

**THE SUPPORT OF FINNISH LANGUAGE IN  
DEGREE IN SOCIAL SERVICES**

Finnish Language Support for International Students

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## ABSTRACT

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This thesis is a project oriented work that was carried out by a team of five people, which consisted of three Diaconia University of Applied Sciences staff and by two students Panu Kallio and Irene Asare. However, this thesis is written by Panu Kallio and the Irene Asare's work is only referenced in the text. The reason for this is that Panu did his Bachelor's Thesis for this project, while Irene did one of her study modules assignments for the project. However, both students worked together on planning of the project, materials, preparation and shared their respective findings and notes on the meetings they had with project team members and the international DSS students they mentored.

The project began on 3<sup>rd</sup> of April and lasted until 5<sup>th</sup> of May. During this time, we provided Finnish language mentoring for a total of 12 international first year DSS students, who we divided according to their skill with Finnish language and how long they had been living in Finland. Since a project of this nature had never been done before in Diaconia University of Applied Sciences, this gave us an opportunity to see if this type of language support for international students in a placement environment could work.

We set out the following objectives for our project: Students will gain the confidence to speak Finnish in their placements, give international students the confidence to apply to Finnish working places and organisations and give an opportunity for the students to practice Finnish in their practical placements.

Keywords: Finnish Language, Mentoring, Project Management, Degree Programme in Social Services, Placement, Community Development, Employment, International Student

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

According to data from the Finnish government and Kela there were a total of 21 061 international students studying a university degree in Finnish Universities and University of Applied Sciences in 2016. In the last 10 years, the number of international students in Finnish Universities has been steadily increasing. In 2006, there were 10 066 students studying, meaning that the number of international students has doubled since then. (Kela, 2016.)

What this equates to is a greater need for supportive measures in Finnish language learning and employment for students, who graduate from Finnish universities. Hence the existence of more supportive programmes for Finnish learning, with the likes of Graduates to Working Life and the Finnish support project that we did.

This Finnish language support is a project oriented work; thus, the focus of this project is more on my findings and feedback that I received from the participants in this project. As such this thesis is more focussed on practical uses and less on theoretical aspects of project management. Suggestions for improvement for mentoring and other aspects of this project are also mentioned in the later chapters of this thesis.

The challenge with the degree programme that I have been studying which is an English Degree Programme for Social Services has been the fact that many students do not necessarily feel the need to study Finnish language. This is because they either have plans to move somewhere else once they graduate or they do not see the point in learning a language that is not the language they are using for theoretical studies in their degree. This thesis proposes a practical method for practicing Finnish with international students, as it combines practical and working life uses at the same time.

## 2. PROJECT DESCRIPTION

This Finnish language support project was originally proposed to Panu and Irene by Diaconia University of Applied Sciences staff. The idea for this came from the fact that Diaconia University of Applied Sciences already had a major part in a joint project called “International Graduates to Working Life” that is essentially a larger project, which other University of Applied Sciences are a part of, as well. International students at Diaconia University also noted that their Finnish language skill is currently not sufficient to work in working places.

Arcada, Diak, Haaga-Helia, Laurea and Metropolia are the universities of Applied that all have the same goal of improving employment for international students, specifically in the capital region of Finland, who have graduated with a degree from these universities.

The duration for the International Graduates to Working Life project is 1.2.2016-31.12.2017 and by the end of the project the goal is that 100 international students have received a working place. Any proven methods that have had a significant help with employment are also considered for future use in these universities.

How will this goal be reached then? The aforementioned universities have different projects that have similar objectives of providing different measures for students and organisations that improve employment through networking, events for learning more about Finnish working life. In addition to these measures, the project also aims to provide other means of improving employment for international students, such as career guidance and the use of alumni.

The funding for the project comes from the social fund of European Union, which alongside Diaconia University of Applied Sciences. (International Graduates to Working Life Diak, 2017).

This is where me and my partner's project came into the fold. The fact that this "Graduates to Working Life" project was ongoing, gave me and my project partner a great opportunity to not only do our respective assignments for our degrees, but also to provide Diak and "Graduates to Working Life" valuable data on how Finnish language support would work in students' placements.

We initially had these conversations in January and we officially started the planning of this project at the in February. After presenting our project plan in front of students and teachers, we soon started doing the initial planning for our Finnish language support project. We first started by introducing ourselves for the first year DSS students, who were our target group for the project.

Once we had met the students, we started to contact all the students, who had expressed interest in receiving help and support with Finnish language during their practical placements. We initially received responses from 17 students, which was about half of the size of the study group, who were interested in receiving Finnish language support for their placements.

## 2.1 Life of an International Student in Finland

The issue that international students are facing with Degree in Social Services study programme is the fact that majority of the study modules are taught in English, thus the role of Finnish language is lessened. According to the official timetable for DSS studies (Curriculum for Bachelor of Social Services, 2016.) There are only three Finnish language modules that each aim to provide different learning outcomes, starting with the student being able understand familiar every day expressions and to communicate with simple phrases. Then in the second course the aim is that the student to able to write short and simple messages and masters some grammar. In the last Finnish language course, aim for the student is to understand main points in short texts and that the student knows some vocabulary in Finnish regarding his or her field of study and work. (Curriculum for Bachelor of Social Services, 2016).

The fact that there are only three Finnish language modules means that much of the Finnish learning falls on the international student. It also does not help that all the Finnish courses are organised in the first three semesters of the degree, which makes it difficult for the student to keep practicing Finnish in long term. What this means is that the student must practice Finnish in his or her own time to become better using Finnish after the third semester has ended. The amount of Finnish language teaching that happens at Diaconia University of Applied Sciences is clearly not enough for international students to feel confident using Finnish and apply for working places where Finnish is the main language being used when discussing about this with the students I mentored. This is where our project aims to help students keep using Finnish more actively outside of language courses and motivate them to keep practising Finnish more.

## 2.2 Project Schedule

Since, the placements for the students would begin on 3<sup>rd</sup> of April, me and my project partner had to begin planning the Finnish language support project as early as possible, hence why the initial conversations regarding this project began on January. Soon afterwards we agreed on our roles and what we would do during this project. Also, we made a time table which we would follow step by step to make sure we would meet our deadlines in time and that every person in the project knows how we are proceeding with our plans.

According to Dennis Locke, a project plan must be made with sufficient detail to allow monitoring and control. It is also important that each of the tasks follow each other in a logical order, for instance in Table 1 we cannot start language support until we have planned what kind of support we will be providing for the students. (Locke, 2013, 39).

Here is an overview of how our project began, including all the presentations and meetings we had etc. This timetable was written by me and my project partner Irene. (Asare, Kallio, Project Plan, Unpublished Work)

Table 1. Project Timetable

Stage	Task	Implementation Time	Responsible Personnel	Notes
1 <sup>st</sup> Stage  Finnish Language support Project Planning	Introducing Project	30.1.-16.2	Project Manager Katja Päälysaaho, Sanna Wesanko, Irene Asare, Panu Kallio	Project Manager introduced project on 16.2 to us. Project team was also named.
	Project Team Meeting	30.1.-16.2	Katja Päälysaaho, Sanna Wesanko, Irene Asare, Panu Kallio	Project team held initial meeting on 16.2 to discuss about the Project Plan and Tasks
	Working on the Project Plan	30.1-24.2	Irene Asare Panu Kallio	Project plan was to be submitted on 24.2.
	Project Plan Presentation	22.2	Irene Asare Panu Kallio	Panu Kallio and Irene Asare presented the Project Plan to Project Manager



2 <sup>nd</sup> Stage  Contacting Target Group and Their Placements	Meeting the Students and filling out the Appendices 2 Forms.	Meeting 1 15.3  Meeting 2 23.3	Irene Asare, Panu Kallio	We organised two meetings to meet all the 12 students.
	Dividing the Students and Contacting the Students' Placements via email	29.3	Irene Asare, Panu Kallio	We divided the students according to their Finnish skill and contacted the placement organisations
3 <sup>rd</sup> Stage  Project Implementation	Language Support Begins	3.4-5.5	Irene Asare Panu Kallio	Finnish Language Mentoring
	Project Supervision	Project Team Meeting 1. 13.4  Project Team Meeting 2. 26.4	Maija Kalm-Akubardia, Sanna Wesanko, Irene Asare, Panu Kallio	We talked about the Project Process and any issues that we might have faced.
4 <sup>th</sup> Stage  Final Evaluation	Feedback and Evaluation	8.5	Project Team and Target Group	Evaluating the Project.

As can be seen from Table 1, we had a clear idea on how this project would proceed over time. The fact that we had a constant dialogue with our project managers and other responsible team members meant that everyone in the project were up to date on what was happening.

Material gathering and planning was started early, so that we had enough time for this, before we were to implement our project. Also, we promoted the project as much as possible for the class and that every student was aware of the existence of this Finnish Language Support Project. This meant that we went to see the class during their lectures on two occasions on 16<sup>th</sup> of February and 8<sup>th</sup> of March to promote our Project and in the latter meeting to remind students about the upcoming meeting with students on 15<sup>th</sup> of March, in case they had not checked their emails or had been absent from lectures.

In the second stage of the project, we organised two meetings with the students, the first meeting taking place on 15.3 and the second one taking place on 23.3. This was an important step, because not only did we get a chance to meet everyone interested in being part of this project, but we also had the chance to see what their Finnish language skill is like. During this stage, we decided that should divide the students according to their Finnish language skill. Appendices 2 forms helped us do this and we proceeded with this action. After confirming who still wanted to be part of this project and agreeing which of the students we would be mentoring, we started to contact the placement organisations to let ask them if it is suitable for them that we visit the students every week.

In third stage, we started the language support for the students, which lasted until 5<sup>th</sup> of May. We also had supervision from our project supervisors to discuss how the project was progressing and if we had been facing any challenges. More detail will be mentioned about the project process in Chapter 5. In the final stage, we filled out the Appendices 1 and 2 forms and did the final evaluation on how the project went and whether we met our objectives and goals. Feedback and evaluation is discussed in more detail in Chapter 6.

### 3 PROJECT ANALYSIS

Given the fact that 17 students from a class of 30 or so students expressed interest in joining our Finnish language support project, gave us the impression that there was a demand for this type of Finnish language support.

#### 3.1 Stakeholders and Target Group

Stakeholders are individuals or groups of people who are affected by the project. The stakeholder can also affect the outcome of the project. People or organizations who are investing in the project or who are providing the funding of the project are also stakeholders and are called project sponsors. A successful project is one that satisfies all the stakeholders at the end of the project. Stakeholder analysis is important, because it learns and identifies the different interests the stakeholders might have in the project, and which are the most important interests and how to satisfy as many interests as possible at the end of the project. (Martin, 2002, 43.)

In this project, we have different stakeholders some of which are directly affected by the project and some of which may not be directly affected by the project. To start with, our target group are the DSS first-year international students at Diaconia University of Applied Sciences. From the 17 students, 12 joined our project. They are the stakeholders who will be directly affected by this project. They are international students, who currently have insufficient Finnish skill and will be given the Finnish Language support and their role will also be important in evaluating the project process during and after the project. They will provide important data to language mentors and feedback to the project and they will also provide final feedback at the end of the project.

The Project Team in this case is our team which responsibilities include us the language mentors and our project manager and two other team members. According to Vivien Martin (2002, 44). These are people who will carry out all the tasks and activities to complete the project. They also need to possess the skills, knowledge and experience to achieve the goals and objectives set by the project team. Importantly they also need to be available to work on the project at the time the project is taking place.

The language mentors are third year DSS students at Diak. Panu being a Finnish native and Irene, who is an Immigrant who has lived in Finland for over ten years. Diaconia University of Applied Sciences staff are also stakeholders in the project. These staff include the teachers who will provide work supervision to the language mentors and they are also part of the project team.

In a project, oriented work in project management terms, target group according to Vivien Martin is the identifying target groups and their needs. Project target groups represent a subset of project stakeholders. The aim of preparing the analysis is to understand the actual needs of the target groups, the problems they deal with; the analysis justifies the meaningfulness of the project. (Martin, 2002, 45).

### 3.2 Goals and Objectives of the Project

Before getting into our actual goals and objectives for our project, it should be made clear what the distinction between goals and objectives in this case is. In project management goal is a general statement about what the project team is trying to accomplish (Zarinpoush, 2006, 61.) for instance, in our project one of our goals was that we hope this project would encourage working places and organisations to give more placement or part-time work opportunities for international students. This goal would be broad and overly ambitious to be an objective, as it would be difficult for us to meet this type of objective in such a short time, which is why we must consider the limits of this project.

Meanwhile objectives are specific, measurable statements of progress that a project aims to accomplish within time (Zrinpoush, 2006, 61.) for instance, in our project one of our project objectives was that the international students we mentored would gain the confidence to speak Finnish in their placements. This is a more specific statement and is reflected in the actual statement.

In our project, we used the SMART technique to assess our project objectives, which is an abbreviation that stands for the following words; Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic, Time-bound. According to Joseph Heagney, each objective should be analysed with this method to ensure they are achievable by the end of the project. (Heagney, 2011, 48).

Our first and most important goal for the project was that our project would encourage the use of Finnish language mentors in DSS students' practical placements in the future. This was, because there is an obvious need for this type of support, yet it does not exist. Many international students, whom I talk to during these studies and the students that I mentored in their placements said that they wished that more supportive measures for practicing Finnish and getting help with Finnish, especially in working life is much needed. They personally felt that too much of the emphasis for an international student is to study during his or her own leisure and not enough support from the University or working places. Our second goal was to encourage working places to give more placement opportunities, meaning that if a student showcases skills that are important for the work, despite having deficiencies in Finnish language, he or she could still be considered for additional training or part-time work, for instance. In fact, one of the students that my project partner mentored received a summer job from her placement due to how quickly she was learning Finnish. Our objectives were to give more confidence for international students to speak Finnish in their placements. Give international students the confidence to apply to Finnish speaking working places and placements. And finally, the opportunity to practice Finnish in their placement, whether it was with us or with the student's clients and co-workers in their placements.

### 3.3 SWOT Analysis for the Project

In our project plan, me and my project partner noted potential threats to our project. We used a method called SWOT analysis, which stands for strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. This technique is credited to Albert Humphrey (Hindle, 2010, 303). We used Table 2 and 3 to outline our project's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats using the SWOT analysis method.

Table 2. Strengths and Weaknesses of the Project

Strengths	Weaknesses
One of the language mentors is a Finnish native (Panu Kallio)	Only two language mentors available for the project
The other language mentor is an immigrant who has once had the same experience as the first year DSS students. (Irene Asare)	Placement as a setting might not always be convenient to have language mentoring sessions.
We have work supervision from three Diaconia University of Applied Sciences Staff (Katja Päällysaho, Sanna Wesanko, Maija Kalm-Akubardia,) and a Finnish teacher to provide us materials for the mentoring sessions (Marjaana Karhia)	

Table 3. Opportunities and Threats of the Project

Opportunities	Threats
The International Graduates to Working Life Project can see if language mentoring is a good method for international students to learn Finnish.	Lack of motivation from the international first year DSS students to learn Finnish.
Combine practical uses of Finnish language with working life.	The Finnish Language Supports lasts for only 5 weeks.
	Placement Organisations might not be co-operative with us due to time constraints or limited staff.

In Table 2, as major strengths we noted that the fact that one of the mentors is a native Finnish speaker and the other Finnish mentor an immigrant background gave us the opportunity to utilise both strengths. Panu being the native speaker could help with the more intricate areas of Finnish language i.e. spoken word terms, while Irene could be considered a role model to the first-year DSS students as she understands the struggles she once had as a foreigner in Finland whether it was language or culture that might have been a challenge for her at the time. As our third strength, we recognised the supportive network we had around us, consisting of 4 staff members from Diaconia of Applied Sciences. As our weaknesses, we noted the fact that there were only two language mentors in this project made it challenge for us to divide the workload of meeting 12 students weekly at their placements. As a second weakness, we realised that a placement has its weaknesses as a setting for this type of language sup-

port, as it was difficult at times to get the space we needed for a calm and relaxing session between us and the students.

In Table 3 The first major threat, was the lack of motivation from the first-year students to learn Finnish. The reason why we saw this as a threat is, due to the following reasons; the student is studying a degree in English, therefore he or she does not necessarily feel the need to study Finnish, outside of compulsory Finnish language courses and placements in Diaconia University of Applied Sciences. One other consideration is the fact that half of the students in the project had been living in Finland for the past 2-4 years. Thus, they might have lost their motivation to keep studying Finnish, even though they have a solid foundation in terms of handling the basics of Finnish language. Reason being that having done mistakes before whether it is by using an incorrect word, bending or past tense, this may hinder the learning experience that the student is having with the language.

Another threat we included in our plan was the threat of limited time we had, since this language project only lasted for a month. This created a challenge, because the students are already having challenges in integrating into the working community in the placement at large, and we had to consider that in our project, as well. This also meant that we had to temper our expectations and plans, since we could not set an objective that the students would learn to speak Finnish fluently by the end of the project. As such we had to make sure that our goals were realistic and in relation to the length of the project, as well as the limited time we had. Hence, we had the first objective that the students would gain confidence in speaking and using Finnish as much as they can during their placements. Our metric for success on this regard was set at a reasonable level, because we cannot expect every student to be a fast learner or efficient in picking up new words.

Thirdly we noted that placement organisations where the students did their placements would not be co-operative for Finnish mentoring provided by us, due to lack of space, time constraints or limited staff. This was one of the most



important threats that we outlined, because one of the student's that my project partner was mentoring said that her placement was not fond of my project partner's presence in this student's placement environment. Thus, they had to agree do Finnish language mentoring somewhere else outside of the placement environment. In this case, they decided to meet at the Diaconia University of Applied Sciences library for their future mentoring sessions.

Opportunities we included were that everyone involved in this project, including the International Graduates to Working Life project could see if this project is a good method for foreign students to learn Finnish while doing their placements. Combining practical uses of Finnish language with working life was a great opportunity for us to see if we could teach Finnish words to international students through practical work that happens at the placement. Being able to combine practical placement with this Finnish language support creates a unique way to combine these aspects together was also seen as an opportunity from us.

### 3.3 Documentation

We wrote down notes about what happened during each meeting we had and counted the number of hours we worked on each part of the project, whether it was presentations, team meetings, planning, mentoring sessions etc. We were also in regular contact with my project partner to hear how the mentoring meetings had been going and what our next step in the project would be. Notes were written down from these phone calls, as well.

Lastly, we also used appendices 1 and 2 as notes and evidence on what we had done with our students. These also acted as our feedback and evaluation tools for the project. We did not have a budget plan for this project due to having access to all the material, contacts from behalf of Diaconia University of Applied Sciences, thus there is no separate chapter for this aspect of the project as it was not relevant in the case of our project.

## 4 PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION

When we started this project, we initially began by first introducing ourselves in front of the DSS first year students. This gave us an opportunity to get to know the students before we started mentoring the students in their practical placements.

### 4.1 Preparation and Planning

After me and my project partner were introduced to the students, we started to contact the students, who expressed interest in receiving help with Finnish language. We sent an invitation to a meeting with us, where we would then talk more specifically about the project and why we were doing it. Once we had an idea on who were interested in this Finnish language support, we planned to meet the students personally in the Diaconica University of Applied Sciences grounds. In this meeting, we properly introduced ourselves to the students and told the students briefly about our project.

The way we proceeded next was that we asked all the students to fill out the self-evaluation form, which is included in the appendices section of this thesis. The reason why this was important for us to do was, because it gave us a better idea of what the students' Finnish skill is like and a convenient way of dividing the students between me and my project partner. What we did was that, I chose the students, who had been living in Finland for a longer period and who had already showcased a level of understanding for the Finnish language. While my project partner chose students, who had not lived in Finland for very long, thus needed help with more basic aspects of the language.

## 4.2 Participants

It is important not to disclose the identity of the students, who participated in this project and to ensure their anonymity, I will not mention where the students are originally from or what their first language is. While this could be interesting for readers of this thesis to know, I do not see it as an important matter to unfold, as with languages every person learns them in different ways. There can be of course, some truth to the fact that the more languages a person speaks the more likely he or she will learn a new language, but I do not necessarily see it as a relevant topic to dive deeply into in this context. Therefore, I will talk about the students in these types of labels; Student A, B, C, D, E, F.

I used Common European Framework of Reference for Languages as a method to assess at which language level the students are at with regards to Finnish Language This helped me provide material and exercises that we were then going to use in our mentoring sessions.

What the level language levels stand for exactly go as follows according to European Framework of References for Languages; A1 and A2 mean that the person is a basic user of a language and that the person understands familiar words and very basic phrases whether it is in a conversation with another person or when writing notes or emails. Simple phrases and terms are also used when the person is telling about his or her background, family, work, studies. There was only one student, who I was mentoring who would fall in this category. B1 and B2 stand for an independent user, which means that the person can understand more complex sentences and connect terms, as well as phrases more effectively than A1 level user. Meanwhile C1 and C2 stand for a proficient user, who already understands much more advanced sentences and can express him or herself spontaneously without having to search for expressions or words. (European Framework for Languages, 2016).

### 4.3 Students' Language Skills

I used Table 4 to evaluate at what language level the students were according to my observations and what their strengths and developmental areas were regarding Finnish language. Overall language level was used to determine the student's language level using the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages. As for the other categories in the table, I used a simple form of 1-5 form of numbering, 1 meaning that the student is a basic user, while 5 stands for a proficient user in this aspect of the language.

Table 4. Students' Finnish Language Level

Student Name	Overall Language Level	Speaking with clients and co-workers	Understanding speech	Writing work related text
A	A2	2	2	1
B	C1	4	4	4
C	B2	3	3	3
D	B1	3	3	2
E	B1	2	3	1
F	B1	3	3	2

Table 4 acted as a point of reference to what kind of material I needed to prepare for the students, and to also note what the skill level for the students was regarding Finnish language. It is also important to note that this evaluation in Table 4 is based on my observations and not Appendices 2 forms that the students filled out to evaluate their Finnish skill level in the beginning and at the end of the project.

With student A, for instance I used simpler sentences and I aimed to speak slower than with the other students I was mentoring, as he was still learning the basics of Finnish language. I tried my best to urge him to use Finnish, for instance when we made appointments to his placement, whether it was by phone, email or text message. Even though he made mistakes or typing errors, it was important not for him to revert to English or stop using Finnish. Our goal was to Finnish all the time for the student to become more accustomed to using Finnish regularly in everyday life and work.

Students whose language level was B1 and B2, I used more advanced vocabulary and I could also talk at a slightly normal pace as I would normally do when speaking Finnish with other Finnish speakers. Students who were in this category, we could delve more deeply into work related terms and focus more on writing emails to their fellow co-workers in their placement, for instance.

There was only one student, who I would put into C1 and C2 category, as this student showed impressive level of skill with Finnish language that even I was surprised by. Basically, a proficient user can understand more complex matters and expressions without having to search for words that a basic user would need more time to find the words for expressing him or herself. With this student, we practised writing text more and we practiced writing presentations and other written work she needed to present in front of her clients.

## 5 PROJECT PROCESS

The purpose of this chapter is to explain what we did each week with the international DSS students that we mentored. Themes we focused on every week and what kind of exercises we did with the students. Lastly what exercises and sessions worked well and which ones did not are mentioned.

### 5.1 Week 1

In week 1 of the project, our focus was we got to know our students better and get an idea on how well the students can express themselves in Finnish. While the Appendices 2 Forms that the students filled out before their placements began gave us an idea on what their Finnish skill was like, however due to having many students we did not have time to engage in longer discussions in during these meetings. The first week's theme was essentially introductions and expressing oneself with simple sentences. We asked our students to tell about their life, family, where they are from, where they currently live and what they have studied or worked at. etc. I also asked from my 6 students about the placement environment and to describe what the weather is like. The objective was to discuss in Finnish always and only use English if necessary in case there was a misunderstanding between me and the students. Overall, the first week went well and all the students expressed motivation to keep learning Finnish and the use of Finnish in the mentoring sessions was as prominent as we had hoped for. However, there was clearly a bit of nervousness from both the mentors and students. This was especially apparent when I was not sure if any of my exercises or plans that I had in mind for the session would be helpful for the student. It was also a challenge that with some of the students that I mentored talked about some of the issues they were having with the degree programme itself, which is why it was important for me to divert the conversation back to the Finnish language. After all, this was not my responsibility to talk about these issues, as my role was to be a Finnish mentor only.

## 5.2 Week 2

In the second week, we focused more on the placement environment and I asked my students to talk about what he or she had done at the placement during the week. I asked this question every week from this moment on, as it gave me an idea on how much Finnish the student had assimilated thus far in the placement. We could then talk about words and terms that the student had not either heard before or did not know what words were in Finnish, such as meeting, schedule, client. These were important words to address, since the students would be hearing these words often while doing their placements. The Finnish teacher from Diaconia University of Applied Sciences we received support from, also pointed out that we should ask them about conception of time and how to say what time it is (quarter past, half past), as well as what weekday and month it is. Not only was this important for the students to get an understanding of what time they should come to placements and their schedule at the placements, but it was also helpful for us and the students. Since we would look at our schedules often for the upcoming mentoring sessions, it made sense for us to make appointments using Finnish language. This helped the students absorb Finnish words in this area and be in the habit of using time notions in Finnish. The second week went considerably better compared to the first week mainly, because we had now gotten to know the students and be better prepared for some of the students' tendencies of talking about other topics and not focusing on the matter of practicing Finnish.

## 5.3 Week 3

In the third week, our theme was on more complicated expressions, when trying to say in Finnish; over there, on top of this etc. We also talked much about the differences between spoken word and written word in Finnish. Each of the students had their own questions on what does this spoken word or expression mean and what is it the official literary word for it in Finnish. This was an important topic to cover, since many of the co-workers and clients in students'

placements were using spoken word or slang words to express themselves, which is why many of the students had difficulties in understanding what was being said to them. This was especially apparent by the fact that all 6 of my students were doing placements where there were youths or children as service users. We noticed that especially the younger clients were using spoken word terms oftentimes, so it was no surprise to us why so many of the students we were mentoring wanted to know more about spoken word of Finnish language. Along with these topics, we also did other exercises, including an exercise where I showed the students a picture that they then had to describe in as much detail as possible in Finnish. The students really liked this exercise, as it allowed them to use their imagination and use all the possible Finnish vocabulary they knew. This ended up being another exercise we did at every mentoring session from this week forward.

#### 5.4 Week 4

This week, I did observation on how the students used Finnish while working with service users at their placements. A couple of the students also took the opportunity to get advice from me with some of their placement tasks. For instance, student B needed help in making a presentation about a service that her placement provides for the service users. I let her do all the writing and thought process on what words and terms she should use for the presentation, while only aiding with spelling and corrections. This allowed the student to notice how much Finnish he or she knows and become more confident in his or her ability to keep using it regularly. The idea was also to let the student use all the knowledge he or she gained from our sessions from these last three weeks and put them to use. One of the more interesting exercises I did this week in those students' placements where it was possible to walk around the work environment and point out the items, notifications, sign posts, playground tools, different equipment etc. to translate them from English to Finnish. Combining the visual aspect of seeing these objects and systematically explaining what each of them are in Finnish proved very helpful for many students.



In retrospect, I wish I had thought of using this type of exercise before with my students, as it never occurred to me to use this method to practice Finnish with the students. However, I am pleased that one of my students suggested me this method as it was revelatory to see how well the student could absorb these words in greater fashion. I then used this same method of practicing Finnish using the placement environment as a learning platform for new words with my other students from this week onwards.

### 5.5 Week 5

In the final week, the theme was to repeat the exercises that we had already done with the students in the earlier weeks, but most of the sessions was spent filling out the Appendices 1 and 2 documents. We wanted to know how the students felt about this Finnish language support that they had received for these 5 weeks. The most important questions that we were interested in knowing was how much did they think they had improved their Finnish language in their opinion and how helpful was this language support project for their placement experience. We had originally planned to have a separate session for filling out these feedback forms, however this was difficult to organise, since many students had busy schedules at the time, thus we had to reserve time for this in the final week of the project instead. This was a setback, given how we would have liked to have had group discussions with our students after the project had ended to brainstorm together on how this type of language support could be further improved and perhaps even included in the Degree curriculum for placements.

## 6 PROJECT EVALUATION

Producing a report about the findings of the project is one way to communicate the results and evaluation of a project (Zarinpoush, 2006, 49.) We provided between 1-2 hours of Finnish language support to all the students every week. Very soon however, me and my project partner noticed that one hour simply was not enough time for these sessions.

We had themes for each of the sessions, but at least I noticed very early on that despite me having my own ideas on what are some of the areas we could cover regarding Finnish language it was not always what the student needed. Often the student had his or her own questions and topics that they wanted to go through. I would say that there is nothing necessarily wrong in having different themes for each session, however every student is different, thus their needs are not the same either.

This project was about providing a supportive and most of all a valuable learning experience that will hopefully have a positive outcome in their future learning Finnish. Both mentors always had a plan going into every session. My plan was always more like a framework of different exercises and conversations we could have in the session, along with all the questions and requests of the student on what he or she wanted to learn.

The reason why we did not want to have a step by step plan for the mentoring sessions was due to the placement environment not being as convenient for a proper setting to practice Finnish. Therefore, I thought that having a theme was better rather than a step by step plan that needed to be followed.

Firstly, the fact we divided our students according to their Finnish language skill and how long they had been living in Finland was a good idea, as it really helped us carry out this language support for these students much more effectively. I felt that me having more advanced Finnish speakers, helped me support

those students more efficiently. I would have had difficulties more likely in providing support in an effective manner with students who had only been in Finland for 6 months or less, since I would have had to speak significantly slower and use simpler words and expressions.

Interestingly what we noticed was that we received responses faster about when we could arrange meetings from the students, who had been staying in Finland for 2 years or longer. While the students who had been living in Finland for 6 months or less replied slower or did not reply at all. This could be that those students who had been living here for a longer time have gotten used to the Finnish culture regarding the quicker responsiveness. Another reason why the other half of the first-year students took longer to respond to our emails could be that they are still getting used to using their emails.

A surprising setback that happened to us in this project was when my project partner Irene had to do her mentoring session elsewhere with one of her students, which was unexpected to us since all the other placement organisations had been very friendly and co-operative towards us and this project. However, since we had included this in our SWOT analysis as seen from Table 3, we were able to accommodate to these types of changes. This indicates how important it is to consider all the possible risks and threats that might occur in a project. This way it was easier to adapt to necessary changes and act accordingly.

Perhaps the most surprising finding was that some of the students' co-worker or clients especially younger individuals wanted to practice their English language with the students. This led to a discussion between us and our project supervisors about how to communicate the importance of practicing Finnish language for the international student in their placements. Since this opportunity for the students learning Finnish should not be undermined by other people in the placement wanting to practice English or other languages with the student instead. This is another aspect that should be emphasised when international students are doing their placements in Finnish working places.

### 6.1. Feedback and Findings

One of the points of discussion I had with my students was this fear of saying the wrong word or not bending the words correctly or not using the right conjunctions when using Finnish. What I always tried telling my students was that they can make mistakes when speaking or writing Finnish and that native Finnish speakers will correct them if they got a sentence or a word wrong. I got the impression from all my students that they felt more comfortable using Finnish, due to my encouragement towards them.

One of the aspects we were interested in seeing was that if the students felt more motivated to learn Finnish when the mentor who visits them is a non-Finnish person rather than a Finnish native speaker. My project partner told me that the feedback she received from her students was that they felt more motivated and relaxed when their mentor was a non-Finnish person.

The reasons for this were according to her students that the mentor acts as almost like a role model to the first-year students and that they can see that it is possible to learn the language as a foreigner. What they also mentioned was that not only is it easier for them to relate to a non-Finnish mentor, but that the foreign mentor understands some of the struggle that the first-year students are going through with not only the language, but also the culture in general, since the mentor herself has been in the same situation at one point in her life. The combination of being able relate to one and other is important to note here and is the prime reason why both the student and the mentor can work together on this goal of learning to speak Finnish and more importantly become confident in using the language actively.

I also noticed this first hand with one of my students, as well, since he mentioned that there was this one asylum seeker doing a placement in the same organisation where he was doing his placement. He said to me that he felt somewhat unaccomplished with his Finnish skill, as he noticed how the asylum seeker spoke better Finnish than he did, despite only having lived in Finland for

less than a year. This demonstrated to him that not only is it possible to learn Finnish no matter how difficult it may feel, but if you put enough work in, you are even able to learn to speak it fluently in a matter of months.

Suggestions of improving this kind of Finnish support that were mentioned, was the inclusion of children's books for teaching material due to the simpler language that those books use. Unfortunately, I did not realise to use children's books as a viable material for our sessions, until the time I used a comic book that had too demanding vocabulary for my student to understand the text. I think that children's books as a teaching material is a sound material that can be used with those students especially, who are still at novice level when it comes to Finnish.

What was also suggested were pictured memory cards that had the English and Finnish words written on each side of the card. I think this especially was a good idea, since these memory cards could easily be carried to all the sessions and practice the words in a convenient way.

More structured material was also suggested that were designed for different skill levels; beginner, intermediate and advanced. Wordbooks if you will, however the student noted that he had experience being a teacher in his home country, so he acknowledged the fact that it may become too much of a Finnish lesson and thus the project would lose its original focus of being more about encouraging the use of Finnish and speaking it as much as possible. Regardless, I think this is something that could be included if

During our feedback sessions, some students expressed the need of having two meetings in a week instead of just one meeting. This request makes sense especially if the student felt that they needed even more support with Finnish language than they were already receiving. Our concern however with having two meetings with each student a week is twofold. Firstly, there is a risk that the presence of a language mentor can interrupt the work that the student is trying to do in the placement. Secondly, the placement is only 5 weeks long which is a

rather short time to get to know the placement environment. Obviously, the more meetings you have the more effective the tutoring will be, as well. However, with both of us having 6 students to mentor at the same time, it was already a challenge to mentor that many students every week.

One of the students that I mentored said the following:

I possess a satisfactory foundation for speech, as well as an understanding of the basic conjugations (present and past tense), but I still need to work on many other aspects (word placement and proper format). Working with my Finnish language mentor Panu has helped me tremendously these last 5 weeks! (Student D)

This quote shows that the student noted how this project helped him become a more well-rounded user of Finnish and admits that he still needs to learn about several areas in Finnish language. Another positive comment about the flexibility of the project and mentoring techniques we used with one of my students:

I appreciated the fact that not only did you have your suggested themes, topics and exercises for the mentoring sessions, but you were also interested in considering what my needs were as a learner of Finnish language. (Student C)

This quote points out how the student recognised the strengths of this type of language mentoring and that we managed to consider what the student's needs were as a Finnish language learner.

There were some criticisms and suggestions for improvement, as well, including the following statement:

Verbs, adverbs, and adjectives including how to make sentences or write short essays using Finnish words could be practiced more during these mentoring sessions. Finnish language books should be used in the teaching and some home works given. (Student E)

This statement had me thinking that perhaps there should be a clearer distinction between this type of support and the teaching that Finnish language teachers in Diaconia University of Applied Sciences do.

After all, teachers should take the role of teaching more complex aspects of the language and that this type of mentoring support that we provided to the participants of this project should mainly stick to the practical implications of Finnish language whilst in working life.

This reminds of me the time when I was mentoring a student in his placement at a kindergarten. What we did was we walked through the entire kindergarten both outside and indoors, while highlighting different items in the working environment, whether it was toys, equipment, signs etc. I think that by having the visual indication, writing the word down to a seat of paper and practicing the word repeatedly eventually helps the student memorise the word in an effective manner. The fact that this student had to deal with these items or words every day meant that this would become second nature to him by the end of the placement, thus better remembering these words rather than study these words from a book every day at his home, for instance.

I think this is one of those exercises that where this type of project's focus should be, combining both practical use and work related use. After all, the most important words or terms that a student needs are the ones he or she uses the most in his or her placement or working environment.

## 7 CONCLUSION

As a conclusion to this project, the appendices 2 forms that I filled out together with the students I mentored all saw improvements across each section. At least a one point increase in every category was noticed by me, whether it was understanding speech, writing text or speaking Finnish. However, speaking Finnish on the phone was still a challenge for all my students, as it was more difficult to understand what the person was saying during a phone call. Reason being that it was easier to understand what the person was saying in Finnish when you can see the person's body of movement in a face to face conversation, making it easier to understand more complicated words that might otherwise get misunderstood in a phone call.

What I was particularly pleased about was the honesty that the students had regarding their Finnish language. Each of my students realised that this was not about reaching for the highest points in the evaluation form or an assignment that would then be graded in their certificate. They realised that this for their own benefit in the long term and a proof of concept that they can learn to become more confident using Finnish, even though they might not always find the correct words to express themselves.

Every student that me and my project partner mentored, hoped that this type of Finnish language support would be included in the DSS study plan and that this project made their placement experience more satisfying. While I agree that the feedback we received is positive, it is Diaconia University of Applied Sciences' decision if they want to include this type of support programme in the degree in social services study programme. I think that this project proved that this is a viable method with minor tweaking to be considered a great companion for becoming better at Finnish language to international student's placement experience in the Degree in Social Services.



## 8 PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

During this project, I learned a lot about how to carry out a project such as this. Whether this was to make sure we hit our deadlines and the open dialogue I had with my project partner on how the mentoring was going. Also, our biweekly discussions with our project supervisors during the project implementation stage helped us reflect on how the project was going and if there were any issues that we had encountered with the students or placements we co-operated with.

While it was challenging at times having to listen to some of the issues that my students are having in their personal lives or how difficult it is to learn Finnish. I always had to keep my composure and drive the conversation back to the matter at hand which was learning Finnish. This was also a valuable skill for me to have in working life once, since conversations with service users can at times go to areas that are not the focus of the meetings.

This project also reassured me, how well I worked as a part of team in this project. I think part of that success is due to my project partner Irene Asare, who was the ideal project partner for me, as we shared similar traits personality wise, of both of us having a calm and careful approach to the work we do. Above all, I think we both complimented each other's skill set and worked effectively together during this project.

Overall, despite not hitting every possible goal we had set out in the planning stage of this Finnish language support project, I still thought the project was a success. Given the fact that how positive the feedback was from students and how pleased our project manager and other project team members were about our findings. I also think that the feedback and compliments I received from the students I was mentoring, gave me confidence that I can provide meaningful support that helps these students better perform in their placements and future workplaces in Finland. I also had the opportunity to work with different types of students, who all had different needs and what they wanted which in turn al-

lowed me to work with people who all wanted different to learn different aspects of Finnish language at the end of the project.

With regards to community development, I think that by us helping the first-year DSS international students become more confident using Finnish, we helped the working community at large in the placement environment. This meant clearer communication between the co-workers of students and service users at the placement. I think our project also strengthened the bond between the placements and Diaconia University of Applied Sciences, since we were in close contact with both parties during the project. This is another aspect that should not be underestimated, since placements should act as learning experiences for everyone involved.

I utilised all the knowledge and experience I had gained from the Diaconia University lectures and placements to carry out this project with my project team. I feel that I have learned significantly from this experience as a student of this field and that I was able to reflect on how I did and in which areas I could have done better. Being complimentary towards my team members and critical of the project and its shortcomings was also important to remember.

Bachelor of Social Services competences mention that a student has been able to assimilate a reflective and research oriented work style. It also mentioned that the student has practical expertise in research oriented work and can produce new information. Lastly, it is mentioned that the student can plan, carry out, report and evaluate a project or research. (Bachelor of Social Services Competences, 2010, 6). I think that this thesis demonstrates all those areas, whether it was the planning stage of this project, realising the plan or evaluating the results. The fact that I executed all these different stages in the project with my project team and produce this Thesis about this project indicates that, I met these competences and be prepared for my future in the field of social work.

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## APPENDICES

Feedback Questions for Students at the end of the Project, which was gathered either orally or in written form, depending on whether the student wanted to write down his or her feedback on a piece of paper.

### Appendices 1. Project Feedback Questions

1. Did you find this Finnish Language support project useful for your practical placement?
2. What did you like about the project?
3. Do you think that your Finnish language has improved or that you became more confident in using Finnish more during your placement because of the project?
4. Did you ever feel that this project disrupted your placement experience?
5. What are some of the developmental areas in the project in your opinion, i.e. what could be improved?
6. Were there enough meetings per week in your opinion? Would have twice a week been better, for instance?
7. If you were given the option of receiving similar type of Finnish language support in your next placement, would you take it and what kinds of changes or teaching methods you would like to see being implemented?
8. Would you like to see this type of language mentoring included into the DSS degree programme? Meaning that all DSS students, who need help with Finnish could receive this kind of Finnish language support in their future placements.

Finnish Language Self-Evaluation Form, which all the students filled out before their placements began and after their placements ended.

## Appendices 2. Finnish Language Self-Evaluation Forms

### Communication with a Client

Understanding speech. Evaluate together with the student how he or she understands a client's speech in different situations. Circle the number that presents the student's Finnish skill level.

0	1	2	3	4	5
not yet					understands in most situations

Speaking. Evaluate together with the student, how talking with different clients goes along.

0	1	2	3	4	5
not yet					speaking is fluent and understandable, the student is proactive

### Communication by Phone

Evaluate together with the student about his or her ability to communicate by phone.

0	1	2	3	4	5
not yet					has the courage to use phone and the matter gets taken care of via phone call.

### Communication in the Working Community

Understanding speech. Evaluate together with the student, how he or she understands speech with his or her Finnish co-workers in different situations.

0            1            2            3            4            5

not yet

understands in most situations  
accurately and correctly

Speaking. Evaluate together with the student how speaking Finnish with his or her co-workers goes.

0            1            2            3            4            5

not yet

speaking is fluent and understandable,  
the student is active and initiative

### Writing

Evaluate together with the student how writing related to their work goes. Can the student write Finnish so that the text is completely understandable and there is no interpretation for misunderstanding? If there are still challenges in writing, do they stem from writing level or that the student does not recognise Finnish grammar or praxis.

0            1            2            3            4            5

not yet

text is completely  
understandable

### Informal Feedback

In this part you can document, for example the student's activeness regarding Finnish language and learning it. What needs and strengths does the student have from the language proficiency point of view?