnish people and Finnish culture. Therefore, the second research question about exit survey comments in relation to the Finnish culture, can be answered with a focus on both the Finnish people and the broad culture found in the country.

Two global themes emerge from exit surveys: First, Finnish culture is appreciable via interaction with Finns though sometimes it is difficult to meet Finns. And second, Finnish culture is appreciable outside of direct human interaction, though it can be quite different from one's home culture. For the purposes of this exploratory article, however, the two issues are combined into one global theme represented below in Figure 2: Cultural value is found in both people and their surroundings (society).

**Figure 2** Themes from left to right: Global, organizing, basic.

#### 4. Discussion

This brief and exploratory research sheds some light on issues that exchange students experience when residing in Finland. In particular, this research investigated comments related to the Finnish language and culture. As for data about the Finnish language, exchange students were overall more positive than negative in their comments. Perhaps one of the most interesting findings in the exit surveys was the voluntary use of Finnish language in written responses. The students were never directly asked about learning Finnish, so their comments and use of the language represent an intriguing trend that could be studied in more detail in future research.

Although the exit surveys never specifically inquired about students' experiences with Finnish culture, data did reveal some evidence of exposure. In general, many students seem to appreciate Finnish culture (society) and its level of safety and organization although it may be quite different from one's own culture. At the same time,

however, some students expressed a certain tension while interacting – or failing to interact – with Finns themselves. Such sentiments however are nothing novel as Dervin (2011: 76) included the following student comment: “we do not meet Finns, it is a bit of a shame. We always stay together”.

General impressions lead to a sense of admiration and appreciation among exchange students for Finland’s organized society and educational system, though breaking through some cultural barriers remains difficult. Additionally, some students learned enough Finnish to use in simple phrases, which indicates interest in the language (and culture?) itself. Thus, responses to the research questions about language use and culture did arise in the exit survey responses, despite a lack of explicit questions about such topics in the questionnaires themselves. To better explore these issues, the next section considers how the future can approach such research.

## **5. Final Comments and Future Research**

The title of this article comes from a student response in the data that was found outside the targeted commentary as a part of this research. Nevertheless, the title remains as it lends itself to the overall feelings in this research. Future research will hopefully include more data that could support a framework that explores interest in learning the Finnish language. With this limited data, generalities about the exchange students’ experiences with the Finnish language remain unsupported. The data do reveal, however, that the positive and neutral comments outnumbered the negative and that some students are able to use at least a small amount of Finnish.

One limitation in this article relates to the use of the word tension as this very term was frequently used in Astrid-Stirling’s (2001) article. After considering use of a synonym or other related expression, the



term tension was nonetheless adopted in this research because it most closely describes many comments from the exchange students.

Issues related to exchange student linguistic and cultural experiences should be explored in future research. In particular, students should be specifically asked about their exposure to Finnish language and Finnish culture and whether they would like more or fewer such experiences. Inquiry into the students' opinions about specific language classes and materials should also be pursued. Perhaps the most beneficial action for this type of research would be revision of the exit questionnaires to explore these issues explicitly from semester to semester and from year to year. Additionally, the ability to match students' names, home countries, and other variables to specific responses would greatly increase the depth of the data and allow for more sophisticated analysis.

Another angle to approach a better understanding of exchange students' experiences in Finland, would be to investigate alternative data sources. For example, student created social media may contain further insight into linguistic and cultural experiences in Finland. Additionally, interviewing students post-exchange would provide rich data to complement the results of the exit-surveys. For example, conducting in-depth case studies with a small number of students could provide commentary about language and cultural experiences on an individual level.

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## Empowering Spanish Learners in Turku: A Trainee's Gamification Proposal

Lis Daniela Vila Rosas

This article highlights the didactics of **gamification** in the classroom as well as the development of intercultural competence in the learning environment by following the curricular content of the Spanish lessons of the **Center for Language and Communication Studies (CeLCS)** of the University of Turku,

In this article I address how I was able to engage as an Erasmus intern with the students of Spanish at CeLCS, addressing the relevance that was given to the Spanish-speaking **culture** in the second language learning/teaching process.

The study is framed within the field of **Spanish as a Foreign Language (SFL)** in Finnish higher education and focuses on the effects of gamified learning environments on the student's second language learning process. Hence, this essay will introduce a didactic proposal in which the students engaged in an escape room experience. This experience centered around the renowned Prado Museum, the principal repository of Spanish national art, featuring one of its most celebrated masterpieces, *Las Meninas*, by Diego Velázquez, a prominent figure in the Spanish Golden Age of art.

## **1. Engaging students through Gamification: Exploring escape rooms in language learning contexts**

Despite the lack of empirical evidence confirming the cognitive effects of gamification in learning environments (Boudadi & Gutiérrez-Colón 2020; Dicheva et al. 2015), it has gained popularity in recent years as many scholars describe its positive impact on motivation in foreign language learning. This paper investigates the following research questions:

- What is the effect of escape rooms on the student's motivation in the classroom of Spanish as a Foreign Language?
- How is gamification encouraged in the Spanish courses of the CeLCS?

More specifically, I will describe one of the most successful didactic proposals during my work experience as a Spanish teaching assistant in the CeLCS of the University of Turku. I prepared an escape room that combined Spanish culture with a problem-solving activity that is planned to positively boost the student's linguistic attitudes towards learning new vocabulary and grammar while having fun in the classroom.

An escape room is a physical or virtual adventure game in which players solve a series of puzzles and riddles using clues, hints, and strategies to complete the objectives at hand. Typically, escape rooms involve a storyline or theme that sets the stage for the challenges the players will face. The goal is to "escape" from the room or achieve a specific objective within a set time limit.

My role as an Erasmus trainee at the Center for Language and Communication Studies of the University of Turku during the Spring semester of 2021 consisted of assisting and observing the Spanish classes. The classes consisted of 25 students at the beginners' level, 15 in the "Spanish continuation" or intermediate level, and 8 at the advanced level. I had the opportunity to interact with the students of

Spanish, as I carried out informal conversational groups, as well as presented different topics of Spanish and Spanish-American culture in the classroom.

The primary objective of CeLCS is to develop the students' proficiency in foreign languages and their ability to communicate effectively, while also fostering intercultural appreciation and contributing to the university's global engagement efforts (University of Turku, 2023). What caught my attention in the Spanish classes was the emphasis placed on knowledge of the culture of Spanish-speaking countries, as well as the encouragement to move beyond language proficiency goals, embracing the broader objectives of intercultural communication.

Language is deeply intertwined with culture (Byram 1997; Kramsch 1993; Liddicoat 2002), and the Spanish lecturer of the CeLCS and my traineeship's supervisor, Tiina-Leena Salo, exposed learners to authentic cultural materials, encouraging intercultural interactions, promoting critical reflection on cultural differences, and integrating cultural topics and perspectives into the language curricula. By embracing the Spanish and Spanish-American cultures, language learners navigated the complexities of multiculturalism and linguistic diversity.

Furthermore, it was essential to create a supportive and motivating language learning environment that took into account learners' attitudes, beliefs, and social context. Most of the activities that were designed for the Spanish courses fostered a positive attitude towards the target language community and a strong motivation to belong to that community (Gardner 1985). Additionally, when creating a motivating and culturally diverse learning environment, games were incorporated into the interactive and immersive educational setting.

According to Werbach et al. (2012), gamification is the process of using gaming elements and techniques in non-gaming contexts to engage users and motivate them to achieve a goal. The term

"gamification" was initially coined by Nick Pelling in 2002 to describe the application of game-like accelerated user interface design for enjoyable and fast electronic transactions. However, the consulting firm Gartner later defined gamification in 2010 as the use of game mechanics and experience design to digitally engage and motivate people to achieve their goals. Originally emerging in the digital and business industry to enhance group work within companies, gamification later transitioned to the educational sphere, incorporating basic notions from social sciences and humanities, including psychology, neuroscience, and education (Costa 2020).

Gamification has become increasingly popular to drive engagement in educational contexts, since teachers and trainers may use elements such as leaderboards, badges, and rewards to increase motivation and engagement among their students (Flores 2015). This can be particularly effective for topics that students may not be naturally inclined to explore, as games incorporate an essential component known as progression, which enhances player engagement and motivation (Dickey 2005). In alliance with Flores:

Following this aspect the L2 learner feels attracted towards having this experience. In order to change or set off a specific behavior, the learners need to be motivated and Gamification opens the door for the L2 learner to enhance its language learning experience and at the same time acquire the skill to solve any task or challenge the class, the unit, or the topic presents. In addition, Gamification offers the learners an opportunity to interact among them as it's implied in a social game (2015: 43).

For Spanish learners, incorporating gamification can offer an enjoyable and captivating approach to the language-learning process. To effectively cater to the linguistic and cultural needs of students teachers need to adapt their practices, which involves integrating methodologies and teaching strategies that closely mirror real-life and contemporary activities, ensuring that the educational experience is meaningful and applicable to their linguistic and cultural context, as 'the use of dynamics, mechanics, and components of the

game contributes to a state of continuous flow at the time of learning, i.e., an intrinsic motivation' (Cruz: 119).

Towards the conclusion of my traineeship in the Language Center of Turku, I organized a themed escape room experience for the students in the classroom, where they were tasked to solve a series of puzzles, riddles, and challenges within a set time limit to successfully "escape" and achieve the final objective. There is clear support in the literature to suggest that incorporating escape rooms as a language-learning tool can be beneficial for students.

As Cruz (2011) explains, "The escape rooms are action games that unfold in a real context, where groups of people or teams must uncover clues and undertake challenges to solve a particular mystery or 'escape' a given space, taking into account that the time is limited" (121). Escape rooms serve as immersive, team-oriented experiences that involve players engaging in live-action games. In these games, participants uncover clues, tackle puzzles, and complete various tasks within one or more rooms during a set time limit (Nicholson 2016).

In the next section, I will delve into the process of developing and implementing an escape room activity based on the Spanish National Art Museum, the Prado Museum, and its renowned painting, *Las Meninas* by Diego Velázquez (Museo del Prado, 2023). This didactic proposal provides insights into the potential of escape rooms as a valuable tool for teachers in language education, as we discuss the effects of gamified learning settings on students' motivation and language learning outcomes.



## **2. The Prado Museum-themed escape room**

### **2.1. Objectives**

- To promote the acquisition of Spanish vocabulary, grammar, and language skills through immersive and interactive activities within the escape room scenario.
- To enhance oral and written communication skills by engaging learners in problem-solving tasks, teamwork, and communication with their peers to solve puzzles and complete challenging tasks.
- To foster intercultural competence by incorporating cultural references related to the target language and culture.
- To increase learners' motivation and engagement by providing a dynamic, challenging, and enjoyable learning experience that encourages active participation.

### **2.2. Target Audience**

The target audience includes learners from diverse cultural backgrounds, different age groups, and individuals with varying language goals and motivations. In alliance with the European Common Reference for Languages (CEFR, 2001), the proficiency level expected is B1-B2, and it can be adapted depending on the learner's abilities in terms of speaking, listening, reading, and writing, as well as their knowledge of grammar and vocabulary.

### **2.3. Content Selection**

The Prado Museum in Madrid, Spain, is one of the most well-known galleries in the world. It houses an extensive collection of works from Spanish, Dutch, Flemish, German, and Italian masters. Visitors can also enjoy a variety of special exhibitions, educational programs, and other activities, which makes it a great place to learn more about Spanish art, culture, and history (Museo del Prado, 2023).

As Merino-Manueco (2015) tells us, it is important to bear in mind that when incorporating artistic creations, virtual explorations, and

similar resources in the classroom, they should be utilized as instrumental means to accomplish particular linguistic objectives, hence, “De este modo, cuadros como Las Meninas, el Dos de Mayo o el Guernica son obras que nos permiten argumentar peculiaridades sociológicas así como introducir temas específicos (la religión, la defensa de los animales, la lucha por la libertad, etc.)” [In this way, paintings such as Las Meninas, Dos de Mayo, or Guernica are works that allow us to argue sociological peculiarities as well as to introduce specific themes (religion, the defense of animals, the struggle for freedom)].

Painted in 1656 by the esteemed Spanish artist Diego Velázquez, "Las Meninas" stands as a pinnacle in Western art. Recognized as one of the most significant and iconic works of the Spanish Golden Age, this masterpiece portrays a vast chamber within the Royal Alcazar of Madrid. Its intricate composition features a diverse array of figures, including Velázquez himself, the Infanta Margarita, her chaperone, two dwarfs, and her bodyguard, complemented by a multitude of servants in the background (Underwood, 2008).

The painting is filled with symbolism and references to the court of King Philip IV of Spain. It is a commentary on the relationship between the artist and the court, as well as a representation of the court itself. The painting is a study in contrasts, with the central figures of the Infanta and Velázquez himself standing out against a dark background of servants and courtiers. The painting is a masterful display of the Baroque style of painting, with its attention to detail and use of light and shadow to create a sense of drama (Harris 2005).

Las Meninas has been studied and interpreted by many art historians and is seen as a milestone in the development of the Western painting tradition. With this activity, students can dig deeper into the history of the Spanish Golden Age, a period of great artistic, literary, and intellectual progress, apart from gaining a deeper understanding of the painting and the symbolism behind it (Cabrera & Caire, 2013).

## 2.4. Methodology and approaches

Given that the escape room is intricately themed around the Prado Museum in Madrid, a compelling immersive narrative is crafted to captivate participants and set the stage for their adventure. The classroom is meticulously organized, featuring interactive elements that facilitate seamless collaboration among teams, typically comprising 2 to 8 individuals.

Before stepping into the escape room, participants receive comprehensive instructions detailing various puzzles and game rules. The duration of the experience spans from 60 to 90 minutes, culminating with the fastest team completing the final task. Upon achieving the objective, the game concludes with participants offering a summary of their performance.

Tasks within the escape room can be presented either online or on paper, with the last task specifically designed as a printed paper puzzle for teams to engage with. The teacher's role in the escape room mirrors that of a "Game Master Assistant," overseeing the experience and offering hints or guidance as needed throughout the participants' journey (Da Cruz, 2019).

## 2.5. Activities and tasks

This escape room consists of five activities that are preceded by a message in which the author of *Las Meninas*, Diego Velázquez, explains to the players the following task to complete. The teacher will give the students the ordered messages in an envelope to the groups after they finish each task. The activities and their initial messages are as follows:

- a) Buenas noches amables damas y caballeros, no se asusten pues yo soy solamente un fantasma que pasea por el museo cada noche. Mi nombre es Diego Velázquez y puedo decir que he tenido una vida muy interesante, ya que he vivido en los mejores palacios y pintado a los miembros más ilustres de la realeza.

Necesito vuestra ayuda para encontrar un cuadro que se ha perdido por el museo, es mi creación más famosa y no puedo descansar en paz porque ha desaparecido.

Para la primera prueba, ¿podrías ordenar la biografía de Diego Velázquez?

a) *Good evening kind ladies and gentlemen, do not be frightened for I am only a ghost who wanders through the museum every night. My name is Diego Velázquez, and I can say that I have had a very interesting life, as I have lived in the best palaces and painted the most illustrious members of royalty. I need your help to find a painting that has been lost in the museum, it is my most famous creation and I cannot rest in peace because it has disappeared.*

*For the first task, could you order the biography of Diego Velázquez?*

b) Muy bien, sí, entonces ya sabes quién soy yo. Quiero ayudarte a encontrar mi cuadro perdido en el museo, pero primero tienes que conocer las obras de mis otros amigos artistas y pintores del museo.

Para ganar mi confianza, debes completar las preguntas que te propongo a continuación sobre la "Maja vestida" (1798-1805) de Francisco de Goya.

¿Podrías marcar verdadero o falso en la siguiente tabla? Para esta prueba, puedes utilizar el móvil si lo deseas.

*b) Very well, yes, then you know who I am. I want to help you find my lost painting in the museum, but first, you have to get to know the works of my other artist and painter friends in the museum.*

*To gain my trust, you must complete the following questions about Francisco de Goya's "Maja vestida" (1798-1805).*

*Can you mark true or false in the table below? For this test, you can use your mobile phone if you wish.*

| DESCRIPCIÓN/DESCRIPTION  | VERDADERO/TRUE | FALSO/FALSE |
|--|----------------|-------------|
| En el cuadro hay una mujer con un vestido blanco largo, cinturón rosa y chaqueta y zapatos azules. / <i>In the painting, there is a woman in a long white dress, pink belt, and blue jacket and shoes.</i> |                |             |
| Este cuadro tiene otra versión de la misma mujer, pero desnuda (sin ropa). / <i>This painting has another version of the same woman but naked (without clothes).</i>                                       |                |             |
| La expresión de su cara es tranquila y seductora al mismo tiempo. / <i>The expression on her face is calm and seductive at the same time.</i>  |                |             |
| La mujer está acostada en la bañera y se va a dar un buen baño. / <i>The woman is lying in the bathtub and is going to have a good bath.</i>   |                |             |
| Es cierto que la "maja" (la mujer) del cuadro es la decimotercera duquesa de Alba. / <i>Indeed, the "maja" (the woman) in the painting is the thirteenth Duchess of Alba.</i>                              |                |             |
| La modelo tiene el pelo rizado y negro. / <i>The model has curly black hair.</i>   |                |             |

- c) Bueno, parece que sois unos expertos en arte español. Si conseguimos resolver las siguientes adivinanzas, estaremos muy cerca de encontrar el cuadro perdido.

*c) Well, you seem to be experts in Spanish art. If we can solve the following riddles, we'll be very close to finding the missing painting.*

Soy largo y delgado,  
con buena figura,  
mi pelo alocado  
lo mojo en pintura  
(El pincel)

*I am long and slim,  
with a good figure,  
my crazy hair  
I dip it in paint  
(The brush)*

Escucha, te voy a hablar  
de un artista singular  
de pequeño quiso ser  
un pintor fenomenal  
pinta girasoles, retratos y soles  
era impresionista, era un gran  
artista  
a París viajó  
pues quería ser pintor  
en Arlés casa encontró  
y pintó su habitación  
(Van Gogh)

*Listen, I'm going to tell you  
about a singular artist  
when he was a child, he wanted to  
be  
a phenomenal painter  
he painted sunflowers, portraits and  
suns*

|  |   |
|--|---|
|  | <p><i>he was an impressionist, he was a great artist</i></p> <p><i>he travelled to Paris</i></p> <p><i>because he wanted to be a painter in Arles, he found a house and painted his room</i></p> <p><i>(Van Gogh)</i></p> |
| <p>d) <i>Las meninas</i> (niñas en portugués) eran las jovencitas, hijas de importantes personalidades, que estaban al servicio de la infanta Margarita. Ahora tenéis que utilizar este código secreto para saber el nombre de cada personaje del cuadro. Cuando termines, espera a las instrucciones de tu profesor/a/e para dirigirte a la prueba final. Una vez recibas el puzle, ¡Ayuda a Velázquez a resolver el misterio del cuadro perdido!</p>           |   |
| <p><i>d) The ‘meninas’ (girls in Portuguese) were the young girls, daughters of important personalities, who were in the service of the Infanta Margarita. Now you have to use this secret code to find out the name of each character in the painting.</i></p> <p><i>When you have finished, wait for your teacher's instructions to take you to the final test. Once you receive the puzzle, help Velázquez solve the mystery of the missing painting!</i></p> |   |

Once the students discover the names of the characters displayed in the painting, the students will be given access to a puzzle of pieces from the painting which they have to reorganize and hand it back to the teacher to finish the game.

## 2.6. Evaluation and expected outcomes

In the evaluation and expected outcomes, the teacher plays a pivotal role in fostering an environment that encourages teamwork,

creativity, and problem-solving exclusively in Spanish within the group. Following the principles of the escape room methodology, the initial step involves meticulous planning of the room. This planning phase encompasses the selection of a thematic backdrop for the game, the careful curation of puzzles and clues, and the establishment of a reasonable time limit for players to complete the game. A crucial consideration in this planning process is ensuring that the puzzles and clues pose a sufficient challenge to captivate the players, that the time limit is realistically achievable, and that the grammar and vocabulary align with the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR).

Drawing insights from López-Serrano's (2017) perspective on the motivating factors of classroom space organization in the context of Spanish as a Foreign Language, the physical arrangement of the room becomes a critical aspect. Ideally, the teacher should configure the furniture layout to facilitate interaction and prominently display various materials. This intentional organization allows the teacher to evaluate students' interactions and guide them toward finding suitable solutions. Thus, the teacher becomes responsible for assessing the impact of the escape room on the development of language skills. This assessment includes gauging the level of engagement and motivation exhibited by participants throughout the activity and evaluating whether the language learning goals, problem-solving skills, teamwork, and cultural understanding were effectively addressed and achieved. The comprehensive evaluation ensures that the escape room not only serves as an enjoyable and immersive experience but also as a purposeful and enriching tool for language acquisition and cultural competence.

### **3. Conclusion**

In conclusion, this essay has delved into the didactics of gamification in language learning and the cultivation of intercultural competence



within the classroom setting. It has presented a didactic proposal centered on investigating the impact of gamified learning environments on students' motivation, drawing on my experience as a trainee at the Center for Language and Communication Studies (CeLCS) of the University of Turku.

The exploration emphasized the significance attributed to the Spanish-speaking culture in the language learning process at CeLCS, underscoring its role in nurturing intercultural appreciation and communication skills among students. The study further delved into the development and implementation of an escape room activity based on the Prado Museum.

While specific data on student feedback has not been collected, the activity was notably praised among the students. In the absence of formal metrics, anecdotal evidence suggests high levels of engagement and enthusiasm. Overall, the escape room activity has demonstrated itself as an effective educational tool, fostering language learning, cultural understanding, and collaboration among students.

As we conclude, it is evident that the integration of gamification, particularly through innovative activities like escape rooms, holds promise for enhancing language education. This study encourages further research and exploration into the realm of gamification in language education, aiming to provide valuable insights that can inform the creation of more engaging and impactful learning experiences for students.

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i Author's own translation.