

Dio Dolmans

**Adapting to Modern Customer Needs in the Public Sector**

A Study to Strengthen E-services Facilitating Online Language Teaching to Multicultural Students

## **Adapting to Modern Customer Needs in the Public Sector**

A Study to Strengthen E-services Facilitating Online Language Teaching to Multicultural Students

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## ABSTRACT

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This case study aims to give recommendations to Villa Victor on how they can strengthen their e-service of online teaching to multicultural students. The case study does this by utilizing the GAPS Model of Service Quality. This model aims to identify if any causes of quality problems have occurred within the design, marketing, and service delivery processes with the focus being on how these problems affect the customers' perception of the service to analyse the service quality. Furthermore, as this case study is focused on online teaching being provided to multicultural students, technology and cultural differences factors were also analysed to determine how these factors affect the customers' perception of the service. These factors include software perception and the various matters stated in the eight principles of effective online teaching, as well as different learning strategies employed by people from different cultural backgrounds.

For this case study, a mixed method approach was used to collect data from the senior management, service personnel, and customers. This method included 5 semi-structured interviews followed by an online survey completed by 77 students of which 28 were found to be useable for this case study.

The findings reveal that only two gaps could be identified, one of which was found in the service delivery and the other being influenced by the emergence of the former. These gaps were caused by poor technology-job fit caused by the software in use for every analysed course, as well as lack of perceived control for one course caused by a policy decision to let beginner level students attend higher level courses. Furthermore, the findings reveal that such technology factors as software perception and communication with students, based on the eight principles of effective online teaching, have affected the students' perception of the service quality to an extent.

Based on these findings, recommendations were given to the case company to solve the identified issues and in turn strengthen the e-service. These recommendations were to change the software in use to resolve the poor technology-job fit and improve the students' perception of the service, create promotional videos for the higher level courses so that beginner level students can have an example of how these courses are carried out without disrupting the class, and create more courses to divide the large groups into smaller groups so that teachers are able to properly give feedback and instruction, etc.

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Keywords: GAPS Model of Service Quality, Principles of Effective Online Teaching, Different Learning Strategies, Cultural Differences.

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# 1 INTRODUCTION

During the first quarter of 2020 the world was impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic which subsequently resulted in national lockdowns and social distancing measures being implemented across the globe to combat the spread of the disease. Due to lockdown measures, various companies had to adapt to the situation by increasing the use of E-services for communication purposes for both their employees and customers. Similarly, Multicultural Centre Villa Victor, a non-profit municipal organization providing support to immigrants and Finns living in Oulu, had to utilize their previously developed E-service offering to a greater extent to continue to provide their support (e.g., online language teaching).

Due to the lowering of restrictions regarding the COVID-19 pandemic, many companies have been able to return to normal practices. However, Villa Victor reports that some of their customers have shown a preference to continue to receive online teaching through E-services due to such geographical, scheduling, and convenience factors. Consequently, Villa Victor aims to strengthen their E-services to continue to fulfil customer needs. For this reason, this case study was conducted for Villa Victor to support their aim and focuses on Villa Victor's E-service of online language teaching offered to multicultural students. The objective of this case study was to gather information regarding research, service design and delivery, and internal/external communication from the company side, as well as student expectations, their perception of the service delivery, and problems they may encounter from the customer side. This is required to ultimately be able to identify any causes of problems throughout the service design and delivery process and to provide the client company with advice on how to resolve these issues.

This case study has been conducted using a mixed method approach, during which semi-structured interviews were performed with both the senior management and service personnel, and online surveys were distributed to the customers. The data collection was conducted using three sets of questions concerning the GAPS Model of Service Quality as described by Wirtz & Lovelock (2016, 549, 551, 553, 554, 555), Zeithaml et. al. (1990, 52, 71, 72, 90, 116, 117), and Haksever et. al. (1997, 15, 60). The model is used to identify causes of quality problems (resulting from 'gaps' of understanding between the customer and company) occurring within the design, marketing, and delivery process of the service with the focus being on how these problems affect the customers perception of the service delivery. Also, as the study is focused on the strengthening of an 'E-

service' that is being delivered to a multicultural customer base, the factors of technology and cultural differences affecting the customers perception of the service delivery were also considered when constructing the sets of questions.

To summarize, the research problem for this thesis is the lack of knowledge regarding students' perceptions, expectations, and problems they may encounter, which is needed to strengthen Villa Victor's E-service. Therefore, the research question is:

→ *How can Villa Victor strengthen their E-service?*

And supportive questions include:

→ *Do any gaps of understanding exist between the senior management and its employees, as well as between the company and the customer?*

→ *Do the factors of technology and cultural differences affect the customers' perception of the service?*

→ *How can Villa Victor solve the identified problems?*

The following chapters presents further information about the client company, and the theoretical foundation for this thesis which includes supporting literature on the GAPS Model of Service Quality, how technology affects the customers perception of the service delivery, and how cultural differences affects the customers perception of the service delivery. The theoretical foundation chapter is subsequently followed by the methodology chapter (i.e., the development of the research task) and the results of the research (i.e., empirical data), the conclusion which presents advice on how Villa Victor can improve their E-service, and lastly, the discussion chapter which presents a summary of the findings as well as the limitations of the case study.

## 2 CLIENT COMPANY

This case study is conducted for Multicultural Centre Villa Victor, a non-profit municipal organization of the City of Oulu. The following subchapters provide further information on the company's history and how they are operating presently.

### 2.1 History

The company started off as the International Activity Centre of the City of Oulu and started to work on the same premises as the social and healthcare services for immigrants in 2000. The International Activity Centre would stay in these premises until the beginning of 2007 during which they moved to the De Gamlas Hem house in the Heinäpää district. In 2008, the ESF project Homelike Oulu was launched, one of its goals was to support and develop the activities of the International Activity Centre. The Homelike Oulu project would run until 2011, during which the Friendship House of Oulu Settlement moved to the same premises as the International Activity Centre which enabled the two companies to work under the same roof and together provide activities for immigrants and Finns living in Oulu. At the start of 2013, the International Activity Centre was finally renamed to Multicultural Centre Villa Victor. (ouka.fi – Information About Villa Victor, date of retrieval 14.11.2023.)

Between 2013 and 2023 multiple projects would take place which were focused on multiculturalism, language teaching, and multilingual guidance, such as the "Participate and Influence" project (2013, funded by the EU Integration fund and the Finnish Ministry of Interior), the ESF project "Language skills facilitate integration" (2015) with the goal of developing Finnish teaching and mentoring, the "Good beginning in Northern Ostrobothnia" project (2016, funded from ESF), a university administrated project "Language – a key to participation" (2018) where Villa Victor participated as the co-operative party, and lastly the ESF project "MONINE" (2020) which had the goal of developing multilingual guidance. During this time, Multicultural Centre Villa Victor underwent several changes such as the premises which changed multiple times until they eventually settled to the recently renovated premises of Oulu10 located at Torikatu 10, where they currently are situated. The services also saw some changes, the multilingual assistance moved to Oulu10 alongside Villa Victor's staff in 2019 and was ultimately removed as part of its services in 2023. Also, in 2019 the language courses took place in two different locations. The language clubs took



place in Oulu<sup>10</sup>, while the Finnish courses took place in Aleksinkulma. However, due to the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, most of the courses were provided through online teaching from 2020 onwards. All Finnish teaching, except for the teaching groups in the uni-campus and the customized course for Nokia Networks, was transferred to new classrooms in 2022. (ouka.fi – Information About Villa Victor, date of retrieval 14.11.2023.)

## 2.2 Villa Victor Today

Due to the large number of diverse groups of foreign nationals living in Oulu, Multicultural Centre Villa Victor focuses their efforts on promoting multiculturalism in Oulu and providing support to immigrants to help these individuals integrate into Finnish society. This is reflected in the company's goals which are the following: to increase positive interaction together with different language and culture groups, authorities, associations, and other co-operation parties, to support two-way integration through improving involvement and supporting personal life management, to promote multiculturalism, and to prevent racism. (Pelkonen 13.11.2023, e-mail message.)

In order to achieve these goals, Multicultural Centre Villa Victor employs its experts in multicultural issues to provide a large amount of multicultural services. These services include: *various courses* which include Finnish language courses at various levels given both online and in classrooms, and mentoring which is targeted to educated immigrants and aims to help them enhance their incentive in professional networking and improve their awareness of the facts and customs in Finnish working life. Furthermore, it includes *info events* which are comprised of around 15 info events annually provided in several languages that give information regarding various topics related to society, authorities, and public services e.g., accommodation and living, studies, hobbies, health and security, etc., *multicultural occasions and events* such as the "Welcome to Oulu", "Colourful Restaurant", "Week against racism", and "Independence Day Celebration" events, as well as various planned excursions. (Pelkonen 13.11.2023, e-mail message.)

### **3 THEORETICAL FOUNDATION**

Within the theoretical foundation are explained the concepts of the GAPS Model of Service Quality. Furthermore, the concepts of e-learning and learning strategies are discussed to provide information on how technology and cultural differences affect the teaching and learning experience of both the teachers and students, and how these factors may affect the student's perception of the E-service of online language teaching provided by Villa Victor.

#### **3.1 The GAPS Model of Service Quality**

This case study utilizes the GAPS Model of Service Quality (otherwise known as the SERVQUAL model). The model makes use of a gap analysis to help companies to identify the potential causes of quality problems that can occur at the macro level. (Wirtz & Lovelock 2016, 549.)

To properly introduce the GAPS Model of Service Quality, it is necessary to define the concept of "service quality". The concept of "quality" can have different meanings dependent on the context. In the perspective of services, quality is operations-driven which means that it must comply with internally developed specifications that tend to be tightly aligned with productivity and cost-containment goals. As services are inherently intangible and multifaceted, evaluating the level of quality becomes more difficult. Therefore, service researchers argue that to define and measure service quality, a distinctive approach is required. Due to the frequent involvement of customers in the service production it is required to separate the service into two parts to define and measure its quality, namely the process of service delivery and the actual outcome of the service. Furthermore, researchers suggest that customers evaluate the perceived quality (i.e., the customer's perception of the quality of the provided service) by comparing their perception of the service delivery and its outcome to what they previously expected the service to be like. Therefore, from the customer's perspective service quality can be defined as a high standard of performance that was able to consistently meet or exceed their expectations. (Wirtz & Lovelock 2016, 551.)

From this explanation it can be perceived that the company's definition of "service quality" is often different from the customer's definition. Companies believe that the service quality is determined on how well the service conforms to the set service design specifications which are often tightly aligned with productivity and cost-containment goals. In contrast, customers believe that the service

quality is determined by how well the service was able to meet or exceed their expectations. This division between the company and the customer often creates gaps of understanding on how the service delivery should be designed, one side believing it should be focused on productivity and cost-containment and other believing it should be focused on customer satisfaction.

For this reason, the GAPS Model of Service Quality aims to identify if any gaps of understanding exist between the company and the customer by analyzing different points in the design and delivery process of the service. The creators of this model, Valarie Zeithaml, A. Parasuraman, and Leonard Berry, identify four potential gaps, namely, the knowledge gap, policy gap, delivery gap, and communications gap, within the service organization itself that may lead to the fifth, the perceptions gap, and eventually the final gap, the service quality gap, which refers to difference of what customers expect from the service and their perception of the actual service delivery. (Wirtz & Lovelock 2016, 551.) These gaps are further explained in the next subchapters.

### **3.1.1 Gap 1: The Knowledge Gap**

The knowledge gap relates to the difference between what the management think the customers expect and the actual needs and expectations of the customers. (Wirtz & Lovelock 2016, 553.) This gap is depicted in Figure 1.

The knowledge gap can be caused in three possible ways, namely through the lack of marketing research usage which can be seen by the scarce use of research findings and insufficient communication between management and customers, insufficient upward communication between contact personnel and management, and excessive levels of management which causes a separation between contact personnel and top managers. (Zeithaml et al. 1990, 52.)

To close this gap, it is required to inform management about customer expectations. This can be done by for example, implementing an efficient customer feedback system which includes such functions as satisfaction research, complaint and compliment content analysis, customer panels, and online monitoring, improving market research procedures, questionnaires and interview design, sampling, and field implementation, and repeat research studies on a periodical basis, increasing the amount of interactions customer have with senior management (e.g., by senior management taking a more active role in the communication with customers), and finally,

encouraging and facilitating frontline employees to communicate with the management. (Wirtz & Lovelock 2016, 554.)

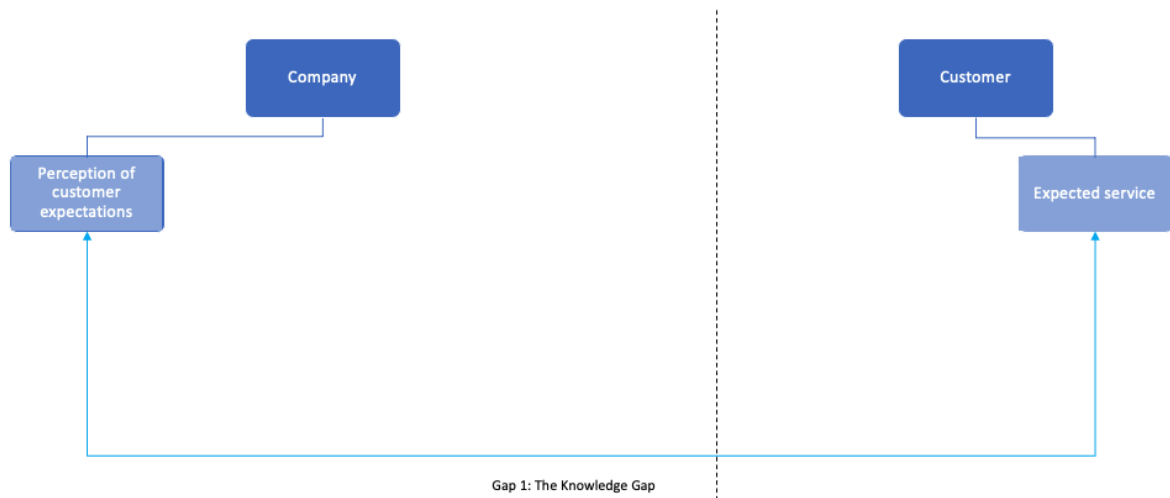


Figure 1. Gap 1: The Knowledge Gap

### 3.1.2 Gap 2: The Policy Gap

The policy gap relates to the difference between the management's understanding of what customers expect and the service standards they chose to set for the service delivery. The name derives from the fact that the management has made a policy decision to set standards below customer expectations typically due to cost and feasibility reasons. (Wirtz & Lovelock 2016, 553.) This gap is depicted in Figure 2.

The four major causes for this decision are due to insufficient dedication to service quality, management perceiving that it is infeasible to meet customer expectations, insufficient standardization of tasks, and goal setting being non-existent. (Zeithaml et. al. 1990, 71-72.)

To close this gap, it is necessary to shift the focus back to customer needs and expectations by creating service products, processes and standards that are based on these needs and expectations. This can be done by for example, improving the product and customer service processes, setting and communicating measurable customer-focused service standards to all employees, and developing tiered service products to ensure customer expectations are met (see Appendix 2). (Wirtz & Lovelock 2016, 554.)

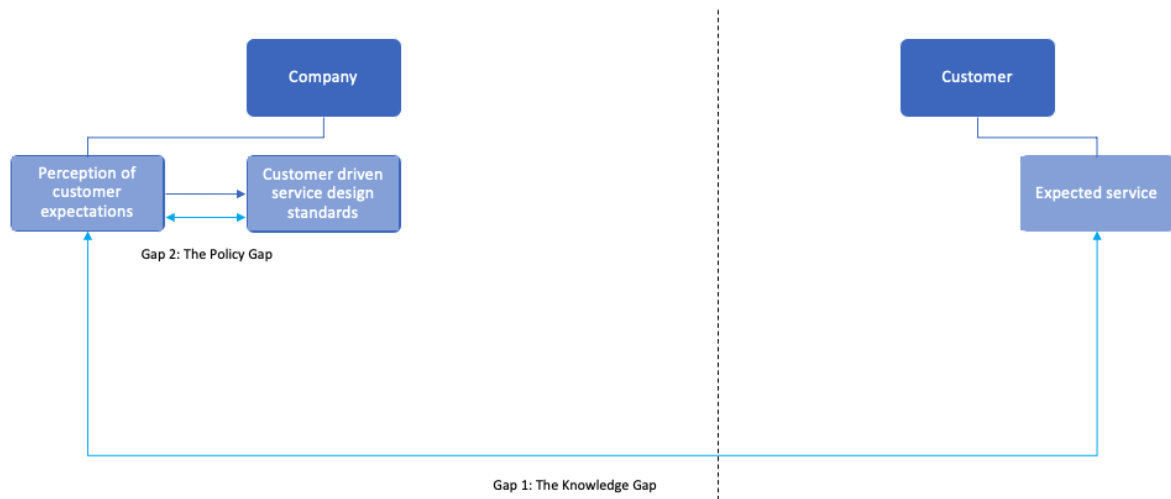


Figure 2. Gap 1 & Gap2: The Policy Gap

### 3.1.3 Gap 3: The Delivery Gap

The delivery gap relates to the difference between the established service standards and the actual performance on these standards by the service delivery team. (Wirtz & Lovelock 2016, 553.) The gap usually emerges due to employees being unwilling or unable to perform the service at the desired level. (Haksever et. al. 1997, 60.) This gap is depicted in Figure 3.

Some factors that may contribute to the emergence of this gap are “1) *role ambiguity*; 2) *role conflict*; 3) *poor employee-job fit*; 4) *poor technology-job fit*; 5) *inappropriate supervisory control systems (leading to an inappropriate evaluation/compensation system)*; 6) *lack of perceived control (by employees)*; and, 7) *lack of teamwork*” (Zeithaml et. al. 1990, 90.). These factors are explained further in Table 1.

Factors	Description
<b>Role ambiguity</b>	Occurs when employees have not received clear instructions and/or training to perform their roles properly.
<b>Role conflict</b>	Occurs when employees believe that the management expectations from them are unrealistic regarding e.g., service time.
<b>Poor employee-job fit</b>	Occurs when the company has not hired employees with the right skills for the job and/or fails to train these employees properly.
<b>Poor technology-job fit</b>	Occurs due to the company not having provided the necessary technology and equipment to the employees for them to properly perform their service tasks.

<b>Inappropriate supervisory control systems</b>	Occurs when the company chooses to monitor easily measurable factors such as number of customers served instead of such factors as customer satisfaction.
<b>Lack of perceived control</b>	Can occur when employees need to get approval from managers to resolve certain problems or if they feel that they cannot resolve certain problems on their own volition due to fear of exceeding their authority.  Can lead to poor service quality due to employee stress.
<b>Lack of teamwork</b>	Can occur when employees and managers fail to work together towards a common goal which can compromise service quality.

Table 1. Factors that may contribute to the emergence of the Delivery Gap. Source: Haksever et. al. 1997, 60

To close this gap, it is necessary to make sure that the service delivery team's performance meets the established standards. The company can do this by: ensuring that the customer service teams are both motivated and able to meet service standards, installing the required technology, equipment, support processes, and capacity, teaching customers to efficiently perform their roles and responsibilities in a service delivery, and efficiently coordinating objectives, performance, costs and rewards with both intermediaries and third parties which are involved in the service delivery; and observe and motivate service quality (see Appendix 2). (Wirtz & Lovelock 2016, 554.)

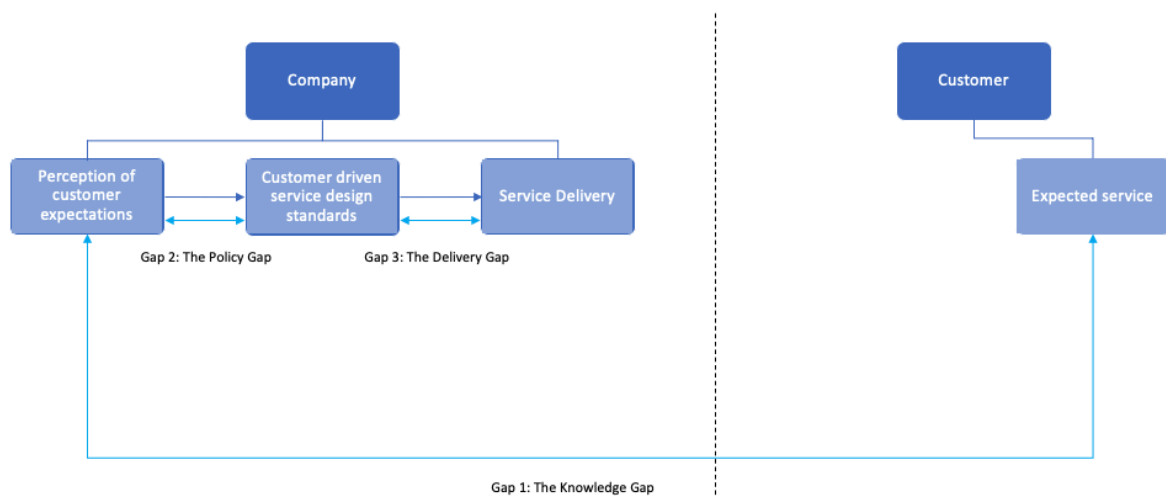


Figure 3. Gap 1- 2 & Gap 3: The Delivery Gap

### 3.1.4 Gap 4: The Communications Gap

The communications gap relates to the difference between how the company advertises the service, what customers come to understand the service to be like from this advertisement, and

how they experience the actual service. (Wirtz & Lovelock 2016, 553.) This gap emerges when the delivered service does not match what was promised in the advertisement of the service. (Haksever et. al. 1997, 15.) This gap is depicted in Figure 4.

The two major factors that can cause this gap is insufficient horizontal communication mainly between the operations, marketing, and human resources teams, as well as across different branches, and the tendency to overpromise in marketing content. (Zeithaml et. al. 1990, 116-117.)

To explain these factors further, insufficient horizontal communication, to my understanding, means that e.g., there is a difference between how the service personnel, meaning the personnel that perform the service, and the marketing personnel/company view the service. In this case, if the company communicates to their target customers their perception of the service, which reflects a certain level of service quality, and the actual service delivery is different from the company's perception, then this can create a communications gap between the company and the customer and in turn negatively affect the customer's perception of the service. Furthermore, the tendency to overpromise in marketing content refers to the occurrence of a company 'overselling' the service to their target customers in which they make promises that they cannot deliver on. This will then also result in a communications gap between the company and the customers and in turn result in the service delivery failing to meet the customer's expectations.

To close this gap, the company needs to close both the internal and external communications gaps by ensuring that the promises that are being communicated are both realistic and correctly understood by the customers. The company can do this by: ensuring that the content that is being communicated establishes realistic customer expectations, and informing the operational capabilities to managers who are responsible for the communication of sales and marketing, avoiding the occurrence of sales teams focusing only on generating sales (e.g., through overpromising) and neglecting customer satisfaction (e.g., through failing to meet customer expectations), and specifying what is being promised and managing the customer's understanding of what is being communicated (see Appendix 2). (Wirtz & Lovelock 2016, 555.)

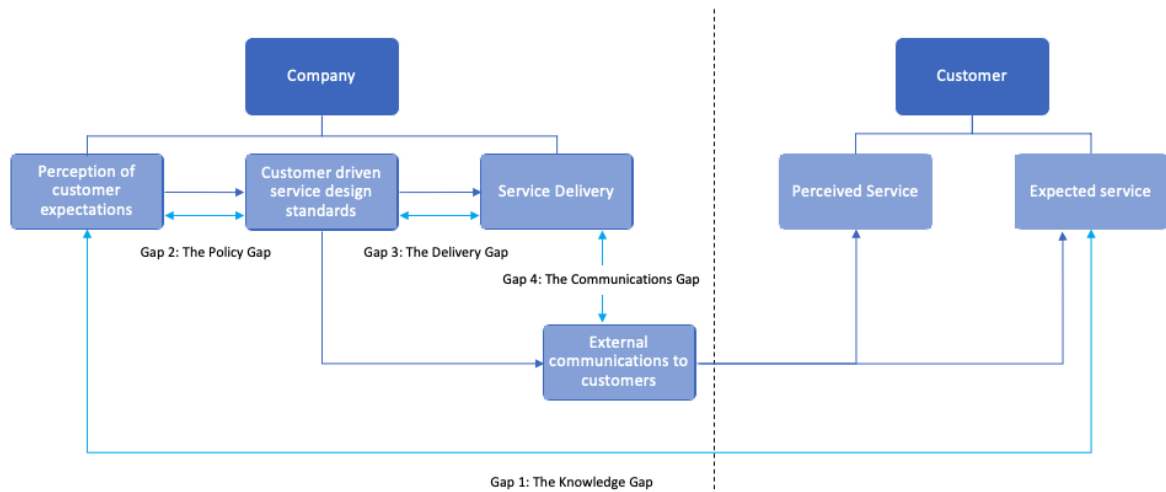


Figure 4. Gap 1-3 & Gap 4: The Communications Gap

### 3.1.5 Gap 5: The Perceptions Gap

The perceptions gap relates to the difference between the actual service delivery and what customers feel they have received due to them not being able to correctly assess the service quality. (Wirtz & Lovelock 2016, 553.) This gap is depicted in Figure 5.

To my understanding, what is meant with this statement is that the customer can often struggle to correctly determine the quality of the service they have just experienced due to the inherent intangible nature of the service. Alternatively, products which are tangible objects are easier to judge for a customer as the customer can look at the physical quality of the object and reflect on similar products that they may have owned before.

To close this gap, the company needs to create tangible indicators of the service quality and communicate the delivered service quality. This can be done by creating service environments and physical evidence based on the level of the provided service, repeatedly informing customers what is being done during the service delivery, and answering any questions the customers may have about the service after the service delivery so that the customers can appreciate the quality of the service they have just received. (Wirtz & Lovelock 2016, 555.)



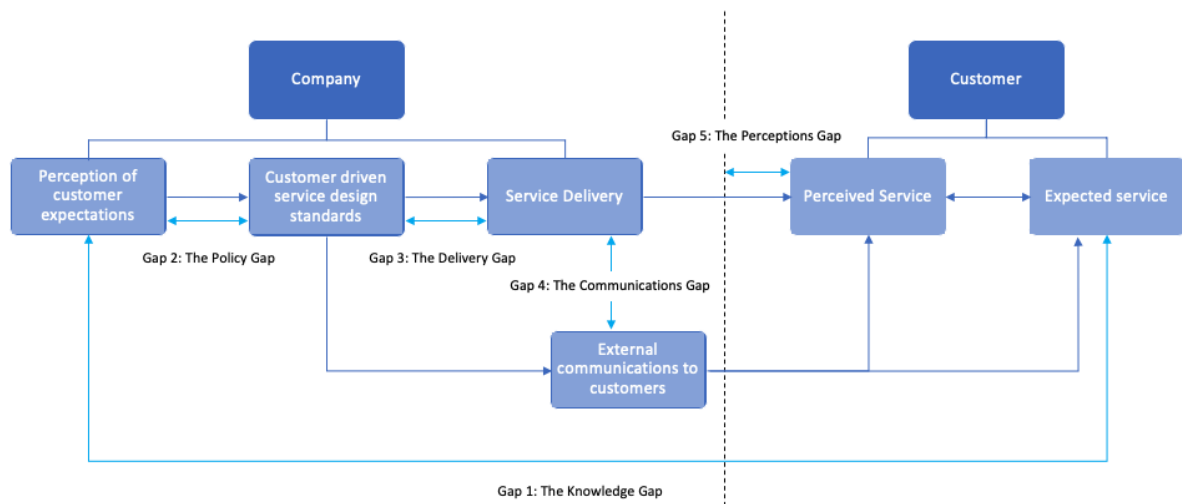


Figure 5. Gap 1-4 & Gap 5: The Perceptions Gap

Furthermore, for this case study, it is needed to analyze the tangible indicators of the service quality that the students can perceive during the class, as the students do not need to visit Villa Victor's premises to participate in the course. For this reason, the HEdPERF (Higher Education PERFORMANCE-only) scale developed by Abdullah (2006) can be used as a measuring instrument of service quality. This scale focuses on six dimensions, namely, non-academic aspects, academic aspects, reputation, access, program issues and understanding. As this scale was mainly developed as a measuring tool for higher education institutions, several variables, such as recreational facilities, variety of programs, easily employable graduates, etc., can be ignored for Villa Victor's purposes. However, the scale still has value to this case study as most variables focus on the student's perception on such matters as the educator's professional appearance, attitude and overall helpfulness during classes, knowledge of the material and systems in use, and the accessibility to the institution's support and advisory services (e.g., level of ease to contact the institution by telephone). (Abdullah 2006, 569, 570, 576.)

Therefore, the study will analyze the student's perception on these variables to determine what their perception is of the service quality.

### 3.1.6 Gap 6: The Service Quality Gap

The sixth and final gap is the service quality gap which relates to the difference between what customers have come to expect to receive from the service and how they have perceived the actual service delivery. (Wirtz & Lovelock 2016, 553.) This gap is depicted in Figure 6.

As mentioned in previous subchapters, customers form their expectations of a service by the external communication from the company to the customer. However, this communication to the customer is only one of a few factors which can shape a customer's expectations. Customer expectations are also affected by the personal needs of the customer (e.g., what he/she is aiming to gain from this service), word-of-mouth communications (i.e., what other people have said about the service when they engaged with it), and lastly, the customers past experience (e.g., their former experience with the service or similar services).

As this gap is the culmination of all the previous gaps, the way to close gap 6 is to simply attempt to close gaps 1 to 5. (Wirtz & Lovelock 2016, 555.)

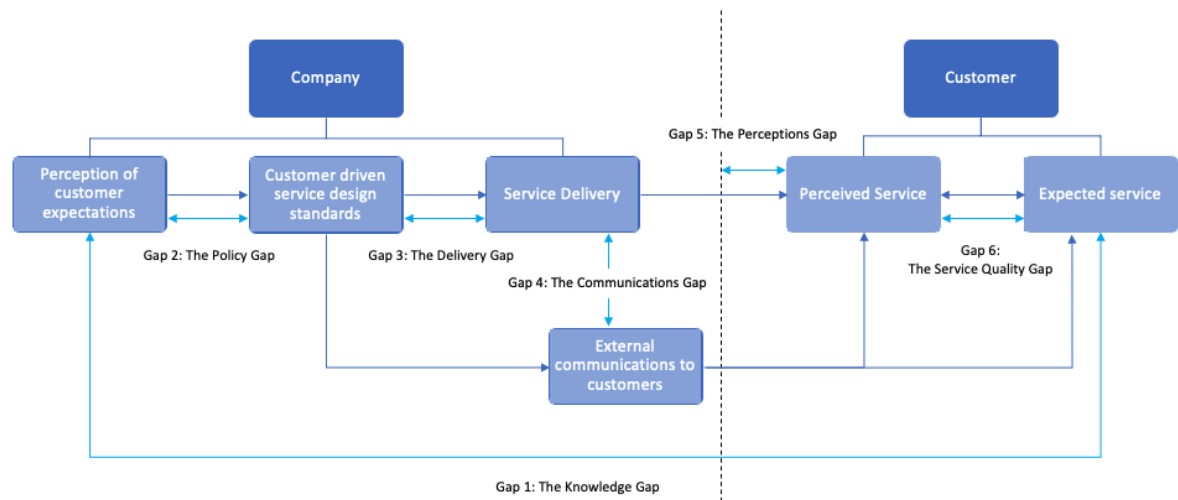


Figure 6. The Gaps Model of Service Quality

### 3.2 The Factors of Technology

This subchapter focuses on how technology affects the customer's perception of the service delivery described through the concept of e-learning. Furthermore, as this case study is focused on Villa Victor's students who chose to participate in online learning classes instead of traditional ways of learning (i.e., in classrooms), this subchapter focuses only on the benefits and disadvantageous of e-learning, and studies which compare traditional learning and e-learning instead of hybrid forms of learning that entail participating in classes both in classrooms and online.

### 3.2.1 Definition of e-learning and how it affects the teaching and learning process

E-learning can be described as a method of teaching and learning that transfers knowledge and education through the utilization of various electronic devices to students to meet their learning needs. It is comprised of various elements such as technological tools and design, e-learning platforms, content, and users. (Coman et. al. 2020, 3.).

E-learning differs from traditional education as it shifts the focus from being more teacher-centered to being more student-centered (i.e., instead of the focus being only on instruction, e-learning also focuses on adjusting the learning to individual needs). The difference between traditional education and e-learning can also be seen in terms of sources of information, assessment, or quality of education. In traditional education, evaluation of student work is done solely by teachers, who are also the main source of information for students, and the quality of learning is dependent on the teacher's knowledge and skills. In e-learning, the evaluation of student work can be done with the help of tools and systems, information can be procured by students from various documents uploaded on online platforms, and the quality of learning is dependent on teachers' level of training in the usage of technology and their teaching style. (Coman et. al 2020, 3,4.).

In order for teachers to have an effective framework of teaching in e-learning, Cable and Cheung (2017, 3,4,5,6) describe eight principles that lie at the core of effective online teaching. These principles are shown in Table 2.

Principles of Effective Online Teaching	Description
<b>Principle 1: Encouraging contact between students and faculty</b>	Meaningful and frequent interaction between students and faculty results in increased student engagement and satisfaction. (Umbach & Wawrzynski 2005, 12.)  Through interaction between students and faculty, teachers can find out what students are struggling with and provide the necessary guidance resulting in students being more likely to stay motivated and achieve better learning outcomes. (Robinson & Hullinger 2008, 106.)
<b>Principle 2: Encouraging collaborative learning</b>	Students in collaborative learning environments share knowledge with each other and work together to achieve common learning goals. (Brindley et. al 2009, 3.)

	<p>Collaborative learning helps students to develop higher order thinking skills and achieve deeper knowledge generation (Jonassen et. al 1995, 16 – 17; Pallof &amp; Pratt 2010, 69.).</p>
<p><b>Principle 3: Encouraging active learning</b></p>	<p>An active learning process makes students reflect on what they have learned and how they are applying their learning while engaging in activities (Michael 2006, 160.).</p> <p>Through active learning, students oversee their own learning e.g., they can write or talk about their learning, relate their learning to past experiences, and apply what they have learned to their daily lives.</p> <p>Teachers are seen as a partner which guide students through the learning process and motivates them for further aims. (Petress 2008, 566.)</p> <p>Active learning can lead students to achieve a greater retention of knowledge, stronger motivation to learn, deeper understanding, and a more positive attitude to the subject being taught. (Bell &amp; Kozlowski 2008, 31, 32, 33, 34, 35.)</p>
<p><b>Principle 4: Giving quick feedback</b></p>	<p>Providing timely feedback on students' performance is essential to student learning. (Gibbs &amp; Simpson 2005, 8; Weaver 2006, 1.)</p> <p>Providing quick feedback is important for students' learning outcomes as it allows students to evaluate existing knowledge, reflect on what they have learned what still has to be learned, and provides them with recommendation for improving their future work. (Chickering &amp; Gamson 1987, 4.)</p> <p>Through receiving quick feedback, students can make adjustment to improve their learning performance and achieve learning objectives.</p>
<p><b>Principle 5: Emphasizing time on task</b></p>	<p>To achieve satisfactory academic performance, students are required to spend a sufficient amount of time on studying. (Nonis &amp; Hudson 2006, 156 – 157.)</p> <p>Teachers need to define clear time expectations to students so that they can allocate a realistic amount of time on completing their tasks. This in turn establishes a foundation for higher performance.</p>
<p><b>Principle 6: Setting and communicating high expectations</b></p>	<p>Research concerning teacher expectations in the past 40 years provides clear evidence that students perform at high levels when teachers communicated that they expected students to perform at this</p>

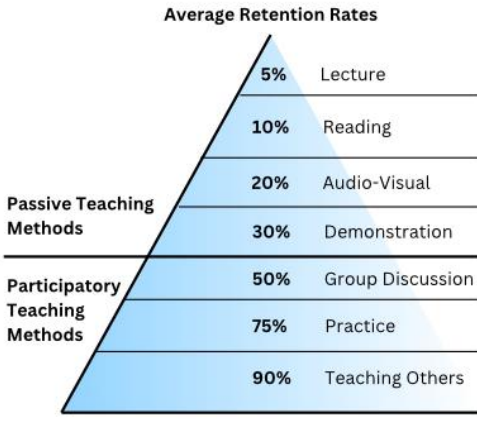
	<p>level. (Rubie-Davies 2010, 121, 131.) This is known as the self-fulfilling prophecy effect.</p> <p>To stimulate students' learning, high expectation teachers could set clear instructions, give frequent feedback, and praise positive learning behaviors and outcomes.</p>																				
<p><b>Principle 7: Respecting diverse talents and ways of learning</b></p>	<p>As shown by the National Training Laboratories learning pyramid (Figure 7), teaching at the bottom of the pyramid will result in higher knowledge retention rates.</p> <div style="text-align: center;"> <p><b>The Learning Pyramid</b></p>  <table border="1" style="margin-left: auto; margin-right: auto;"> <thead> <tr> <th colspan="2">Average Retention Rates</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>5%</td> <td>Lecture</td> </tr> <tr> <td>10%</td> <td>Reading</td> </tr> <tr> <td>20%</td> <td>Audio-Visual</td> </tr> <tr> <td>30%</td> <td>Demonstration</td> </tr> <tr> <td colspan="2"><b>Passive Teaching Methods</b></td> </tr> <tr> <td>50%</td> <td>Group Discussion</td> </tr> <tr> <td>75%</td> <td>Practice</td> </tr> <tr> <td>90%</td> <td>Teaching Others</td> </tr> <tr> <td colspan="2"><b>Participatory Teaching Methods</b></td> </tr> </tbody> </table> </div> <p>Figure 7. The Learning Pyramid. Adapted from National Training Laboratories. Source: Cable &amp; Cheung 2017.</p>	Average Retention Rates		5%	Lecture	10%	Reading	20%	Audio-Visual	30%	Demonstration	<b>Passive Teaching Methods</b>		50%	Group Discussion	75%	Practice	90%	Teaching Others	<b>Participatory Teaching Methods</b>	
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<p><b>Principle 8: Applying technology</b></p>	<p>In online education, applying technology is naturally an essential element as online students need to use various online technologies to learn and interact with their instructors and peers.</p> <p>To enhance student learning process and experience, teachers need to choose the right technology.</p>																				

Table 2. Eight Principles of Effective Online Teaching. (Modified from Cable & Cheung (2017, 3, 4, 5, 6)).

Principle 8 shows that a form of technology (i.e., software), which positively affects the student's learning process and experience needs to be chosen. This also relates to the extent to which teachers and students accept the integration of technology. Fred Davis, the developer of the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), believes that this acceptance of technology integration can be essential to the success of information systems, and that this acceptance is influenced by the perceived usefulness and ease of use of the system in use. (Coman et. al 2020, 4.)

Regarding the use of e-learning in higher education, literature concerning this topic has provided results that are in favor of its usefulness, effectiveness, and positive affect on a student's

performance. Furthermore, a study that focused on the impact of e-learning of students and teachers in which teachers were the majority respondents, claimed that teachers believed that E-learning can strengthen the educational process and confirms that E-learning enhances collaboration and communication with students, as well as that it provides students with flexibility and support through which they can better understand lectures. Another similar study, focusing on students' attitude towards e-learning, revealed that students had a positive attitude towards it and that it increased further when they realize that E-learning systems are easy to access. Lastly, research that compared traditional with online learning had shown that a high percentage of students who had participated in the survey stated that although they believed to have incorporated more information from face-to-face classes than online classes, that they did positively view their overall experience with online learning, even though they had experienced problems while using E-learning platforms. (Coman et. al 2020, 4.)

### 3.2.2 Benefits and downsides of E-learning

E-learning has many benefits that can enhance the educational process through its complex characteristics and diverse features. Studies show that e-learning can be as effective or even better than traditional ways of studying to assimilate information. E-learning is especially effective for shy, easily intimidated, and slow learning students who have difficulty expressing themselves in a classroom setting. E-learning has the benefits of flexibility in accessing content and resources and delivering education, adaptability relating to the way courses can be adapted to the individual needs of the students, and accessibility as in students can join classes from anywhere in the world and thus do not need to travel to classrooms which saves time and money. (Coman et. al 2020, 5.)

However, e-learning also requires that students and teachers know how to integrate e-learning effectively into the teaching and learning process to positively influence collaboration and performance. According to Tham & Werner (2005, 15,19, 20, 21), the effectiveness of e-learning is determined by three elements as shown in Table 3.

Elements of effective e-learning	Description
Institution	Consisting of: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li data-bbox="727 1877 1430 1951">1. The <b>educational institution</b> which should provide the necessary training to their teachers.</li> </ol>

	2. The <b>teachers</b> and their ability to know how to use the right tools to properly enhance students' learning, and how to create a friendly learning environment for their students.
<b>Students</b>	Who may feel isolated due to the absence of the physical presence of their classmates, which is especially the case for international students who have moved abroad.  In this situation, it is the teacher's responsibility to know how to communicate and create a connection with their students, as well as to teach them how to properly use the technology in use.
<b>Technology</b>	The software used to teach students.  In this case it is important for the institution to consider which software should be adopted that can accommodate their teaching process.

Table 3. The three elements of effective e-learning. (Tham & Werner. 2005, 15, 19, 20, 21.)

Even though e-learning has many benefits, it also has some downsides which can affect the student learning process. First, online learners can get easily distracted, lose focus or miss deadlines. Second, due to e-learning's dependency on technology students are required to have access to the internet and computers and even when access is available, interruptions or other system errors can appear during courses. Third, students need to have the ability to organize how they study and the amount of time they spent on learning which can sometimes lead to decreased motivation. Fourth, students may feel isolated as they lack physical interaction and presence of colleagues. Lastly, online learners may develop health problems such as sight and back problems due to spending many hours seated in front a screen and reduced outdoor activity. (Coman et. al 2020, 6.)

### 3.3 The Factors of Cultural Differences

For this case study, cultural differences need to be analyzed to discover how these differences may affect the learning process of these students, and ultimately, how these differences may affect their perception of the current service provided to them. The cultural difference that this case study will particularly look at are the learning strategies students from different cultural backgrounds may employ in their learning.

### 3.3.1 Definition of multicultural

According to the Oxford English Dictionary, multicultural is defined as “Of or relating to a society consisting of a number of cultural groups, esp. in which the distinctive cultural identity of each group is maintained”. (Oxford English Dictionary 2003, date of retrieval 11.09.2023.) From this definition it can be understood how Villa Victor’s students are seen as “multicultural” as the company has provided an environment where people from different cultural groups find themselves in, each of which have a distinctive cultural identity.

### 3.3.2 Definition of learning strategies and its diversity

Learning strategies can be defined as certain actions an individual may take to make their learning process easier, quicker, enjoyable, effective, and transferrable to new situations. These learning strategies can be grouped under two major classes, namely direct and indirect and can also be further divided into six-subgroups (memory, cognitive, compensation, meta-cognitive, affective, and social). (Oxford 1990, 8, 11-12.)

Direct learning strategies (memory, cognitive, and compensation) involve the target language directly and requires the mental processing of this target language, while indirect learning strategies (meta-cognitive, affective, and social) support the language learning without directly involving the target language. To further explain these sub-groups of learning strategies, *memory strategies* are used by students to help store and retrieve new information, *cognitive strategies* are used to enable students to understand and produce new language, *compensation strategies* are used to allow students to use the language despite their gaps in knowledge, *meta-cognitive strategies* are used to allow students to control their own cognition, *affective strategies* are used to help regulate emotions, motivations and attitudes, and lastly, *social strategies* involve students learning through interactions with others. (Oxford 1990, 8-9, 11-12.)

### 3.3.3 Learning strategy choice of different cultures

In a study conducted by Deneme, S (2010) she discovered that students from different cultural backgrounds use different learning strategies while learning a second language, that cultural



background can affect their strategy choice, as well as that people from different cultures learn in different ways. (Deneme 2010, 81-82.)

Deneme found that in terms of individual strategies, Jordanian students preferred more the usage of saying or writing new English words several times to learn English than the Turkish and Spanish students, showing a tendency (in this case) to use direct cognitive learning strategies. Deneme speculates that this occurrence of Jordanian students' usage of saying or writing new words to learn the language comes from their cultural background, as writing is often used in their native culture as a means of self-expression. Turkish students on the other hand showed to make use of guessing strategies (compensation) and mental pictures (memory) when learning new words. Moreover, Turkish and Jordanian students seem to enjoy reading English as a pastime (meta-cognitive) more than the Spanish students. According to the Spanish students in Deneme's study, the reason for this was that young people in Spain do not read much for pleasure, not even in their native language. (Deneme 2010, 85-87.)

However, cultural background is but one of the factors that affect strategy choice. According to Oxford, many factors affect the strategy choice, namely the level of awareness of the student, in which stage the student finds themselves in their learning, the requirements needed to complete the task (e.g., academic or social), the expectations communicated by the teacher, age, gender, and personality traits of the student, nationality/ethnicity, motivation and purpose for learning the language, as well as the general learning style. (Oxford 1990, 13.)

## 4 METHODOLOGY

This chapter present a description of the research process implemented in this case study. The following subchapters present the chosen research methods, data collection and analysis.

### 4.1 Research Context

This research focuses on Villa Victor's e-service offering of online Finnish language teaching provided to students from different cultural backgrounds. Data was gathered from three groups of people, namely, the senior management, further referred to as SM1 and SM2, the service personnel (i.e., educators), further referred to as SP1, SP2, and SP3, and the customers (i.e., students), using three different sets of questions that were designed in the framework of the GAPS Model of Service Quality and with consideration to the technology and cultural differences factors. The aim was to determine if any gaps of understanding have occurred between these three groups which may have affected the service quality, and if the technology and cultural differences factors had affected the customers' perception of the service quality.

This case study was conducted using two separate research methods to collect data from the employees at Villa Victor and the customers.

The first and second data sets were collected from the senior management and service personnel using semi-structured interviews which is a type of interview where a set of open-ended questions, divided into separate topics, is used and which may be asked in any sequence depending on various answers an individual interviewee may give. (Cohen et. al. 2018, 511.) This method is a qualitative research approach which is a type of research that consists of procedures that depend on text and has distinctive data collection and analysis steps that provide an in-depth understanding of complex issues and focuses on understanding observations. (Gonzalez et. al. 2008, 3.)

The third data set was collected from the students using an online survey which was created using a mixed method design. Mixed Methods Research (MMR) is a form of research that utilizes both quantitative and qualitative approaches to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the research problem compared to only choosing to use one or the other. (Cohen et. al. 2018, 32.) Within this survey most questions were designed with a qualitative approach in mind where

students can answer openly to a question, while some questions were designed with a quantitative approach in mind where students had to select an answer out of multiple choices. This survey was designed to make it more respondent-friendly for the participants. This method was also chosen as it is believed to be a method to gather more authentic responses as respondents feel that they can be more honest due to anonymity. (Cohen et. al. 2018, 362.) Although online surveys are usually a quantitative research method, the collected data was analyzed through qualitative analysis procedures as all the gathered data was text based.

In total 77 students participated in the online survey, which consisted of 46 elementary students, 12 follow-up students, 16 YKI-training students, and 3 advanced students. However, as there were not enough student participants from the advanced course, the advanced student responses were not analyzed. Similarly, as the elementary teacher chose not to participate in this case study, the responses from the elementary students also were not analyzed as this would only result in a partial analysis (i.e., information in relation to gap 1-5, regarding the elementary course, were missing from the service personnel side and; therefore, the service quality of this course could not be properly analyzed). For this reason, only the follow-up and YKI-training student responses were analyzed in this case study, leaving **a total of 28 student participants**.

The data that was collected from the three groups was analyzed by comparing the answers each group gave to certain questions to determine if any gaps of understanding have occurred between the management and their employees and between the company and the customers. Furthermore, the data that was collected from the service personnel and customers regarding the technology and cultural differences factors were analyzed to determine if these factors affect the customers' perception of the service quality.

## **4.2 Data Collection**

This subchapter presents the methods used to collect data from the participants.

### **4.2.1 First Phase: Semi-structured Interviews**

The semi-structured interviews were conducted through Microsoft Teams and were recorded with the participants verbal consent. Each interview lasted around an hour depending on the amount of

information each participant was able to give. In total, five participants were interviewed which included two participants belonging to the senior management and three participants belonging to the service personnel.

The research began by interviewing the senior management which were interviewed on their perception of the courses, their knowledge of the service design and delivery, as well as their managerial and marketing responsibilities as the senior management at Villa Victor are also responsible for advertising their courses. Due to this the set of questions used for these interviews focused on gaps 1-5. The questions were initially divided into various topics e.g., perception, research, service design, faculty, internal communication, external communication/marketing, etc. to create a more structured interview (Appendix 3).

This first round of interviews was subsequently followed by interviewing the service personnel which were interviewed similarly on their perception of the courses and their knowledge of the service design, as well as on their performance during the service delivery, their knowledge of cultural differences and how they adjust their teaching, their perception of the software in use, their knowledge of how their courses are advertised, etc. These questions were asked in relation to each teacher's course, i.e., SP2 was asked about her advanced and YKI-training courses, SP3 was asked about her follow-up courses, and SP1, having experience teaching various courses and being partially responsible for supporting the teachers and other tasks, was asked about her general knowledge of the courses. Due to this the set of questions used for these interviews similarly focused on gaps 1-5 and were divided into similar topics as the set of questions used for the senior management interviews to find similarities or differences between the answers, but also included questions that focused solely on the service delivery which would be compared with the responses from the students (Appendix 4).

After each interview was concluded, a transcription was made of the recording of the interview for later observation. After all the interviews were concluded, observations of each answer given by each participant was written down in an observation table and sorted depending on which gap, technology factor, or cultural differences factor it belonged to (Appendix 5-6), to be able to properly compare the answers during the data analysis.

#### **4.2.2 Second Phase: Online Survey**

The research continued by distributing a weblink to the students which would bring them to the online survey. This link was distributed by the teachers in their respective courses. Participants were informed at the start of the survey that they would be allowed to save their answers after completing each page and return to the survey later on to ensure that they would finish the survey in its entirety.

The survey was created through Webropol and had settings in place that ensured the anonymity of respondents i.e., no personal information such as names, email addresses, etc. were gathered through this survey. The survey included such questions that focused on the participants background, their perception of the software in use, how they found about the courses and how the description compared to the service delivery, their perception of the service delivery, and lastly, they were asked to rate the course overall and give feedback on how to improve the course. These questions were created to gather information regarding gaps 4-6 and the technology and cultural differences factors (Appendix 7). The data was collected over a month period.

Observations made from the collected data of the online survey were similarly sorted depending on which gap, technology factor, or cultural differences factor it belonged to.

#### **4.3 Data Analysis**

This subchapter presents the way the gathered data has been analyzed to answer the stated research questions and to evaluate the service quality of the follow-up and YKI-training courses.

##### **4.3.1 Gap Analysis Through Thematic Approach**

The gathered data was analyzed using gap analysis which aims to identify if any gaps of understanding exist between senior management and the service personnel, as well as between the company and the customer by analyzing different points in the service design, marketing and delivery process (i.e., GAP 1-6).

In this analysis we first aim to identify, based on the collected data from the senior management, service personnel, and students, if any gaps have occurred and the cause for this gap occurring. To identify if a gap has occurred and what the cause may be for this gap, the gathered data was analyzed and; subsequently, observations were made from the answers that were given by the three groups on certain questions that were designed with a potential gap in mind. These observations were then compared to identify if the gap has occurred and how it has occurred. After a gap and the cause of the gap were identified, a solution, based on the gathered empirical data and the information gathered in the theoretical foundation, was advised to Villa Victor to close this gap.

An example of this process is shown in Figure 8., in this example, the gathered data showed that the company has a different understanding of what the customers expect and need from their service (i.e., GAP 1). After the gap has been identified, we aim to determine the cause of this gap occurring, for example, the data shows there has been a lack of market research to properly design the service to accommodate customer expectations and needs. After the gap and the cause of the gap has been identified, a solution will be advised to the company to close this gap, for example, improving market research procedures with a focus on discovering customer needs and expectations.

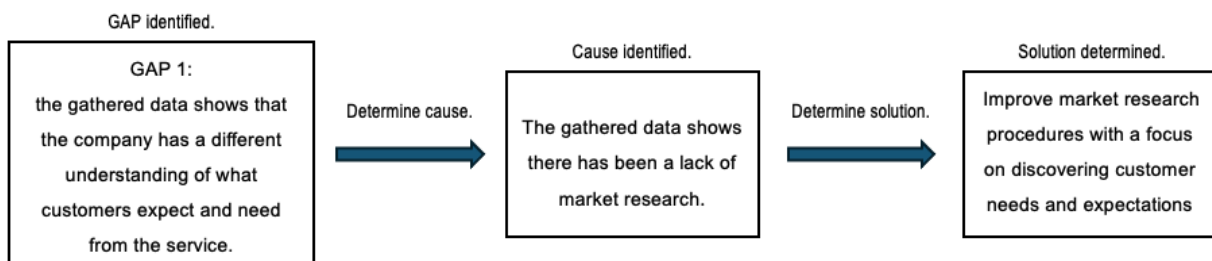


Figure 8. Analysis example.

To correctly identify any possible gaps and their causes, **thematic analysis** was used which is a method through which you analyze the data by attempting to identify and report patterns (i.e., themes). This form of analysis requires the analyst to constantly move back and forth through the data sets throughout the entire analysis process. The thematic analysis begins by the analyst familiarizing themselves with the data by reading and re-reading the data while actively looking for meanings and themes found in the data, after which the analyst is able to identify and report the themes. (Braun & Clarke. 2006, 5, 15, 16, 17.)

### 4.3.2 Analyzing Technology and Cultural Differences Factors

For the technology factors, both teachers and students were asked questions regarding the teacher's knowledge (or in the case of the students, the perceived knowledge) of the software in use, their perception of the overall usefulness of the software and their attitude towards it, the teaching-style of the teachers (e.g., more teacher-centered or more student-centered), the incorporation of active learning methods, as well as the amount of communication between students and the teacher.

For the cultural differences' factors, students were asked questions regarding their preferred learning strategies and if they feel that the current teaching style conflict with their preferred way to learn a language. Similarly, teachers were asked question regarding their knowledge of different learning strategies of students from different cultural backgrounds and if/how they adjust their teaching to these learning strategies.

The gathered data from these answers were then analyzed, similarly through **thematic analysis**, to determine how these factors affect the service delivery/perception (i.e., GAP 5/6).

## 5 RESULTS

This chapter presents the results gathered through the semi-structured interviews and the online survey. This chapter starts with 5.1, in which the student participant background information gathered through the online survey is presented. Following this, 5.2, 5.3, and 5.4 presents the gathered data regarding the GAPS model and the technology and cultural differences' factors which were analyzed through thematic analysis. At first 29 themes were identified, these themes were then clustered into 20 organizing themes which were further organized into 3 global themes. A summary of this thematic network is presented in Figure 9. The chapter continues with 5.5., which presents the feedback given by Villa Victor's employees and the customers. Lastly, 5.6 presents the rating the student participants have given to their respective courses.

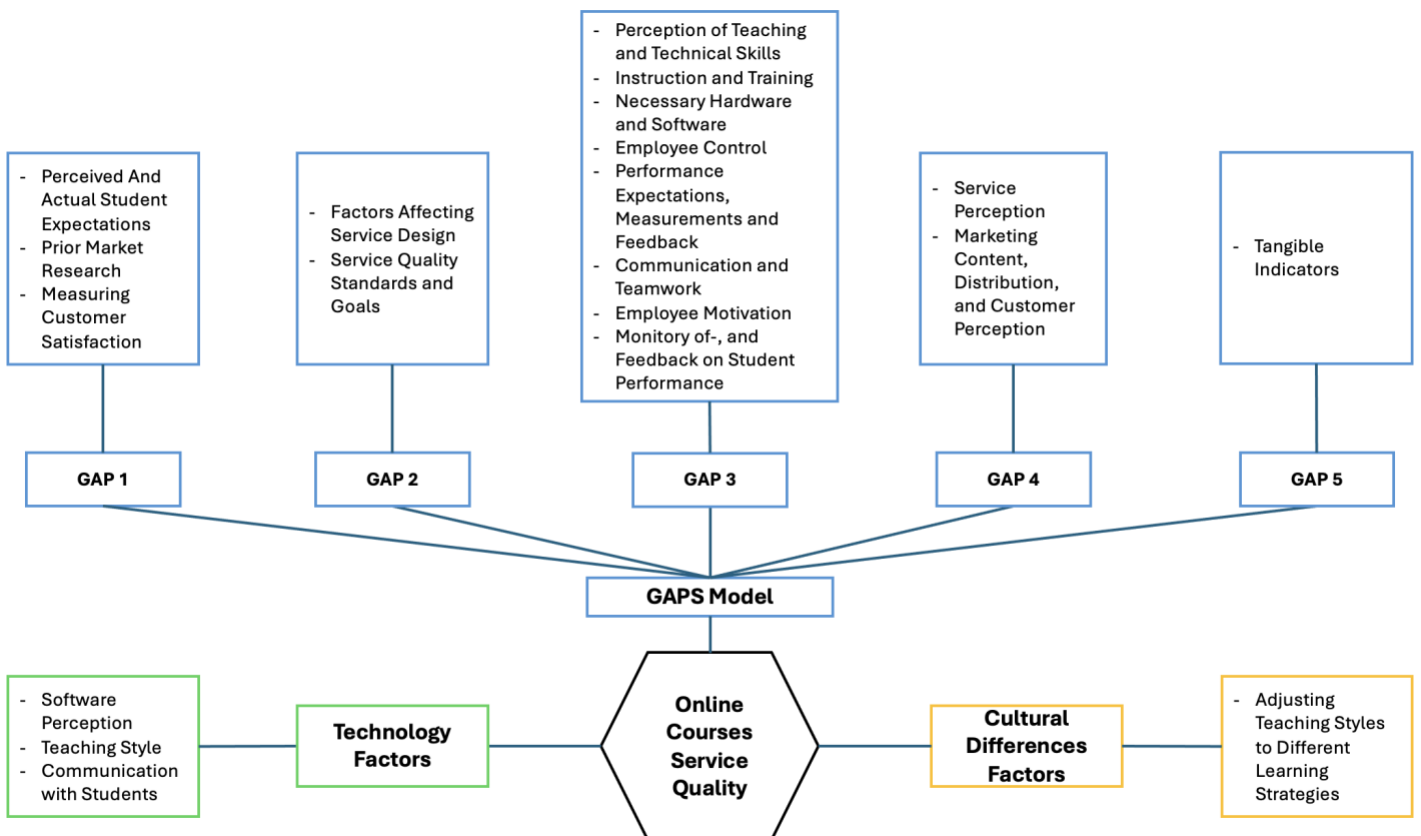


Figure 9. Case Study Thematic Network Summary



## 5.1 Student Participants Background Information

### Follow-up student participants background information

In total 12 follow-up students participated in the case study, consisting of one person from Thailand, Nepal, Brazil, Hungary, Vietnam, Kenya, England, China, and Turkiye, as well as three people from Russia, as shown in Figure 10. The **native language** of these students consisted of Thai, Nepali, Russian, Tatar, Portuguese, Hungarian, Vietnamese, Swahili, English, Mandarin, and Turkish. When asked where they **currently live**, 11 participants answered to currently live in Finland, while only 1 participant lives in Hungary. The **educational background** of the participants ranged from high-school level to master's degree level education. Regarding **employment**, two participants are currently employed, one being a tester and the other a software developer, while the rest all stated to currently be students, five of which are university students and the rest stating to study Finnish (i.e., students of this course). When asked if they had participated in **similar language courses** before, 7 responded "Yes", 5 of which answered that they participated in similar language courses in Finland (no specification where in Finland), 1 answered that they participated in a similar language course in his/her own home country, and one answered "online".

ETHNICITIES OF FOLLOW-UP STUDENT PARTICIPANTS

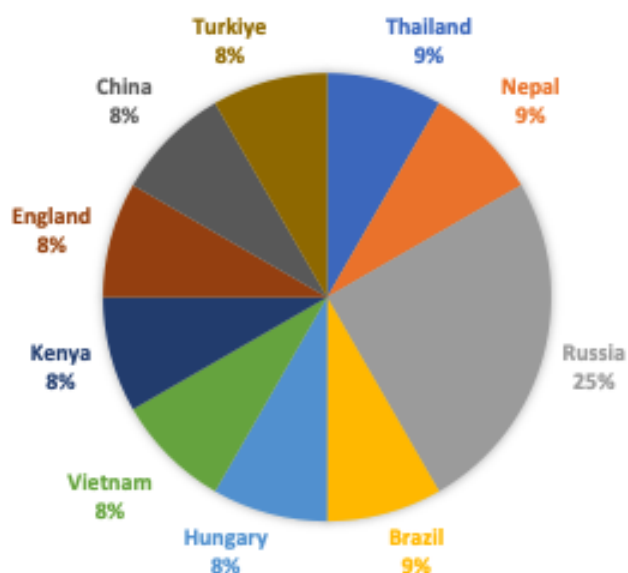


Figure 10. Various ethnicities of Follow-up student participants

### YKI-training student participants

In total 16 YKI-training students participated in the case study, consisting of one person from Pakistan, Egypt, Cameroon, Poland, Italy, Japan, China, Cambodia, and Tajikistan, two people

from Nepal, two people from Russia, and lastly, three people from Ukraine, as shown in Figure 11. The **native languages** of the students consisted of Urdu, Arabic, French, Nepali, Russian, Polish, Italian, Ukrainian, Japanese, Uyghur, Khmer, and Tajik. When asked where they **currently live**, 14 participants answered to currently live in Finland, while 1 lives in Egypt and 1 lives in India. The **educational background** of the participants ranged from bachelor's degree level education to PhD level education. Regarding **employment**, the majority of the participants, namely 13, have stated to be currently in employment, consisting of a Senior IT Professional, Nurse, two Researchers, Mechanical Design Engineer, Doctoral Researcher, Optical Specialist, Tire installer, Dentist, Teacher, Language Teacher, Cleaner, and Fabric Maintenance and Operator. Two of the participants stated to be students, one being a theology student and one a Finnish student, while one participant stated to be unemployed. When asked if they had participated in **similar language courses** before, 7 stated "Yes", of which one stated to have studied in Helsinki, and another in Tampere, Jyväskylä, and Oulu.

**ETHNICITIES OF YKI-TRAINING STUDENT PARTICIPANTS**

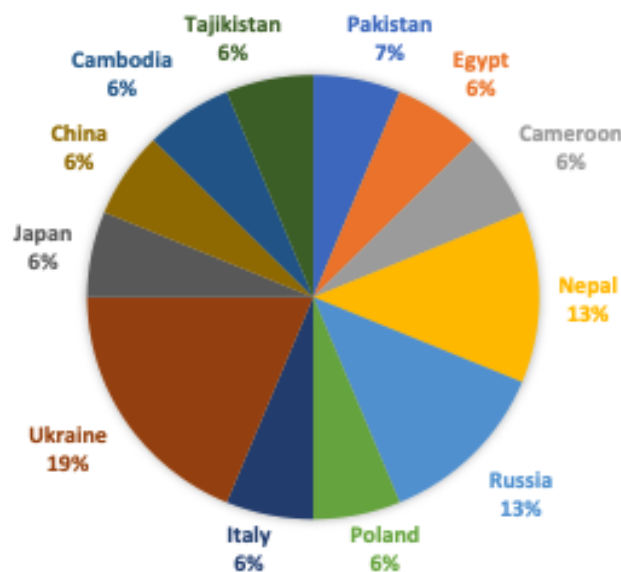


Figure 11. Various ethnicities of YKI-training student participants

## 5.2 GAPS Model

### 5.2.1 GAP 1

#### Perceived and Actual Student Expectations

**Senior Management** – The gathered data shows that the company believes students may at first expect a more **traditional way of teaching** where there is a start and an end date, required reading material that you will need to get, and skills assessments and tests. This is evident from SM2's responses where SM2 stated, referring to the non-stop teaching method they use, "*—many times they are expecting that – this kind of course starts then at this date and then we proceed with some sort of curriculum to the end and then it's here*", further stating, "*But this is totally different – you can come anytime, you can be absent for some time if you cannot come and then you can always return back—*". SM2 continued, regarding the confusion students may initially feel, "*And the other thing is really that they ask that what book series do you use or what material should I have, and then we have to really explain that you don't have to have anything that we provide all*", adding, "*And then maybe another thing is really that people well, it's somehow related to this assumption that we would have this kind of conventional teaching – they have very precise language skill levels – and then we have to explain that – we don't do any language skill assessments or tests—*". SM2 further states that this expectation comes most likely from the **students' prior experience with similar language courses** not provided by Villa Victor stating, "*I think it's mainly because of the tradition or what kind of studying or teaching history they have*". SM1 also agrees with SM2 on this matter as he stated "*I think there are also variations of student expectations and it's based on many things – it's based on their own learning history, so, what kind of capabilities they have to learn during the lessons and do they have a prior experience in Finnish or in education in general—*".

**Service Personnel** – The gathered data shows some similarities with SM1 and SM2 statements. SP1 stated that students are initially surprised by the fact that the teachers in the courses "*don't use any book*". SP3 stated that students expect to do exercises and be able to monitor their own progress "*maybe the same thing as in live classrooms, but in a different setting*". Furthermore, SP2 communicated that student expectations can vary and that this also often has to do with the age of the particular student, stating "*There are quite many young students who want to speak a lot and talk about like – the news and so on, and then most of the time, the older students want to – study themselves*". SP1 stated that the educators teaching style at Villa Victor may be "*different from many other countries*" further stating that people from certain cultures are used to a form of teaching where the teacher "*tells you do this and then you learn*". This statement shows that the teachers believe that some students tend to expect a traditional teacher-centered way of teaching and that this is influenced by their prior experience with language teaching. SP3 shows a differing viewpoint as the rest of the employees, as she stated that students who enroll for these online courses are "*looking for kind of support in the language learning*" and that students may ask some questions

that have arisen in their independent study. This statement by SP3 conveys an opinion that students use the online courses as a support to their own learning but not as their main source of learning. The gathered data from the service personnel further shows that students enrolling to the online Finnish language course provided by Villa Victor expect the **teaching to be performed in English**. This is evident from SP1's statement where she stated that the classes are given fully in Finnish and that students have asked before "*why don't you use English?*". SP1 stated that the reason for this is that not all students speak English and that in this way the teaching will be inclusive for any person who wants to join.

**Follow-up Students** – The gathered data showed **some similarity** to the statements made by the senior management and the service personnel. Only one student, responding to a question regarding the service perception, made a statement that specifically confirmed the belief from the senior management and service personnel. This student stated that he/she would have preferred a "*more systematic approach in grammar and more exercises*" which could be interpreted as an indication that the student expects that the courses would be **taught more in a traditional sense**. Most of the follow-up students spoke particularly about what they **expect to learn and about the quality of the teaching**. The follow-up students specified an expectation to learn more about grammar, learn new words, and to overall learn more Finnish and to improve and practice their grammar and vocabulary knowledge of the Finnish language so that they can communicate with people. These statements, as well as the previous statement, **can be seen as evidence** of what **SP3 stated** students expect, as SP3 stated that students want more exercises and to monitor their own progress. Some specified also that they expect a certain "quality of teaching", also commenting on the benefit of online teaching as it is able to "save time". One student in particular stated an expectation to receive "tips" on how to better speak Finnish. This last statement also shows a similarity with SP3's statement in which she stated that students are looking for support in their own learning.

**YKI-training Students** – The gathered data showed **some similarity** to the statements made by the service personnel. **No statements were made** that particularly **indicated an expectation** that the course would be **taught in a traditional sense**. The students particularly emphasized that they expect that the course will enable them to **speak and write in fluent Finnish**, and that the course **focuses on content** that will specifically **help them pass the YKI-test**. Although these statements do not show a direct similarity to the answers given by the senior management and service personnel regarding student expectations, it **does show similarity** with **statements** made by SP2

**later in the interview** in which she stated that students expect them to know what will be asked on the YKI-test (see 5.5 Feedback on Improvements). Furthermore, some students emphasized that they would want to practice writing texts, while others emphasized practicing to have conversations. These statements do show similarities made by SP2 specifically concerning student expectations, as SP2 stated some students want to speak a lot and others want to study by themselves.

## **Prior Market Research**

**Senior Management** – The gathered data shows that **no targeted market research** had been conducted prior to designing the courses but that Villa Victor has further designed their courses by **reacting to existing needs**. This is evident from SM1's statements where he stated that they have not done any research based on specific needs of their target customers prior to designing the courses, stating, *"No, no, it's based on the feedback of the courses, so, of course the teachers are collecting the feedback – so they are evaluating and assisting, learning all the time, but we have not done this kind of market research on the migrant people or the foreign speaking people, what are the basic needs"*. As a further example of reacting to existing needs, SM1 stated that new courses were created to accommodate Ukrainian refugees and Eritrean immigrants who could not start the integration courses provided by Villa Victor so were instead first taught Finnish, stating, *"One thing what we have done in some cases, if there is for instance the Ukrainians when they started to come here, we created quite rapidly courses for them and connected the orientation course also to the Finnish classes, but that's one thing, we're reacting to the existing needs what was so obvious"*. SM1 continued by stating, *"Also, there was one group of Eritrean people who come here one year ago and in the beginning of their stay they don't have the opportunity to start the integration courses, so, it's a very good opportunity to give them something as a starting point to learn Finnish—"*. Furthermore, SM1 stated that *"—we have not done any systematic market research for the needs of the learning—"*, the reason for this being that *"—our capacity is now full so we don't have the extra resources for organizing the lessons—"*. SM1 also recognized that more has to be done in the future especially, stating, *"But in the future when this integration law is changing in the beginning of 2025 we have to do more to attend to those people—"*. Lastly, SM1 stated that although they did not perform any prior market research, they do collaborate regularly with other enterprises in Oulu with whom they regularly discuss how to develop their concept of learning and the needs of teachers.

## **Measuring Customer Satisfaction**

**Senior Management** – The gathered data shows that for the non-stop teaching courses (i.e., the online courses) **no such research has been conducted** to measure customer satisfaction. SM2 stated that they are planning to do this and that *“maybe this hasn’t come to our mind”* as the courses *“don’t start or stop”*. For this reason, SM2 stated that they are *“planning to organize some kind of system where we could gather feedback and material from students”*.

## 5.2.2 GAP 2

### Factors Affecting Service Design

**Senior Management** – The gathered data shows that the service was designed with both **student needs** and **cost and feasibility considerations** in mind. This is evident from such statements from SM1 that the courses were designed to accommodate students that are *“not living in this area”*, meaning students living abroad or somewhere else in Finland, and that the online classes were designed as there were limited spots available in the traditional classroom courses. This is also evident from such statements from SM2 as he had stated that the online courses were first created due to the COVID pandemic but was continued as they had previously received feedback from students where they communicated a desire for a hybrid form of teaching or that the classes could be recorded in some way. As this would require *“equipment and maybe more personnel”* and as they already at this point had the online classes in place due to the COVID pandemic, they decided to continue this form of teaching **to accommodate this need from the students**.

**Service Personnel** – The gathered data shows a similarity with the statements made by the senior management, as the service personnel also believes the service was designed with **student needs** in mind. This is evident from such statements from SP1 and SP2. SP1 stated that the courses, after the initial creation, were later updated, stating, *“—we have then modified them a bit after, we have changed the levels – set up new courses, but the basics are there—”*, showing that they realized that this needed to happen based on interaction with the customers. SP2 stated that she believes it was designed with student expectations and needs in mind giving an example that a follow-up course was recently created due to student needs, stating, *“—I think definitely there was a need for that, so yes, I think so”*. SP3 made a similar statement in reference to her own specific classes, not in reference to the design of the overall courses, where she stated that her classes are designed with customer expectations in mind, stating, *“Yeah, I think so, at least I try to design our classes so that students get the most out of it”* further stating *“It’s a bit different, I follow the same formula as I do in my live classes for the most part”*.

## Service Quality Standards and Goals

**Senior Management** – The gathered data shows that **no specific service quality standards or goals were set in place** for the courses. This is evident from SM2's statement in which SM2 stated that they **do not put in place any standards or goals** and that they **give the teachers autonomy over their own classes** as SM2 believes they are *"qualified Finnish L2 teachers"*. SM2 continued by stating that he does encourages them to provide multifaceted lessons. However, SM2 further stated that **they do have** *"some kind of framework"* for the different classes they provide (i.e., elementary, follow-up, advanced, YKI-training) which shows the basic structures, vocabulary, or grammar that teachers should include in their lessons. Also, SM2 stated that they also have a *"material bank"* where teachers can find material to use in their classes and that teachers can also create their own material and share it in this bank so that other teachers can use it. These statements show that although there are **no specific goals or standards in place which the teachers need to adhere to**, that **there is some basic material** (e.g., vocabulary exercises) that **the teacher needs to cover** in their classes but that how they do this is up to them.

**Service Personnel** – The gathered data shows similarities with SM2's statements, showing there to be **no set service quality standards or goals** and that the performance of the service is up to the teachers. This is evident from SP1, SP2, and SP3 statements. SP1 stated that the courses are *"curriculum based"* but that it is *"pedagogically free"* meaning that the senior management trust the teachers to know what they are supposed to do and that teachers have complete control of how they teach their classes. SP2 stated that they have *"certain grammar things"* that they need to cover but that it's *"quite loose frame"*. SP3 stated that they have *"quite a lot of freedom when designing classes"* adding that *"there were no guidelines for me in that sense"*. SP1 further stated that the teachers *"want to reach the best goal and make their students learn"* and that if *"one of the teachers wouldn't really do much at the courses"* that the team would know as they *"get feedback from the students"* further stating that this has never happened before (referring to negative feedback concerning a teacher's performance).

### 5.2.3 GAP 3

## Perception of Teaching and Technical Skills

**Senior Management** – The gathered data shows that they trust that their **teachers have the necessary skills to perform their tasks**. This is evident from SM1 and SM2's statements where they both state that **they believe the teachers to possess the necessary skills** as both stated that the teachers are "*qualified teachers*". SM1 and SM2 also stated that they know this as they make sure to **recruit the teachers based on their qualification**. This is further emphasized by SM1's statement, "*—we try to be assured that they are qualified teachers so that's very important for us—*", further stating that they are able to do this as "*—luckily we have a very good connection to the university so we have very good teachers now*". However, SM1 did state that, due to the fact that online teaching is quite new, a lot of qualified teachers still have **a need to improve their teaching skills in an online environment**, stating, "*—we have a lot of learning needs for improving our teaching skills in that way, it's not a easy way to teach and I think that everybody has to develop their skills to do that—*".

### **Instructions and Training**

**Senior Management** – The gathered data shows that Villa Victors **does not give many instructions how to perform the service** as this was evident from previous statements made by SM1 and SM2 regarding them giving the teachers autonomy over their classes. However, Villa Victor **does give some form of training when teachers start their employment** at Villa Victor. SM2 stated that they teach the educators how to use the technology in use (i.e., both hardware and software) or when new technology is introduced. Furthermore, SM2 stated that **when teachers communicate that they are experiencing some problem that they assist them accordingly**. This statement also shows a similarity to SM1's statement where SM1 stated "*there is no training days or that kind of thing*" but that during the teachers weekly meeting they can discuss about various matters concerning their teaching and the issues they are experiencing during the service delivery, sharing ideas, etc.

**Service Personnel** – The gathered data **shows similarities** with the senior management's statements regarding lack of instruction and form of training provided. This is evident as SP1 had emphasized earlier that teachers are trusted to perform well in their roles, showing that there is no strong emphasis on instructing teachers how to perform. Consequently, SP1 added that they have "*a meeting with the teachers that we will go through every week*" where the **teachers receive support from the senior management and that teachers receive training on how to use the software in use** (i.e., Microsoft Teams), further stating that, "*—when a new teacher begins or starts—*" they will be trained "*—to use Teams and – how it works—*". Furthermore, SP2 and SP3



both stated that even though they were already familiar with the software in use, as they used it when they were studying themselves, they did receive training on how to use the software from a teacher's perspective when they began their employment. When asked about which training the teachers would like to receive from the company, SP3 stated that *"I think like online pedagogy, like how to teach a good online class would be good"*. This statement made by SP3 shows similarities with SM1's earlier statement (see "Perception of Teaching and Technical Skills") where SM1 stated that a lot of qualified teachers still have a need to improve their teaching skills in an online environment.

## **Necessary Hardware and Software**

**Senior Management** – The gathered data show that the **senior management believe they have provided the necessary technology** (i.e., both hardware and software) for the teachers to perform their tasks during the service delivery, as both SM1 and SM2 have stated this specifically.

**Service Personnel** – The gathered data **shows conflicting information**. SP1, SP2, and SP3 all stated that they have received the necessary technology to perform their tasks. However, responses to the software perception questions showed a different view from the service personnel (see "Software Perception" chapter 5.3.1). Therefore, it can be assumed that the service personnel do believe they have the necessary **hardware** and that they perceive the software as sufficient, but not necessarily optimal.

## **Employee Control**

**Senior Management** – The gathered data shows that the **senior management believe that the service personnel have complete control over their classes**. This is evident from both SM1 and SM2's statements. SM1 stated that the education generally is *"—based on the teacher's autonomy to decide how she or he carries out the lesson plan based on the idea of curriculum"* and that *"—we don't have strict guidelines in our curriculum—"* further stating that *"—it's quite much based on the teacher's interpretation how they carry out the lesson based on the level of the classes—"* (e.g., elementary, advanced, follow-up, YKI-training) which *"—guides the content and also the pedagogy how they carry out the lesson"*. SM2 made a similar statement in which he stated that the teachers *"—have free hands to decide how to conduct it or how to manage this"*. When asked specifically if SM1 would say that the teachers actually have a lot of control over their own classes, SM1 stated *"That's correct, yes"*.

**Service Personnel** – The gathered data **shows similarities with the senior managements believe that the service personnel have complete control over their own classes**, as SP1, SP2, and SP3 have made statements that confirm this. SP1 had stated earlier in the interview that the company trusts teachers to perform well and to create their own lesson plans based on the established curriculum. SP2 stated that they have the *“freedom to do what we feel is good”* and that they *“can do any kind of exercises we want”* and that they only have to cover certain *“grammar things”*. SP3, similar to SP1, had also stated earlier in the interview that they have the freedom to design their own classes.

### **Performance Expectations, Measurement and Feedback**

**Senior Management** – The gathered data show that the senior management **do not communicate to teachers what is expected of them**. This is evident from the statements made by SM1 and SM2. SM1 stated that *“—in Finland there’s more autonomy in the work—”*, further stating that *“—it’s based more on the trust of the teachers and teaching work so it’s happening more to give them support to succeed in their work but no so much to give them the expectation that you have to do this, and this and this”*. SM2 had made statements earlier in the interview, where he stated that *“—we give very much free hands to the teachers—”* and that *“—we don’t really very much interfere in that”*. Furthermore, regarding performance measurement and feedback, the gathered data shows that this is not performed by the senior management. This is evident from SM2’s statement where SM2 stated that they do not measure performance or give regular feedback to teachers. However, SM2 did state that *“maybe we should”* and that this is something they *“should really consider”*.

**Service Personnel** – The gathered data **shows similarities with the senior managements’ statements**. This is evident from SP1’s statement where SP1 stated that any amount of **feedback** that she has received, had **nothing to do with the classroom** and that the **teachers know what is expected of them**. However, as SP1 shares some responsibility over guiding the teachers alongside SM2, SP1 also stated that **sometimes feedback is given to teachers** if they find out that a teacher is *“not doing what we expect”*, confirming that some feedback is given but as SM2 stated, not regularly. Furthermore, regarding **expectations**, SP2 stated it was *“pretty clear”* what was expected from her as some expectations were communicated to her during the recruitment interview and during the orientation. Regarding **feedback**, SP2 stated that she **does not directly get feedback** but that when she asks questions concerning the lessons that she does get some feedback from other co-workers. Lastly, SP3 stated, concerning **expectations**, that the

expectations that were communicated were **realistic**. Concerning **feedback**, SP3 stated that she does not often get feedback as *“they don’t know what I’m doing”*, referring to how she performs the service delivery (i.e., teaching).

## **Communication and Teamwork**

**Senior Management** – The gathered data shows that the **senior management believes there to be active communication with the service personnel** and that the **service personnel and senior management work together towards a common goal**. This is evident from SM1 and SM2’s statements. SM1 stated that SM2, alongside SP1, has a weekly meeting with the teachers where they discuss about various topics, stating *“—they meet every week, in their contract they have one hour common planning, so they share their teaching, they are sharing their needs, they are sharing their ideas – and (SM2) and (SP1) is always running those common learning sessions what they have every week—”* further stating, in regards to SM2 and SP1, *“—so they are quite aware that how their courses are done, what kind of issues there are and also what kind of needs they have—”*. SM2 confirmed this statement from SM1 and added that during this weekly meeting they also discuss with the teachers about *“—some events or maybe some special things coming”* and *“—the planning of the timetable, what kind of classes we have, how many – we are going to have now in the beginning of next year—”*. Lastly, when asked if SM2 believes that the management and the teachers work together towards a common goal, SM2 stated, *“yeah”*.

**Service Personnel** – The gathered data **shows similarities with the senior managements believes about active communication and teamwork**. This is evident from SP1, SP2, and SP3’s statements. SP1 confirmed the statements made by SM1 and SM2, i.e., sharing the responsibility in leading the weekly meetings and what is discussed during those meetings, adding that *“—we start every meeting with kuulumiset, which means that we just hear what is going on in their personal life—”*. Furthermore, SP1 stated that she has a yearly meeting with SM1 to discuss about topics regarding her employment, but she also stated that SM1 is *“easily reachable”* and that she and SM2 always *“—have a possibility to just ask him if we want to talk about something – he will find the time for us”*. SP2 and SP3 further confirmed the statements made by SM1, SM2, and SP1. SP2 stated that they usually talk about *“—everyday things – we can share with each other and also things we have had in our courses”*. SP3 stated, when asked if they have an active communication, *“Yeah, definitely”* further stating *“I think in like very practical things such as schedules—”*. SP3 added that teachers can also discuss about problems they are having with students during these meetings, giving an example of a student behaving inappropriately in a class and being

subsequently removed after SP3 communicated this issue. SP3 continued by stating “So, I was listened to and they really took my concerns into consideration”. When asked if they believe that **the senior management and the teachers work towards a common goal**, **SP1, SP2 and SP3 all agreed**, as SP1 stated “Yes”, and as SP2 and SP3 both stated “Yes, *definitely*” with SP2 adding “*I think we have a very great group—*”.

## **Employee Motivation**

**Senior Management** – The gathered data shows that the **senior management believe that the service personnel is motivated**. This is evident from SM2’s statements where he stated “—*they are very motivated, and they say it themselves frequently that they are really pleased and happy to do their work*”. Also, SM2 stated that when the teachers were asked if they are willing to continue working at Villa Victor, as teachers only receive a temporary contract, they all said, “*yes definitely*”.

**Service Personnel** – The gathered data **shows similarities** with SM2’s statements. This is evident from SP1’s statement where when during the interview she was asked if she sees this earlier specified **trust and freedom** that the senior management gives them **as a motivator**, she replied “**It is**” further stating “—*it’s very kind of wonderful that you do it in your way—*”. SP2 and SP3 had similar responses, also showing similarities with SM2’s statement about them being motivated but slightly different from SP1’s response. SP2 and SP3 both stated that they **receive motivation** from the **senior management as well as their co-workers** which is evident from SP2’s statement where SP2 stated that they are always “—*positive and like build my motivation*”, and SP3’s statement where SP3 stated “—*I would say that me being open and sharing my ideas and feelings about my work has been rewarded with – openness to new ideas*” further stating “*So, in that sense yeah*”. SP2 and SP3 further stated that they also **receive motivation from their students**. This is evident from SP2’s statement where she stated that she gets a lot of motivation from her students as she has received feedback from the students where they communicated that they “*enjoy the lessons and – learn new things*”. SP3 stated that the “*main motivation*” comes from the “*students and their feedback*”.

## **Monitoring of-, and Feedback on Student Performance**

**Service Personnel** – The gathered data shows that **monitoring of student performance is not performed**. This is evident from the statements made by SP2 and SP3. SP2 stated “*Not that much because – I don’t always know like who are on my course*” further stating that “*I might remember some of the names, but for example, in Teams there’s a problem that the names might be like all*”.

*over the place, that there might be like a different name that is their actual name and some people don't even want to use their own name in Teams". This statement shows that monitoring of student performance is impacted by the difficulty of connecting with students due to issues with the software and the nature of online teaching. However, SP2 further stated that she is somewhat able to do this in the certain occasions where she gives exercises where the students have to write texts and that she is then able to see from that who is really studying, but that she is not able to this often as she stated "—I don't have like much extra time to go through them—". SP3 stated, earlier on in the interview, that "I really don't have any tools to monitor their progress" adding later "—Villa Victor is so different in that sense – we don't evaluate students numerically or we don't give them certificates, proofs of language knowledge" further stating "So, that's maybe why the evaluation part or the monitoring part does not play such a big role". However, SP3 continued by stating that "—I can tell if someone has problems with grammars, so then maybe I'll make sure to explain it once more and just to make sure that everyone can get it".*

Regarding **feedback on performance**, the gathered data show that **feedback is given during the classes** as is evident from earlier statements made regarding the monitoring of student performance where teachers would check certain exercise or explain certain things again when students don't understand something. This is also evident from SP1's statement as she stated that "instant feedback" is given during the classes and that when a student answers a question, she will either praise the student if the answer was correct or give feedback if the answer was wrong. However, SP2 made a particular statement about a policy decision made by Villa Victor that **impacts the possibility to give feedback**. When asked if SP2 gives feedback on student performance, SP2 stated "Not really, because I think we have been told in Villa Victor that everyone can come to every course like, for example, a beginner can come to our advanced course just to listen—" further stating that "So, that's why I don't really like ask – everyone like "How are you doing?", "Do you understand?", "Do you want to answer?" ". This statement shows that, due to the previously stated issue of not always knowing who is in the class and there being a mixture of advanced and elementary students present in the class, the possibility to give proper feedback is impacted. When asked if this decision to let beginner students attend the advanced courses may make it more difficult for SP2 to perform her tasks as a teacher, SP2 stated "Well, yeah". SP2 continued by giving an example of when they are working in groups and she notices that only one person is talking that "—in those kinds of situations, yes, it makes it more difficult—" further stating "—but I think that's the policy in all the courses in Villa Victor and have been the policy that everyone can come and – they are open to everyone" adding "So, I'm just trying to manage with it".

## 5.2.4 GAP 4

### Service Perception

**Senior Management** – The gathered data shows that the senior management perceives the online courses to be **a service to teach Finnish to every person willing to learn regardless of level of education or geographical location, and as a tool to help with the integration of immigrants and potential immigrants**. This is evident from the statements made by SM1 and SM2. SM1 stated “*—everybody who is willing to come to class, they can come—*” further stating “*—if you are willing to learn Finnish and you can be there and you can learn at least something, you are in the right place*”. SM2, similar to SM1, stated “*—we don’t have very much, or actually any, prerequisites*” further stating “*Everyone can come, no matter their stages, no matter their nationality, if they have Finnish nationality or not, or even if they are paperless, we don’t ask*”. Furthermore, SM2 stated regarding the online language courses, “*—it allows people to join the classes no matter where they are and actually they are nowadays all over the world, and this really bring this service closer to the customers and also meets better – the needs for the customer because besides the geography, it’s also a matter of time and many times people don’t have time to come to the contact groups*”. SM2 continued by explaining that they are often contacted by people abroad who may want to move to Finland sometime in the future. Due to this, the Finnish language courses are also seen as a service to help with the integration of immigrants before they move to Finland, stating “*They may really contact from when they are still abroad and they are planning this that someday they come to Finland and maybe to Oulu, so this is also somehow kind of, you know, this kind of sisäänheittotuote, you know that we can somehow throw them in already before they are here*”.

**Service Personnel** – The gathered data shows similarities with the senior managements perception that the classes are **seen as a service to teach Finnish to every person willing to learn**. This is evident from SP1’s statement, where SP1 stated that she perceives the main goal of the courses to be a “*—very low-pressure Finnish teaching – center that is open to everyone*” further stating “*—anyone can join who has internet access*”. SP2 made statements more relating to her own classes rather than the online courses in general, as she stated that the YKI-training courses aim to prepare the students for the YKI-test. SP3 made a statement regarding the perception of the quality of the online courses, specifying that she views the online courses not to have the same kind of “*aspect as in person teaching*” and that she perceives it to be a “*kind of space to enhance*”.

*their language skills*". However, it can be assumed that SP2 and SP3 have a similar mindset as SP1 when it comes to the main aim that the online courses are meant for anyone willing to learn.

**Follow-up Students** – The gathered data shows that the follow-up students have a **very positive perception of the follow-up course**. When asked how they would describe the course, the students made such statements as that the course is *"very useful", "convenient", "helpful", "comfortable", and "relevant, interactive"*. Furthermore, the students overall described the course to be very good. One particular student made a statement that confirmed the statements made by the senior management and service personnel, in which this participant stated that the course is a *"Perfect opportunity to get to know Finnish language from anywhere in the world"*.

**YKI-training Students** – The gathered data shows that the YKI-training students have a **very positive perception of the YKI-training course**. When asked how they would describe the course, the students made such statement as *"good and useful", "Efficient, convenient, flexible", "Good level course, teacher is attentive and helpful", "very satisfied", "high quality curriculum and teacher", "It is as shown in the description",* etc. However, two students did have some feedback which could be improved, such as, that there should be less participants in one group and more individual interaction between the teacher and student, and that dividing into sub-groups may be a good idea.

## **Marketing Content, Distribution, and Customer Perception**

**Senior Management** – The gathered data shows that the senior management believes that **the marketing correctly reflects the quality of the service delivery**. This is evident from SM1's statement where SM1 **agreed** when asked if he finds the marketing content to correctly reflect the courses, further stating *"—it's quite general information what we are offering in our social media that what kind of courses we have and when it is and how you can get in the courses"*. This indicates that **no over-promising** is made in the marketing content. Furthermore, the senior management stated that the **teachers are allowed to give feedback**, resulting in change being made to the marketing content on occasion, and that the **teachers are included in the distribution** of the marketing content. This is evident from SM2's statement where SM2 gave an example of when they planned to start a new course. In this example, SM2 stated *"I may discuss about the new ideas, we discuss with my colleague and then we discuss it with our boss and then we make the decision, for instance, like starting new groups, and then this also goes to the teachers meeting when we discuss about this and then they can start marketing it"*. SM2 continued by stating that

the teachers will then market these new developments to the students during their classes. When asked if the teachers can see how their courses are advertised on e.g., the websites, SM2 stated *“Yeah, they can go there anytime and they see all these, and they sometimes might even suggest that you could put it that way – we are very open to any kind of comments, also from the teacher, that what would they like to have there—”*. When asked if any changes were made before when teachers gave feedback on the marketing content, SM2 stated *“If we see that it’s necessary, then we of course do it”*.

**Service Personnel** – The gathered data **shows similarities with the statements made by the senior management**. This is evident from the statements made by SP1, SP2, and SP3. SP1 stated to be very aware of how the courses are advertised seeing as she shares the responsibility with SM2 to market the courses, stating that she is *“the main social media user”* and that she is responsible for *“updating everything on our Instagram and Facebook and also updating our website”*. From these statements it can be assumed that SP1 also perceives the marketing to be realistic, as she shares the responsibility to advertise the courses. SP2 stated to be also aware of where the courses are marketed and that teachers have the opportunity to see how their courses are described and are able to voice their opinions on the description. SP2 gave an example of when their team was able to look at a new description in the marketing content and that they were able to give feedback on it before it was published, stating *“—we were asked – how do we feel about this text, and – we could read them in an early stage before they were published – in the website—”*. When asked if SP2 feels that the description properly reflects the classes, SP2 stated *“Yes, yes I think so”*. SP3 stated also to be aware of how the courses are advertised and that the description in the marketing content is *“quite correct”* further stating *“—we don’t promise anything to the students”* referring to e.g., a certain level they will be able to attain from the course.

**Follow-up Students** – The gathered data **confirms** the statements made by the senior management and service personnel. When asked how they found out about the courses, 25% answered *“The Villa Victor website”*, 16% answered *“Social media”*, 17% answered *“From a friend/family member/acquaintance”* (i.e., word-of-mouth), and 42% answered *“Other”* with two participants stating to have found out about the course from *finnishcourses.fi*, one participant from a university program during exchange in Oulu, and one from a Google search. The gathered data confirms the statements from the senior management and service personnel regarding if the content is realistic, as **100% of follow-up students** answered *“Yes, the description was accurate and met my expectations”*.



**YKI-training Students** – The gathered data **confirms** the statements made by the senior management and service personnel. When asked how they found out about the courses, 12% answered *“The Villa Victor website”*, 38% answered *“Social media”*, 31% answered *“From a friend/family member/acquaintance”* (i.e., word-of-mouth), and 19% answered *“Other”*, with two participants stating to have found out about the course through Google, and one participant stating to have found out about it through both Villa Victor’s website and through *“—events organized for international people”*. The gathered data confirms the statements from the senior management and service personnel regarding if the content is realistic, as **94% of the YKI-training students** answered *“Yes, the description was accurate and met my expectations”*, while only 6% answered *“No”* the reason for this being that there are too many students in the class.

### 5.2.5 GAP 5

#### **Tangible Indicators**

Regarding tangible indicators, the senior management, service personnel, and students were asked varying questions regarding this topic. The senior management were asked in general if they had set any tangible indicators in place. The service personnel were asked specifically if they kept their camera on during their classes, as this would be one indicator by which students could assess the quality of the service as they could see the teacher. The students were asked various questions regarding various tangible indicators including if teachers keep their cameras on, teachers’ attitude during classes, if the teacher seems knowledgeable about the course content, if the teacher is approachable, how fast they receive a response to a question, etc. This approach was taken to ensure that the interviews would not take too long and as it was seen as a topic that should be mainly analyzed from the student’s perspective as tangible indicators are how students perceive the quality.

**Senior Management** – The gathered data shows that **no tangible indicators were set to convey the service quality**. This is evident from SM1 and SM2’s statements. SM1 stated that he is **not aware** if any tangible indicators are set or how they are carried out as this is more SM2’s responsibility. SM2 stated that they did not set any specific tangible indicators as they *“—really trust that teachers do what they are supposed to do and that’s it”*. However, SM2 did state that *“—we really suggest that everyone, teachers and students keep their cameras on”*, which shows that they **have given attention to one specific tangible indicator**. SM2 further stated that they trust the

teachers to do what they are supposed to do as they can visit the online classes at any time and they do this sometimes when they have “—something urgent to tell the teacher”, so for this reason SM2 believes that “—if something strange happens there, -- everyone knows it right away— “.

**Service Personnel** – The gathered data shows **conflicting responses in comparison to the senior managements’ statements** regarding whether the service personnel keep their camera on. SP1 stated that she **only puts her camera on shortly** during “—the first meeting when – all the students are new – so they can see who is there—” but she **then keeps the camera off** as “— the network doesn’t always work so well if all the cameras are on—“. SP2 similarly stated that she **keeps the camera off** during lectures and that she specifically was **instructed to keep it off**, stating “—we have been told to put our cameras down because otherwise it, it might slow down the meeting”. SP3, in contrast to SP1 and SP2, stated that she **does keep the camera on** as she stated, “I think it’s important to see the teacher—”. SP3 continued by stating that “—when the students are doing their exercises, I tend to shut my camera just to kind of give them the feeling that they are not being watched or supervised—”. These statements show that unlike SP2, who said she was instructed to keep it off, SP3 keeps the camera on most of the time. Regarding instructions to keep cameras off, SP3 stated that “We only discussed the students to keep their cameras off”. These statements show that there **may be some miscommunication** regarding this topic as the **senior management** indicated that they **suggest the teachers to keep the cameras on** while one teacher stated that **they were instructed to keep the camera off** and another teacher stated that **only the students should keep it off**.

**Student Results** – The results concerning various tangible indicators in education, as stated by the HEdPERF scale by Abdullah (2006, 576), that were researched in this case study, are shown in Table 4. and Table 5. to give a readable overview of all the tangible indicators. Most apply to the teacher directly while the last two apply to all Villa Victor employees.

**Follow-up Students** – The gathered data showed that the follow-up course **ranks highly on all tangible indicators** as shown in the table below.

Tangible Indicator	Follow-up student response
<b>Camera (relating to Professional Appearance)</b>	84% of students answered “Always” when asked if SP3 keeps her camera on, while 8% stated “Sometimes”. This <b>confirms SP3’s statement</b> as she stated to keep her camera on and only turns it off when students are doing exercises.
<b>Teacher’s knowledge</b>	When asked if they agreed with the statement “My teacher seems very knowledgeable about the course content and systems in use”, 92% answered “Completely agree” while 8% answered “Somewhat agree”.

<b>Teacher's attitude</b>	All students gave positive responses, most of which particularly pointed out SP3's friendliness, helpfulness, and approachability.
<b>Teacher's approachability</b>	All students stated that they are able to approach SP3 concerning problems they are experiencing.
<b>Treatment received</b>	All students stated to be treated equally, some even adding respectfully.
<b>Ability to contact employees regarding questions in general.</b>	10/12 students replied that they are able to contact Villa Victor employees regarding questions in general and that they are able to get answers concerning these problems. 8/10 of these students answered that they get a response during the class, one of which said that he/she only gets a response during class and not after the class. 2/10 of the students answered to get a response through e-mail. From the remaining 2/12, one stated "no" and the other stated "I have not tried".
<b>Time spent on responding to questions</b>	All the students answered that the time spent on responding to questions is quite fast. Some stated that they get an immediate response during the class while others stated they get a response within a day or a few days at the latest.

Table 4. Follow-up student responses to various tangible indicators.

**YKI-training Students** – The gathered data showed that the YKI-training course **ranks highly on all but one tangible indicator**, that one being that the students cannot see the teacher, as shown in the table below.

<b>Tangible Indicator</b>	<b>YKI-training student response</b>
<b>Camera (relating to Professional Appearance)</b>	75% of students answered "Never" while 25% of students answered "Sometimes". This <b>confirms SP2's statement</b> as she stated that she keeps the camera off as she was instructed to do so.
<b>Teacher's knowledge</b>	When asked if they agreed with the statement "My teacher seems very knowledgeable about the course content and systems in use", 69% answered "Completely agree" and 31% answered "Somewhat agree".
<b>Teacher's attitude</b>	All students gave positive responses, most of which particularly pointed out SP2's friendliness, while others pointed out her helpfulness, approachability, professionalism, and politeness.
<b>Teacher's approachability</b>	14/16 students stated that they are able to approach SP2 concerning problems they are experiencing. The remaining 2/16 did not comment on SP2's approachability.
<b>Treatment received</b>	Most students stated to be treated equally.
<b>Ability to contact employees regarding questions in general.</b>	10/16 students stated directly that they are able to contact Villa Victor employees regarding questions in general and that they are able to get answers concerning these problems. 3/16 students answered "No". One student stated, "There was no such need yet", one stated "I don't know", and another did not comment.
<b>Time spent on responding to questions</b>	Most students answered that they quickly get a reply, some stating no longer than 24 hours while others stated 1 to 2 days.

Table 5. YKI-training student responses to various tangible indicators.

### 5.3 Technology Factors

#### Software Perception

**Service Personnel** – The gathered data shows that the service personnel **do not perceive the current software in use** (i.e., Microsoft Teams) **as the most optimal for their classes**. This is evident from statements made by SP1, SP2, and SP3. None had stated directly that they found the software in use to be bad necessarily, as SP1 stated that *“—well, it works, it’s good, I like it”*, SP2 stated that it was *“good”*, and SP3 stated that it was *“OK”*. However, the teachers also have conveyed there to be various issues with using the software and have stated that other programs would be better suited for their teaching needs. This is evident from such statements as SP1’s statement, where SP1 stated that *“there are better programs”* giving such as examples as Zoom and Moodle. The reason why SP1 stated this is that SP1 recognizes that *“there are problems with Teams”* and that this is most likely due to that Teams is *“not meant to use in such an extent as we are using it”* as they have around 2000 people listed in the Teams channels as *“guests”*. SP1 continued by giving examples of the issues SP1 has encountered, such as, various technical problems that prevented students from entering meetings due to links not working. However, SP1 also stated that making changes to the software *“—would require some time and resources to try to do something about it”*. SP2 also gave examples of issues occurring with using the software, such as that they could not remove any students at one point. SP3, similar to SP1, stated a preference for using Zoom as SP3 perceives Zoom as *“—better to use, like easier to use as a teacher”* adding that *“Teams is kind of complicated, especially when doing – screen sharing and such”*, further stating *“—it’s just my personal preference, Zoom is better for me, but Teams might be better for some teachers”*.

**Follow-up Students** – The gathered data shows that the follow-up students **mostly have a very positive perception of the current software** in use (i.e., Microsoft Teams). 11/12 of the follow-up students answered “Yes” when asked if they found the software to be useful, accessible, and easy to use. However, one student answered “No” stating the reason for this being that the *“Navigation is difficult”*. The majority of students also stated that they found the software to fit their student needs, some of which even stated “Perfect”, and *“—it’s a good software to provide online courses”*. Only 3 follow-up students found it to be “OK”, but none said it did not fit their needs.

**YKI-training Students** – The gathered data shows **mixed results concerning the software perception**. 7/16 students directly stated that Microsoft Teams did fit their needs as a student, one of which did say that additionally “*—there can be some websites or blogs where we can practice exercises regarding YKI*”, another stated that in beginning it was a bit difficult to navigate. 3/16 seemed to be unsure in their answer, one stated “*seems fine*”, another stated “*seems to be OK*” but that it only works partially for him/her, and another stated “*it’s ok*”. 4/16 stated that Zoom would be better for their student needs, some of which stating that they preferred it as “*Teams is not very well compatible with some operating systems like MacOS*”, “*Teams has a few lags especially when you use a smartphone*”, and “*—it is not the most user friendly platform, especially for sharing materials—*”. However, when asked if they find Microsoft Teams to be useful, accessible, and easy to use, 87% stated “Yes” and only 13% stated “No”.

## Teaching Style

**Service Personnel** – The gathered data shows that the teachers view their lectures to be **mostly teacher-centered** but that there is also a willingness to adjust the teaching according to student feedback, making it **slightly student-centered as well**. This is evident from the statements made by SP1, SP2, and SP3. SP1 stated that “*—of course the online courses are a bit more teacher-oriented*” as it is harder to interact with students compared to the classroom courses as student are told to “*—turn off their camera because otherwise it will be really, really confusing because there maybe 70 students in one lesson—*” and as they are told to “*—keep their microphones off as well when they’re not talking or wanting to ask something*”. However, SP1 also stated that “*teachers still want to interact*” and that they ask questions to student if they know their names, which is an issue in Teams as some students have strange email addresses that do not state their name. Furthermore, SP1 also stated that “*—I always encourage them in the class that when you feel like it, just open your mic and tell—*”, further stating that “*They may start by typing answers to the chat—*” which SP1 will then keep an eye on. Lastly, SP1 stated that “*—we give them the responsibility – how they want to be part of the class, how active they want to be*” and that the teachers cannot be blamed to get everyone to speak. SP2 stated that, particularly in the advanced courses, “*—there is a bit like me talking alone*” and that “*—in Teams I might have like a very large group, for example, 30 to 40 people, so I cannot really think about like the individual needs of different people—*” (i.e., teacher-centered), but “*if they directly tell me*” SP2 does try to adjust her teaching to the feedback she receives during the class. SP2 gave examples on this matter such as when students, who are participating in SP2’s YKI-training course and who are about to take the YKI-test, ask if SP2 can cover certain topics that may be asked in the test, SP2 will change the lesson plan slightly by

covering these topics to help the student. This shows a willingness from SP2 to adjust to student needs (i.e., student-centered) when they convey these needs. SP3 stated that if she had to choose between describing the courses as teacher-centered or student-centered, she would say it is “—*maybe more, you know, teacher lead*” further stating that “*The classes are structured and planned—*”. However, SP3 also stated that “—*I try to kind of ask for feedback, ask for possible questions, possible things that are unclear, and I always take them into account*”.

Furthermore, regarding the **incorporation of such active learning methods as group tasks and discussions**, the gathered data shows that these methods **are incorporated where the teacher feels it is appropriate**. This is evident from the statements made by SP1, SP2, and SP3. SP1 stated that “—*when I was teaching online the elementary class, there I didn't share people in groups—*” the reason for being that the language skills of the people in these classes are “—*not that high that they could actually have conversations*”. SP1 also stated that SP1 did employ active learning methods in the YKI-training courses, giving an example where SP1 would give them “—*a task that “please tell each other about your school system in your own country” and then I divide them into groups*”. SP2, who teaches the advanced and YKI-training courses, also stated that “—*we work a lot in small groups*” when asked about the incorporation of groups tasks and discussions. SP3 also gave examples of how active learning methods are incorporated in SP3's classes, stating such examples as, “*I have incorporated like shared files where they can write so we can check together everyone's answers*”, and “*I have also utilized breakout rooms—*”.

**Follow-up Students** – The gathered data shows **conflicting responses** concerning whether such active learning methods as group tasks and discussions are incorporated in the class. 7/12 students answered that the course does involve group tasks or discussions, some of which stating a desire for more group exercises. 5/12 of the students answered that it does not involve group task or discussions, two of which answered that they would like there to be more group exercises while one answered that he/she does not need it and one answered that he/she is even grateful that it does not include group exercises.

**YKI-training Students** – The gathered data shows that **active learning methods** such as group discussions and task **are incorporated in the class**. Most (i.e., 15/16) students stated that this is the case, and some even stated that they would want more focus on performing these tasks. One participant particularly stated a desire to have “*20-30 minutes discussion*” in every lesson.

## Communication with Students

**Service Personnel** – Regarding communicating with students **about problems they may be experiencing, and the guidance teachers may be able to give**, the gathered data shows that **this is done but the extent of which is affected by the large number of people that can be in a class at the same time**. This is evident from SP1 and SP3's statements. SP1 stated *"Not much, of course, if the groups are that big"* which refers to SP1's previous statement that there can be around 70 people in one class. SP1 further stated that *"—some students may be so enthusiastic about learning this and that, that they will ask a lot of questions – so the teacher needs to kind of, maybe shortly answer the question but not start going like with this student only"* again reinforcing the idea that due to the size of the group it is difficult to communicate with students on their individual problems as this would take up too much time in the class. However, SP1 also stated that when she responds to these questions that she will respond to the whole class as she recognizes that there are also possibly shy people who may not have the courage to ask similar questions and which will then be pleased to hear the response as well. SP1 continued by stating that *"—it's kind of balancing all, all the time to serve their students and to answer them—"*. SP3 stated *"Yeah, to some extent I am able to give assistance"* and this is done mostly when students ask questions during the class. SP2 however, stated that she communicates *"quite a lot actually"* with the students concerning their problems and that she actively helps the students during the lessons when they have questions about problems they are experiencing. This may be due to SP2 teaching smaller groups of around 30-40 people. However, SP2 had also stated previously (see "Teaching Style", first paragraph) that it is still difficult to communicate about individual needs due to the size of the group and that this is dependent on the student communicating their issues to the teacher.

Regarding communicating to students **how much time should be spent on studying**, the gathered data shows that **this is not really done** and that **they give the students the responsibility to decide how much time they should spend on studying**. This is evident by the statements made by SP1, SP2, and SP3. SP1 stated *"Not really"* but continued by stating *"Of course, -- we tell them that if you come to Finnish class once or twice a week, it's not enough to learn the language efficiently"* further stating *"So, we encourage them to keep their eyes and ears open when they go out to the world"*. This shows that SP1 does not particularly specify an amount of hours that should be spent on studying but that SP1 does communicate that coming to the classes alone will not be sufficient. SP2 stated that *"it's quite much up to them"* continuing by making a similar statement as SP1 where SP2 communicates to the students that attending the

classes is not enough and that they must do self-study. SP3, similar to SP2, stated that it is “—*kind of up to them, how much they want to study*”. SP3 continued by stating that she has similarly communicated to students that they have to do self-study, stating “*I think I’ve mentioned sometimes to students that it’s better to spend, you know, 10 minutes a day instead of like 2 hours a week or these kind of tips, but I think they are adults in the class who are there voluntarily – they can study as much or as little as they want*”.

Regarding **communicating expectations** to students, the gathered data shows that **this is done by the teachers during the classes**. This is evident from the statements made by SP3. SP3 stated that she has “—*laid out a framework of things that we are going to learn and things that they are kind of expected to know after each class*” further stating that students were also given a list of what they should know beforehand (e.g., kpt-changes and verb types) at the beginning of the class.

**Follow-up Students** – The gathered data shows **mostly positive results** when the students were asked how often the teacher **communicates with students** regarding what the teacher **expects** of them, how much **time** should be **spent on studying**, or regarding their **performance**. 8/12 students responded positively regarding this question, some of which answered that the teacher communicates often with them regarding various topics, and one stating that there is regular feedback. 3/12 students responded negatively, two of which stating there to be no communication at all after class, and one stating that he/she would like to receive feedback on assignments. 1/12 students did not give a negative nor positive response but simply responded that the teacher regularly asks for feedback from the students. Regarding whether the students are **motivated to perform well** by the teacher, **10/12 students all gave positive responses**, 7 of which **directly stated they are motivated** to perform well, while 3 gave a response regarding the teacher’s kindness or ability as a teacher. From the remaining 2/12 students, one stated “*I motivate myself*” and another stated to be more passive in the class and did not give a clear answer whether he/she is or is not motivated by the teacher. Regarding whether the **teacher praises students** when they perform well, **11/12** answered that the **teacher does give them verbal praise in the classroom** when they perform well.

**YKI-training Students** – The gathered data shows that there is **a need for more regular communication with students** regarding communicating **expectations, feedback, instruction, and time spent on studying**. 9/16 students answered that although there is some communication regarding the students’ studies, this does not happen enough. Some of these students particularly



communicated a need for more regular feedback, instruction, and overall communication with the teacher (i.e., SP2). However, some of these students also stated that they understood that this could be difficult for SP2 due to the size of the group. Regarding whether students are **motivated by the teacher to perform well**, the results are **mostly positive**. Only two of the participants stated to not be motivated by SP2, while the majority of the participants stated that they are motivated by SP2, some of which even emphasizing that this is due to SP2 encouraging them to share ideas, the exercises and group discussions she provides, and her politeness. The remaining students did not state if they are or are not motivated but rather specified their opinion in defense of SP2, e.g., one participant stated that this would be hard for SP2 to do again due to size of the class, another stated that any adult person participating in these courses should have to motivate themselves. Regarding whether students are **praised when performing well**, the results are again **mostly positive**. The majority of students stated that they are praised when performing well and that this is done by SP2 giving verbal praise during the classes when doing exercises.

#### 5.4 Cultural Differences' Factors

##### **Adjusting Teaching Styles to Different Learning Strategies**

**Service Personnel** – The gathered data shows that **attention is given to this issue and that educators do try to adjust their teaching** according to these different learning strategies. This is evident from the statements made by SP1, SP2, and SP3. SP1 stated that the teachers “*try our best*” to adjust the teaching style to different learning strategies. SP1 gave examples on this matter such as when she noticed that a student needed help with the alphabet, as their writing system of their native language is completely different, she provided assistance by giving “*—extra online exercises – where they can practice this specific thing*”. SP1 gave further examples as that she would recommend certain books they can use in their learning or recommend other courses which may be more suited for that particular person. However, SP1 also stated that adjusting the teaching to these different learning strategies is hard to do as “*—we don't know anything about our students*” further stating that “*—the teacher needs to find out during the lesson that you, that this person is struggling with this one really a lot and then we try to help*”. SP2 similarly made a statement where SP2 stated “*I try to use different strategies*” stating that SP2 tries to be versatile and make the classes in a way that “*—everyone can study like they feel like is good*”. SP2 gave examples on this matter such as that during group exercises, students have the possibility to communicate that they rather want to do it by themselves and then they will not be put into groups, again showing a willingness to adjust to different learning strategies. SP3 stated a different approach to this issue,

as SP3 encourages students to do things in new ways, stating that some students may not have had the “—*kind of autonomy on what they can do here*” as in similar courses they have had before. SP3 continues by stating that she has noticed that some students may have been in a “*very strict school environment*” which has shaped their expectation of how a class and a teacher giving that class should be, meaning more traditional teaching with more strict teachers. SP3 added that due to this “—*it’s always evaluated what you know, you get judged if you don’t know this*” and that student expect the teacher to “*pour knowledge into their heads*” which results in students not taking the responsibility of their own learning. For this reason, SP3 stated that she has tried to “*teach some learning strategies, given tips on learning software, and also kind of taught general theory of language*” (i.e., in the context of all language). SP3 also stated that she communicates to the students that they can always give feedback on the teaching method and that “*this is not set in stone, if you have a good idea – maybe we can do it here in the class*”. The statements made by SP3 show that she tries to teach different methods of learning but is also open to adjusting to the learning strategies of the students when they communicate it.

When asked **if the teachers think that their teaching style may conflict with the different learning strategies** of the students, SP1 stated that it can occur as it “*takes them as well some effort to get used to this not so structured – way of teaching*” and that conflict may also occur when there are students that are not used to participating in online courses. However, SP1 also stated that in these situations SP1 tries to “—*keep it calm and positive and explaining how it works and so on*”. SP2 gave a similar statement given to the previous question of adjusting to different learning strategies, as SP2 stated “—*not really, I think everyone can study the way they feel like, it’s more efficient to them*”.

**Follow-up Students** – The gathered data shows that the follow-up students **use various learning strategies during their studies**. The students were asked which strategies they prefer to use to learn a language and were given the opportunity to select multiple options each of which was an example of strategy use of the different learning strategy choices (i.e., memory, cognitive, compensation, metacognitive, affective, social). The students chose various options when given this choice, 9/12 students selected, “*I say or write new words to learn a language*” (i.e., cognitive strategy), 10/12 selected “*I read texts to learn a language*” (i.e., compensation strategy), 10/12 selected “*I have conversations with other to learn a language*” (i.e., social strategy), 5/12 selected “*I attempt to relate newly learned words to my native language*” (i.e., cognitive strategy), 6/12 selected “*I attempt to guess the meaning of a word when I do not understand it*” (i.e., compensation

strategy), and 1/12 selected “other” stating to focus on grammar which can point to multiple learning strategies. From these results we can see that the follow-up students use a variation of learning strategies when learning Finnish.

When asked if this preferred method of learning a language has been taught to them in their native country, 5/12 stated “No” and that it is “not common” in their country, while 7/12 stated “Yes” or that it was common. These results show that, while it **cannot be concluded** that the strategy choice of **all** the follow-up students is necessarily due to their cultural background, the **majority** of the students did state that **it was due to their cultural background**, as they stated that it was either common or directly taught to them in their native country.

When asked if the current way of teaching complements or conflicts with their preferred method to learn a language, the majority of the students (i.e., 9/12) stated that **it did complement** their stated learning strategies. Some of these students particularly gave some examples relating to the teacher (i.e., SP3) such as that she encourages participation and that she gives tips to for self-study, which shows similarities with SP3’s statements. Two of the remaining 3/12 students gave negative responses to this question, one stating that the classes were “boring” as they mostly focused on grammar, and the other stating “I don’t think” referring to whether the teaching complement or conflict with his/her learning strategy further stating a desire for “more online courses instead of once a week”, showing that this is not necessarily due to the teacher but more due to the amount of classes given. The last of the remaining 3/12 stated that it was “hard to answer” meaning he/she could not state if it complemented or conflicted.

**YKI-training Students** -- The gathered data shows that the YKI-training students **use various learning strategies during their studies**. Similarly to the follow-up students, students were asked which strategies they prefer to use to learn a language and were given the opportunity to select multiple options. The YKI-training students chose a variety of different options, 13/16 students selected “*I say or write new words to learn a language*” (i.e., cognitive strategy), 13/16 selected “*I read texts to learn a language*” (i.e., compensation strategy), 9/16 selected “*I have conversations with other to learn a language*” (i.e., social strategy), 4/16 selected “*I attempt to relate newly learned words to my native language*” (i.e., cognitive strategy), 6/16 selected “*I attempt to guess the meaning of a word when I do not understand it*” (i.e., compensation strategy), and 2/16 selected “other”, one of which answered to watch tv-series with Finnish subtitles (i.e., cognitive strategy),

and the other stating “*answer and questions*” (i.e., social strategy) most likely referring to interacting with the teacher in class.

When asked if this preferred method of learning a language has been taught to them in their native country, 4/16 answered “Yes” some of which directly stating that this method was taught in their native country, 7/16 answered “No” some of which directly stating that this method is not common in their native country, and some stating they developed this method themselves. The results show that the **majority of YKI-training students learning strategy is not influenced** by their **cultural background**.

When asked if the current way of teaching complements or conflicts with their preferred method to learn a language, 13/16 stated that the teaching **does complement** with their preferred method, one of which particularly stated that the teaching is “*quite similar*”. Some of these students also gave advice to improve the current way of teaching, one student suggested that Villa Victor could incorporate “*Kielikahvi*” to support learning which is an event where people can come together to study Finnish outside of a classroom setting, another student suggested that it would be better if they could turn on their camera.

## 5.5 Feedback on Improvements

**Senior Management** – When asked what improvements the senior management would like to make, SM1 gave suggestions on an overarching level with the online courses being a part of the overall service offering while SM2 gave suggestions directly for the online courses. SM1 stated the interest in combining the other services Villa Victor provides with the Finnish language courses. As an example, SM1 stated that a Finnish language learning agenda could be incorporated in the other events or clubs Villa Victor provides e.g., during nature events held by Villa Victor in Pilpasuo the learning agenda would then be created concerning nature. SM1 further stated an interest in more marketing research to come up with new ideas for course content or new courses and to gather data concerning customer needs when extra resources would be available. SM2 stated an interest in changing the current software in use as it is not ideal for the classes. Furthermore, SM2 stated an interest in providing hybrid lessons in the future and a desire to give teachers longer contracts than the current 6-month contracts teachers receive as this would motivate the teachers to develop themselves and the teaching itself.

**Service Personnel** – When asked what improvements the service personnel would like to make to the online language courses, the answers showed that the main issue is the current software in use. Particularly SP1 and SP3 mentioned that a change in software would be best. SP1 mentioned earlier in the interview that Moodle could be beneficial for them to share material with students as this is an issue currently with Teams as students often get confused with how to handle the material. SP3 mentioned that if she could design the course from the start, Zoom would be used instead of Teams to perform the classes, adding that she would also want to allow students to use their cameras. Furthermore, other matters concerning specific courses were also brought up. SP1 mentioned that if they would have the resources, she would like there to be more “*specified courses*” such as “*conversation courses*”. SP2 mentioned that it would be beneficial for the YKI-training courses to receive some guidelines on what the students should specifically study for the YKI-test. SP2 also mentioned, concerning the YKI-training courses, that currently students may have “*unrealistic expectations*” as they believe Villa Victor knows what will be asked on the YKI-test. SP3 mentioned that she would want to have a way to “*ensure that students come on time*” as some students will show up later than specified.

**Follow-up Students** – When asked what improvements the students would like Villa Victor to make to the online language courses, the majority of students emphasized a desire for **more classes per week**, with one stating that this would ensure that students would better retain what they have learned, another one stating that this would then enable him/her to join more classes as how they currently are given do not fit his/her schedule. One student conveyed a desire for **more homework**. Another student answered, “*I would like to have a repository of resources readily available*”, most likely meaning a place to find e.g., course content.

**YKI-training Students** – When asked what improvements the students would like Villa Victor to make to the online language courses, the answers revolved around six topics, namely, amount of classes per week, assignments, material, technical issues, communication, and the amount of differing levels among students. 3/16 students made comments regarding the amount of classes per week, some of which conveyed that they wanted more classes per week, that they should be interactive, and also longer. One participant stated, concerning the amount of courses, that the classes should start at 17.00 o'clock instead of 16.00 o'clock as this participant stated that to attend these classes at 16.00 o'clock he/she would either have to leave from his/her work earlier three days per week or start the lesson while driving. Regarding the assignments, 2/16 participants stated that there should be more interactive assignments. Regarding material, one participant answered

that material should be provided more in advance for students to get prepared for the classes, another participant stated that the material that is covered in the class should focus more directly on questions that will be asked in the YKI-test. Regarding technical issues, one participant stated that it is necessary to address the technical issues that students face to join their lesson, another participant stated, *“Use other user friendly software, like zoom”*. Regarding communication, 3/16 students said that there should be more communication with students, one of which particularly commented on the communication regarding questions, another stated that there should be *“more useful and easy recommendations”*. Regarding the amount of differing levels among students, one student emphasized that it would be better to offer more courses on different levels.

## 5.6 Course Rating Given by Students

**Follow-up Students** – When asked how they would rate the online language courses given by Villa Victor **compared to similar online courses** they have participated in, 42% answered *“Better”*, 25% answered *“On the same level”*, and 33% answered *“I have not participated in any online language courses prior to these courses”*. None of the participants answered *“Worse”*. When asked if they believe that the online language courses provided by Villa Victor are **worth paying for**, 58% answered *“Yes”*, some of which answering that they believe this as they find the courses to be *“good”*, *“useful”*, and *“productive”*. 42% answered *“No”* some of which answering that if it would cost money, they would not be able to attend as they could not afford it, while one in particular answered *“—paid courses should provide higher speed and more individual approach”*. When asked to **rate the online language courses on a scale of 1-10**, the students gave a rating of **8.3/10**, with the lowest score being a 7 and the highest score being a 10.

**YKI-training Students** – When asked how they would rate the online language courses given by Villa Victor **compared to similar online courses** they have participated in, 44% answered *“Better”*, 25% answered *“One the same level”*, 6% answered *“Worse”*, and 25% answered *“I have not participated in any online courses prior to these courses”*. When asked if they believe that the online language courses provided by Villa Victor are **worth paying for**, 37% answered *“Yes”*, some of which answering that they believe this as *“it’s good quality”* and *“informative”*. One participant also stated that he/she would pay if it’s 10€ or less as *“Immigrants aren’t getting same paychecks as the locals”*. Furthermore, 63% answered *“No”*, some which answered that the reason for this is, much like the follow-up students, that it should be free as they could not afford it otherwise. One participant particularly stated that paid courses should be better structured. When asked to **rate**

**the online language courses on a scale of 1-10**, the students gave a rating of **8/10**, with the lowest score being a 5 and the highest score being a 10.

## 6 CONCLUSION

In this chapter, the gathered results relating to the research questions will be discussed. The aim of this case study is to discover how Villa Victor can strengthen its e-service of online language teaching (i.e., RQ1) by discovering if any gaps of understanding exist and how the technology and cultural differences factors affect the customers perception of the e-service.

**RQ2: Do any gaps of understanding exist between the senior management and its employees, as well as between the company and the customer?**

**GAP 1: The difference between what the senior management think the customers expect and the actual needs and expectations of the customers** – From the gathered data it can be concluded that **GAP 1 cannot be identified** as one of the gaps present in any of the analysed courses. Even though neither the follow-up nor the YKI-training course students made statements that showed concrete similarities to the statements made by the senior management (i.e., language skill assessments, book series to acquire, etc.), the student statements did show similarities with the statements made by the respective teachers of the courses.

The follow-up students conveyed the expectation to receive more exercises, to learn and practice grammar, to improve their vocabulary, and to receive tips concerning their studies. This shows similarities with SP3's statements as SP3 had stated that students expect to receive support for their personal study, to do exercises, and to monitor their own progress.

The YKI-training students conveyed the expectation that the course would enable them to fluently speak and write Finnish, and that the course content focuses on topics that will be asked in the YKI-test. Also, some students conveyed the expectation to practice writing texts while other conveyed the expectation to practice having conversations. All these expectations were mentioned by SP2 either directly when asked about student expectations or later during the interview concerning other questions. SP2 had mentioned that some students want to do speaking exercises while other want to do independent exercises. Also, SP2 had mentioned that some students expect her to know what will be asked on the YKI-test.



Due to these results, it can be concluded that the **teachers** do know what their **students expect** from the courses. Furthermore, even though this gap relates to the senior management's understanding of the customer expectations and needs, the results also show that the design of each class (i.e., the service delivery) is mostly up to the teacher who only must adhere to a framework of what must be covered in the class. Therefore, as the teachers form their classes and as they know what their students expect from these courses, it can be concluded that GAP 1 does not exist between Villa Victor and the students for either of the courses.

**GAP 2: The difference between the management's understanding of what customers expect and the service standards they chose to set for the service delivery** – From the gathered data it can be concluded that **GAP 2 cannot be identified** as one of the gaps present in any of the analysed courses. Villa Victor's senior management and service personnel have stated that no specific service quality goals or standards are put in place as the management trust the teachers to perform well, as they are qualified teachers. However, the courses are based on "*some kind of framework*" of what each level course should achieve in its classes accompanied by a material bank in which teachers can find and add material relevant to each level course. For this reason, we can perceive this framework, combined with the senior managements' expectation that the teachers perform their tasks well (i.e., optimal) as SM2 stated the teachers are "*qualified Finnish L2 teachers*", as some form of service quality standards that teachers need to adhere to. Furthermore, both Villa Victor's senior management and service personnel have stated that they work towards a common goal as they have weekly meetings where they discuss various matters concerning the courses. For this reason, we can assume that there are service quality goals in place as the teachers should know what the senior management want the classes to achieve. Lastly, although there is not a major focus on customer expectations, it is evident from the gathered data that Villa Victor have designed and re-designed their courses, and created entirely new courses based on customer needs which were either evident to them or were communicated to them. For example, the online courses were first designed due to the COVID pandemic and then continued as customers conveyed to want a form of online teaching, and as Villa Victor could then reach customers who live abroad who could otherwise not join the classes. Therefore, as Villa Victor has some form of service quality standards and goals in place and as it has adjusted their service regularly due to customer needs, GAP 2 cannot be identified.

**GAP 3: The difference between the established service standards and the actual performance on these standards by the service delivery team** – From the gathered data it can

be concluded that **GAP 3 can be identified** as one of the gaps present in every analysed course. Although no particular service standards were set by the management for the service delivery, as previously stated we can perceive the “*framework*” combined with the managements’ expectation that teachers perform their tasks optimally as the service standards the service personnel need to adhere to. Furthermore, even though most responses to questions regarding this gap were very positive (e.g., employees are motivated and have control over their own classes, there is an active communication between the management and employees, etc.), some issues which have affected teachers to optimally perform their tasks have become evident.

These issues surfaced when service personnel were asked questions relating to the technology factor and relating to what improvement they would make to the online courses. SP1 and SP2 stated there to be issues with the current software in use which has impeded their tasks to an extent, giving such examples of links to classes not working and not being able to remove students among other things. Furthermore, every service personnel participant had similarly stated that they believe other software would be better suited for their classes. Similar issues have also been communicated by both the follow-up and YKI-training students, although mostly from the YKI-training students. Therefore, due to these results combined with the information gathered in the theoretical foundation regarding potential causes for this gap, as stated by Haksever et. al. (1997, 60), we can identify the **cause** for this gap to be **poor technology-job fit** concerning every analysed course as the software in use has been found to be not optimal for the employees to perform their service tasks.

Additionally, SP2 had stated another issue that impeded her ability to properly communicate with students. This issue was that Villa Victor has decided to allow beginner level students to attend higher level courses so that they can experience how these courses are carried out. Due to this SP2 is not always certain which students are in the class and if they are even able to participate, resulting in her not asking questions to the students to monitor their performance or attempting to activate them during classes. SP2 also conveyed specifically that this decision by Villa Victor made it harder for her to perform certain tasks, and that it is something that she sees as being out of her control. Although these statements were made particularly in reference to the advanced course, it can be assumed that this may also be the case for the YKI-training course given by SP2 as she had stated “—*I think that’s the policy in all the courses—*”. Therefore, if it is the case that the same issue (i.e., beginner level students attending higher level classes) occurs within the YKI-training course, then due to these results combined with the information gathered in the theoretical

foundation regarding potential causes for this gap, as stated by Haksever et. al. (1997, 60), for this course **lack of perceived control** can also be attributed to this gap as SP2 feels she cannot resolve this issue on her own volition as the management has made this the “*policy*” in all the courses.

**GAP 4: The difference between how the company advertises the service, what customers come to understand the service to be like from this advertisement, and how they experience the actual service** – From the gathered data it can be concluded that **GAP 4 cannot be identified** as one of the gaps present in any of the analysed courses. This is evident from the gathered results as the senior management and service personnel had stated that Villa Victor does **not utilize over-promising tactics** and as the **service personnel** is included in the marketing procedures and have stated to find the **content to be reflective of their classes**. Most importantly, this is evident from the student survey responses as **100% of all follow-up students** and **94% of all YKI-training students** had stated that the description of the courses that was communicated to them was **accurate and met their expectations**.

**GAP 5: The difference between the actual service delivery and what customers feel they have received due to them not being able to correctly assess the service quality** – From the gathered data it can be concluded that **GAP 5 cannot be identified** as one of the gaps present in any of the analyzed courses. When students were asked questions regarding various tangible indicators (e.g., professional appearance (camera), teacher’s knowledge, teacher’s attitude, teacher’s approachability, treatment received, etc.) the follow-up students gave very positive responses to all the questions. The YKI-training students gave very positive responses to all the questions except for one of the tangible indicators, which was “How often does your teacher keep his/her camera on?”. As all the students gave positive responses to most of the tangible indicators, combined with the fact that the students gave high ratings and very positive descriptions of both the follow-up and YKI-training courses, it can be concluded that both the follow-up and YKI-training students can correctly assess the service quality of the courses and that they feel they have received good quality service.

However, it is still advised that teachers keep their camera on as much as possible during classes as this can affect how students perceive the quality of the class or the professionalism of the teacher. This can be seen by the results from the students. When we look at the follow-up student results, we can see that 84% answered that their teacher (i.e., SP3) “*Always*” keeps her camera on during classes and 92% answered “*Completely Agree*” when asked if they agreed with the

statement “*My teacher seems very knowledgeable about the course content and systems in use*”. When we look at the YKI-training student results, 75% answered that their teacher (i.e., SP2) “*Never*” keeps her camera on during classes and 69% answered “*Completely Agree*” when asked if they agreed with the beforementioned statement. From these results it can be assumed that one of the reasons why 92% of follow-up students answered, “*Completely Agree*” to the beforementioned statement, while only 69% of YKI-training students answered, “*Completely Agree*”, is because the follow-up students are able to see their teacher more often (84% answered “*Always*”) while the YKI-training students are not able to see their teacher often (75% answered “*Never*”). In this case, it can be concluded that student’s perception of the teacher’s knowledge or professionalism was impacted by the lack of visual indication rather than that it impacted the service quality. However, it must also be noted that none of the YKI-training students answered that they did not agree with the statement, as the remaining 31% answered “*Somewhat Agree*”. This shows that the students’ perception of the teacher was minimally but still noticeably affected.

**GAP 6: The difference between what customers have come to expect to receive from the service and how they have perceived the actual service delivery** – From the gathered results it can be concluded that **GAP 6 can be identified** as one of the gaps present in every course. As GAP 3 had been identified, GAP 6 (i.e., The Service Quality Gap) can be identified as Wirtz & Lovelock (2016, 55) stated that this gap is the culmination of all the gaps (i.e., if there would be no identified gaps, GAP 6 would not exist). Even though the student results from both the follow-up and YKI-training students show that their expectations of the courses were met, they (mostly the YKI-training students but also some follow-up students) similarly showed to have issues with the software in use or at least that it is not optimal. This shows that the technology issues have impacted their perception of the service quality. Also, the teachers have stated that the software in use is not the most optimal for their classes. Furthermore, the teacher of the YKI-training courses (i.e., SP2) had stated that she cannot properly communicate with her students due to a policy decision made by the management, which means she is also not able to deliver the service optimally. Therefore, as the service delivery is perceived as not optimal due to the issues with the software in use concerning every analyzed course, as well as the policy decision that hinders SP2’s ability to communicate with her students, it can be concluded that the overall service quality is also not optimal.

**GAP Analysis Conclusion** – In conclusion, for both the follow-up and YKI-training course, only two gaps have been identified which is GAP 3 (i.e., The Delivery Gap) and GAP 6 (i.e., The Service Quality Gap).

**RQ3. Do the factors of technology and cultural differences affect the customers' perception of the service?**

**Technology Factors:**

**Software Perception.** From the gathered results we can conclude that the software in use **does affect the customers' perception of the service**. As stated in the conclusion to GAP 3, both the service personnel and the students have found issues with the current software in use. Most of the issues were mentioned by the YKI-training students. Although most answered that they found the software in use to be useful, accessible, and easy to use, around half of the students seemed to either find it to be just adequate or directly said that other software would be better suited. Most of the follow-up students seemed to also find the software in use to be useful, accessible, and easy to use, as well as that it fit their student needs although some stated to find it to be "OK" and one student also stated directly to have issues with it. Therefore, particularly for the YKI-training students, and some follow-up students, we can conclude that the software in use has affected their perception of the service.

**Teaching Style.** From the gathered results we can conclude that the **teaching style** of the teachers **does not affect the customers' perception of the service**. The teachers have stated that the teaching style is mostly teacher-centered as teachers find it harder to interact with students due to e.g., the size of the classes, the students not being able to open their cameras, etc. However, the results also show that the teachers do adjust their teaching according to student feedback which makes it slightly student-centered. Furthermore, the teachers, and students, have stated that active learning methods are incorporated in the classes. Although some YKI-training students have stated that they would want more focus on these tasks, none of the responses from either the follow-up or YKI-training students implied that this has any negative implications on the perception of the service.

**Communication with Students.** From the gathered results we can conclude that for the **follow-up students** this factor **does not affect their perception of the service** as most of the students gave positive feedback regarding communication with students on e.g., expectations, time spent on studying, their performance, as well as if they are motivated and praised.

For the **YKI-training students** we can conclude this factor **does affect their perception of the service** to an extent. The students gave mostly positive responses on whether they are motivated and praised by the teacher. However, regarding such communication on other matters, the results show that most of the YKI-training students found that although there is communication regarding their studies, that it does not happen enough. Also, some student communicated a need for more regular feedback, instruction, and overall communication with their teacher. Although these students also realized that this could be difficult for SP2 due to the size of the group.

#### **Cultural Differences Factors:**

**Adjusting Teaching Style to Different Learning Strategies.** From the gathered results we can conclude that for both the **follow-up students** and **YKI-training students** this factor mostly **does not affect their perception of the service**. From the results we can conclude that the **follow-up students** use various learning strategies and that a majority did state that this was due to their cultural background as they stated that it was either common to study in this way or that it was directly taught to them. The majority of these students also stated that the teaching style of SP3 did complement their stated learning strategies some of which giving positive examples of how SP3 does this.

Similarly, the YKI-training students use various learning strategies, but the majority also stated that this is **not influenced by their cultural background**. Furthermore, although it cannot be said that the chosen learning strategies of the YKI-training students are due to their cultural background, the majority stated that the teaching style of SP2 does complement with their learning strategies.

#### **RQ4. How can Villa Victor solve the identified problems?**

The identified problems included GAP 3 and 6 as well as the software in use, and the communication with students. None of the other gaps, the cultural differences factors, or such technology factors as incorporation of active learning methods (based on the framework of effective e-learning) were considered as being problematic.

**GAP 3.** To close gap 3, it is necessary for Villa Victor to focus on the identified causes i.e., poor technology-job fit for the all the analysed courses, as well as lack of perceived control for the YKI-training course.

To solve the issue of **poor technology-job fit**, as stated by Wirtz & Lovelock (2016, 554) the right technology needs to be selected to increase performance. Therefore, ideally Villa Victor would have to change the software in use as it has proven to not be the most optimal software for both teaching and student learning needs. Some examples that had been provided by the teachers and some students were Zoom to perform the classes, and Moodle for course content storing and distribution. However, as Villa Victor is a non-profit municipal organization, this will be dependent on cost considerations.

To solve the **lack of perceived control** experienced by SP2, it would be best to not let beginner level students attend the higher-level classes going forward. By doing this, SP2 will be assured that everyone attending the class is meant to be there. Subsequently, SP2 will then be able to perform her tasks more optimally. However, as this would result in beginner students not being able to experience the higher-level classes, I would advise a different solution to accommodate these students. One solution could be to make a promotional video for the higher-level classes. To do this, one of SP2's classes could be recorded and displayed on either Villa Victor's website or in the Microsoft Teams channels. By doing this, beginner level students will have an example of how the higher-level classes are carried out without it disrupting these classes.

**GAP 6.** As GAP 6 is the culmination of all the previous gaps, the causes for GAP 3 (i.e., poor technology-job fit, lack of perceived control) need to be solved to close GAP 3 which in turn will close GAP 6.

**Software in Use.** To solve the issue with the software in use, as stated in GAP 3, Villa Victor would have to find a different form of software for both their **teaching** and **material storing and distribution** needs as both teacher and students have mentioned to have problems with the software in use concerning these issues. Both the teachers and some students have recommended the usage of Zoom as an alternative to teaching with Microsoft Teams, while for material storing and distribution some teachers have also recommended the usage of such software as Moodle.

**Communication with Students.** To solve this issue, in particular feedback, instructions, and overall communication with the teacher as mentioned by the YKI-training students, a more individualized approach to communication would have to be considered. This would require the creation of more courses with smaller groups which would enable teachers to communicate more directly and often with their students. This would similarly allow the teachers and students to open their cameras during classes as this would then not affect the software in use so much. However, this would require that Villa Victor should attain more resources to e.g., hire more teachers. Another solution could be to increase the amount of communication outside of the classroom. Teachers could emphasize to students during the class that if they would want more e.g., instruction, feedback, etc. that they can contact the teacher. Lastly, the teachers could give regular tests to students and then give feedback on the results of those tests. However, this would most likely also require that the group sizes would be smaller.



## 7 DISCUSSION

This chapter presents a short summary of the findings, as well as the limitations of the study.

### Summary of Findings

The main research question for this case study was: **How can Villa Victor strengthen their e-service?** By focusing on the GAPS model of Service Quality alongside the technology factors (i.e., software perception, the eight principles of effective online teaching), and the cultural differences factors (i.e., different learning strategies used by people from different cultural backgrounds), this case study was able to discover, and give recommendations, on certain issues that Villa Victor can focus on to strengthen their e-service. These issues were mainly the poor technology-job fit experienced by the teachers, the perceived lack of control experienced by the YKI-training teacher, as well as the issues with the software in use (referring to both the poor technology-job fit and the experience of the students), and the communication with students. Alongside these main issues another issue was discovered regarding the usage of camera's during classes. One of the teachers mentioned that she was instructed to keep her camera off. While this could be a result of miscommunication, as one teacher said that she was only instructed that students should keep their camera off and another teacher did not state if she was or was not instructed to do so, it can be assumed that this occurrence did affect how students perceive the teacher's knowledge. Although the students of this teacher did not state to find the teacher particularly unknowledgeable, the amount of students who did find her very knowledgeable were considerably less than the students of the other course. Furthermore, alongside these issues, feedback was reported from the senior management, service personnel, and students which Villa Victor's team could focus on to further strengthen their e-service.

However, it must also be noted that besides these discovered issues, the results show that there is an active communication and sense of teamwork among the senior management and service personnel. The teachers even commented on quality of their team where everyone can be heard and voice their opinion, and where everyone is motivated to perform well. This is consequently reflected by the comments of the students as the students largely gave very positive responses to all questions and gave a high rating of their respective courses (8.3/10 for the follow-up course, 8/10 for the YKI-training course).

## **Limitations**

This study had limitations which resulted in not all courses being analyzed. The amount of student survey responses from the advanced course were too few to be able to properly analyze. Furthermore, due to the elementary teacher being unwilling to participate in the study, the responses of the elementary students could also not be analyzed as this would result in a partial analysis which is not enough to determine the service quality as both the service delivery as well as the outcome needs to be analyzed. Also, as the amount of student survey responses from the follow-up course and YKI-training course were minimal (12 follow-up students and 16 YKI-training students), the results of this case study cannot be precisely generalized to determine the actual perception of all the students of each course. However, these results can still be used as an example.

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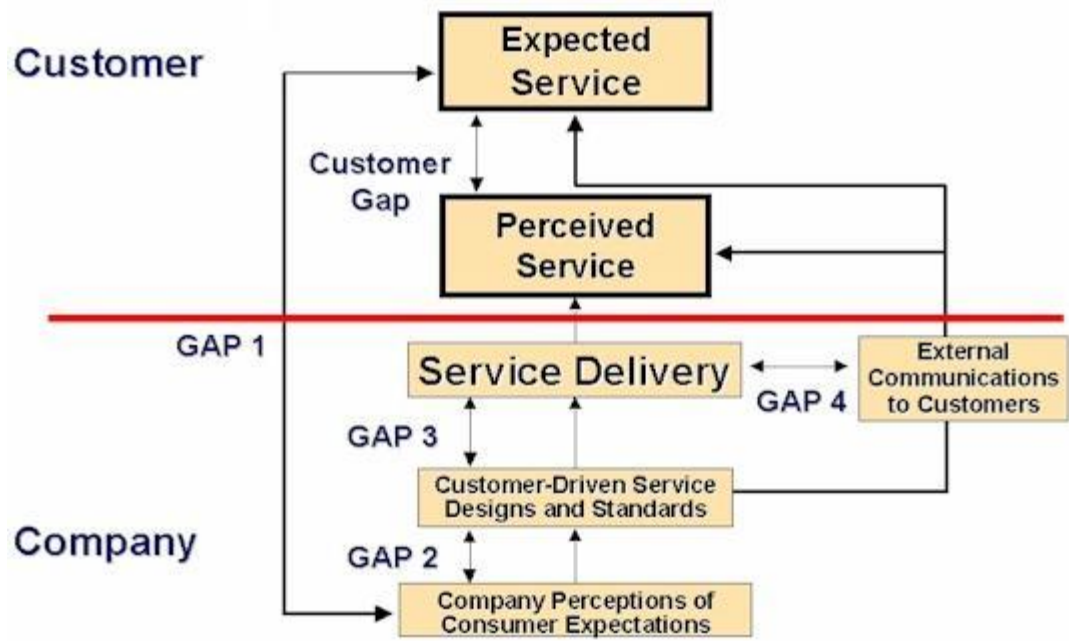
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# APPENDICES

## GAPS MODEL OF SERVICE QUALITY

## APPENDIX 1



Methods to close Gap 2	Examples
<p><b>Improving the product and customer service processes</b></p>	<p>Making use of a customer-centric process for designing and redesigning service products and customer service process which is both precise and systemic.</p> <p>Normalize the practice of repetitive work task by exchanging hard technology for human contact and improving work methods (soft technology) to guarantee consistency and reliability.</p>
<p><b>Setting and communicating measurable customer-focused service standards to all employees</b></p>	<p>Establishing a number of clear, challenging, and realistic service quality goals for each step in the service delivery that are specifically designed to meet customer expectations.</p> <p>Making sure that the goals, standards, and priorities are understood and accepted by the employees.</p>
<p><b>Developing tiered service products to ensure customer expectations are met</b></p>	<p>Establishing varying levels of service products (e.g., premium, standard, and economy-level) so that customers can self-segment themselves depending on their needs, or</p> <p>Offering different levels of service to the customer with each at different price ranges.</p>

Source: Wirtz & Lovelock. 2016, 554

Methods to close Gap 3	Examples
<p><b>Ensuring that the customer service teams are both motivated and able to meet service standards</b></p>	<p>Improving recruitment with a focus on employee-job fit where employees are selected for the skills and abilities they possess, and which are needed to perform the job well.</p> <p>Training employees on both technical and soft skills (including interpersonal skills) which are required to perform their tasks efficiently.</p> <p>Explaining to the employees what their roles include and how their jobs contribute to customer satisfaction by teaching them about customer expectations, perceptions, and problems.</p> <p>Establishing cross-functional service teams that can offer a customer-centric service delivery and problem solving, including efficient service recovery.</p> <p>Strengthening both management and employee roles by delegating decision-making down the organization.</p>

	<p>Measuring performance levels, providing regular feedback, and rewarding both customer service teams as well as individual employees and managers for their performance and achieving quality goals.</p>
<p><b>Installing the required technology, equipment, support processes, and capacity</b></p>	<p>Selecting the most suitable technologies and equipment for increased performance.</p> <p>Making sure that the internal support staff provide the needed support to the service personnel.</p> <p>Evaluating the customer demand with productive capacity.</p>
<p><b>Teaching customers to efficiently perform their roles and responsibilities in a service delivery</b></p>	
<p><b>Efficiently coordinating objectives, performance, costs and rewards with both intermediaries and third parties which are involved in the service delivery; and observe and motivate service quality</b></p>	

Source: Wirtz & Lovelock. 2016, 554

<b>Methods to close Gap 4</b>	<b>Examples</b>
<p><b>Ensuring that the content that is being communicated establishes realistic customer expectations, and informing the operational capabilities to managers who are responsible for the communication of sales and marketing</b></p>	<p>Asking frontline employees and operations personnel to provide their input when new communications programs are developed.</p> <p>Allowing service providers to preview the advertisements and other communications before distributing these to the customers.</p> <p>Ensuring that the sales staff involve the operations staff in face-to-face meetings with customer.</p> <p>Strengthening the understanding and integration between the marketing, operations, and human resource function; and standardizing service delivery across different locations by developing internal educational and motivational campaigns</p>
<p><b>Specifying what is being promised and managing the customer's</b></p>	<p>Testing all advertisement, brochures, telephone scripts, and website content beforehand, to determine if the target audience understands them as the firm intends it to be understood (if not, revise and retest everything).</p>



<b>understanding of what is being communicated by</b>	Also, ensuring that the advertisements reflect the service characteristics that are most valued by customers, and communicating to the customer what is and is not possible, and for what reason
<b>Avoiding the occurrence of sales teams focusing only on generating sales (e.g., through overpromising) and neglecting customer satisfaction (e.g., through failing to meet customer expectations).</b>	Aligning the sales team motivations with those of the service delivery team.

Source: Wirtz & Lovelock. 2016, 555

**Perception:**

1. What is your perception of Villa Victor's online Finnish language courses? (e.g., what does it aim to achieve?)
2. What do you believe students expect from the online Finnish language courses?
3. Can you explain, in your opinion, why students choose to enroll in the online language courses provided particularly by Villa Victor?

**Research:**

4. Has any market research been conducted by Villa Victor for the purpose of designing the course?
5. How has Villa Victor performed this market research? (e.g., questionnaires)
6. What was the focus of the market research? (e.g., customer expectations)
7. How has Villa Victor previously measured such factors as customer satisfaction?

**Service design:**

8. What factors affected the design of the course? (e.g., cost and feasibility considerations, student expectations, etc.)
9. What kind of service quality goals and standards have you set for the online language courses?
10. Why did you choose these goals and standards?
11. What kind of tangible indicators have you set to convey the service quality level to the students? (e.g., response time, ensuring teachers keep their camera on during lectures, etc.)

**Faculty:**

12. Do you believe that your educators understand and follow the specified goals and standards during their lectures? Please elaborate.
13. Do you believe that your educators' performance during the online language courses are at the same level as the specified service standards? Please elaborate.
14. Do you believe your educators possess the necessary skills (i.e., teaching, technology, and interpersonal skills) for their roles? Please elaborate.
15. What kind of instructions/training does Villa Victor provide their educators to perform their roles properly?
16. Have the educators received the necessary technology and equipment to perform their tasks? (Both hardware and software)

17. Do the educators have control over their own classes? (e.g., are they allowed to make certain decisions themselves?) Please elaborate.
18. Do you communicate to your educators what is expected of them, and do you believe these expectations are realistic?

**Internal Communication:**

19. Do you believe that management and employees work together towards Villa Victor's common goal? If so, can you explain why you believe this?
20. Does the company measure performance levels of the employees and do employees receive regular feedback regarding their performance?
21. Are employees motivated and/or rewarded to perform well in their roles?
22. Is there an active communication taking place between yourself and the service personnel (i.e., educators) concerning the online language courses? If so, what do these communications entail and has this information ever resulted in changes being made to the online language courses?
23. Are the educators allowed to review the marketing content? If so, has this ever resulted in changes being made to the marketing content?

**External communication/Marketing:**

24. Do you believe that the current advertisement of the online language courses reflects the quality of the service delivery and that the promises that were made in the marketing content can meet the resulting customer expectations? If so, can you explain why you believe this?
25. Has the marketing material ever been tested before distribution? If so, how has it been tested?
26. Where do you advertise the online language course? (i.e., on the Villa Victor website and/or anywhere else?)

**Other:**

27. Are there any improvements you would personally like to make to the online Finnish language courses provided by Villa Victor?

**Perception:**

1. What is your perception of Villa Victor's online Finnish language courses? (e.g., what does it aim to achieve?)
2. What do you believe students expect from the online Finnish language courses?
3. Can you explain, in your opinion, why students choose to enroll in the online language courses provided particularly by Villa Victor?

**Service design:**

4. Do you believe that the service you deliver (i.e., e-learning) was designed with customer expectations in mind? If so, can you explain why you believe this?
5. What service quality goals and standards were set for your classes?
6. Do you believe that you are able to meet the specified standards, goals, and customer expectations during your lectures? If so, can you explain why you believe this?

**Training:**

7. What kind of instructions/training has Villa Victor provided you to be able to perform your role as an educator? Also, are there any further instructions/training you would want to receive?

**Internal Communication:**

8. Do you believe that you, your colleagues, and the senior management work together towards a common goal? If so, can you explain why you believe this?
9. Do you believe that what the senior management expects from you as an educator is unrealistic? If so, can you explain why you believe this?
10. Are you motivated and/or rewarded by the senior management to perform well in your role as an educator? If so, can you explain how you are motivated and/or rewarded?
11. How often do you receive feedback from the senior management regarding your performance?
12. Do you believe you have control over your own classes? (e.g., are you allowed to make certain decisions yourself or do you believe you need approval from senior management before making any decision?) Please elaborate.
13. Is there an active communication taking place between yourself and senior management concerning the language courses? If so, what do these communications entail and has this information ever resulted in changes being made to the language courses?

**Technology:**

14. Have you received the necessary technology and equipment to perform your tasks? (Both hardware and software) Please elaborate.

15. Do you believe that the software used for these courses (i.e., Microsoft Teams) fit your teaching, and student learning needs? If so, can you explain why you believe this?
16. Do you perceive the software as useful, accessible, and easy to use? If not, could you explain why?

#### **Service delivery:**

17. Would you describe your lectures to be more teacher-centered (i.e., based only on instruction) or more student-centered (i.e., are the classes focused on students' individual needs)?
18. Do you have your camera on during your lectures so that students are able to see you?
19. Do your lectures involve group discussions or group tasks?
20. How often do you communicate with your students about their problems (e.g., learning problems, problems with using the software); and are you able to give guidance to your students to help them with these problems?
21. Do you communicate to your students how much time they should spent on studying?
22. Do you communicate to your students what you expect from them and are students praised for performing well?
23. How do you monitor student performance?
24. Do you provide feedback on their performance during the learning process?
25. How do you adjust your teaching style to the different learning strategies people from different cultural and educational backgrounds may use to learn a language?
26. Do you believe that your teaching style complements these different methods of learning or may possibly conflict with these methods?

#### **External communication/Marketing:**

27. Are you aware of how the online language courses are currently advertised?
28. Are you and the rest of the educators allowed to preview the marketing material and other external communications about the classes before it gets distributed? If so, are you and the rest of the educators allowed to give feedback on the marketing material?
29. Do you believe that the current advertisement of the online language courses reflects your lectures properly and do you believe that you are able to meet the customer expectations resulting from the promises made in the marketing content? If so, can you explain why you believe this?

#### **Other:**

30. Are there any improvements you would personally like to make to the online Finnish language courses provided by Villa Victor?

**SENIOR MANAGEMENT INTERVIEW OBSERVATIONS TABLE**

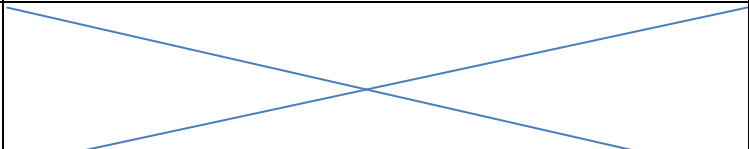
**APPENDIX 5**

<b>Senior Management Interview Observations Table</b>		
<b>Questions</b>	<b>Observations</b>	
	<b>SM1</b>	<b>SM2</b>
<b>GAP 1</b>		
What do you believe students expect from the online Finnish language courses?		
Has any market research been conducted by Villa Victor for the purpose of designing the course?		
How has Villa Victor performed this market research? (e.g., questionnaires)		
What was the focus of the market research? (e.g., customer expectations)		
How has Villa Victor previously measured such factors as customer satisfaction?		
<b>GAP 2</b>		
What factors affected the design of the course? (e.g., cost and feasibility considerations, student expectations, etc.)		
What kind of service quality goals and standards have you set for the online language courses?		
Why did you choose these goals and standards?		
<b>GAP 3</b>		
Do you believe that your educators understand and follow the specified goals and		

standards during their lectures? Please elaborate.		
Do you believe that your educators' performance during the online language courses are at the same level as the specified service standards? Please elaborate.		
Do you believe your educators possess the necessary skills (i.e., teaching, technology, and interpersonal skills) for their roles? Please elaborate.		
What kind of instructions/training does Villa Victor provide their educators to perform their roles properly?		
Have the educators received the necessary technology and equipment to perform their tasks? (Both hardware and software)		
Do the educators have control over their own classes? (e.g., are they allowed to make certain decisions themselves?) Please elaborate.		
Do you communicate to your educators what is expected of them, and do you believe these expectations are realistic?		
Do you believe that management and employees work together towards Villa Victor's common goal? If so, can you explain why you believe this?		
Does the company measure performance levels of the employees and do employees receive regular feedback regarding their performance?		
Are employees motivated and/or rewarded to perform well in their roles?		

<p>Is there an active communication taking place between yourself and the service personnel (i.e., educators) concerning the online language courses? If so, what do these communications entail and has this information ever resulted in changes being made to the online language courses?</p>		
<b>GAP 4</b>		
<p>What is your perception of Villa Victor's online Finnish language courses? (e.g., what does it aim to achieve?)</p>		
<p>Are the educators allowed to review the marketing content? If so, has this ever resulted in changes being made to the marketing content?</p>		
<p>Do you believe that the current advertisement of the online language courses reflects the quality of the service delivery and that the promises that were made in the marketing content can meet the resulting customer expectations? If so, can you explain why you believe this?</p>		
<p>Has the marketing material ever been tested before distribution? If so, how has it been tested?</p>		
<p>Where do you advertise the online language course? (i.e., on the Villa Victor website and/or anywhere else?)</p>		
<b>GAP 5</b>		
<p>What kind of tangible indicators have you set to convey the service quality level to the students? (e.g., response time, ensuring teachers keep their camera on during lectures, etc.)</p>		
<b>OTHER:</b>		



<p>Can you explain, in your opinion, why students choose to enroll in the online language courses provided particularly by Villa Victor?</p>		
<p>Are there any improvements you would personally like to make to the online Finnish language courses provided by Villa Victor?</p>		
<p>What is your perception on the importance of the Finnish language courses to the overall goal of Villa Victor such as integration of immigrants and promoting multiculturalism?</p>		
<p><b>ADDITIONAL OBSERVATIONS:</b></p>		

**SERVICE PERSONNEL INTERVIEW OBSERVATIONS TABLE**

**APPENDIX 6**

<b>Service Personnel Interview Observations Table</b>			
<b>Questions</b>	<b>Observations</b>		
	<b>SP1</b>	<b>SP2</b>	<b>SP3</b>
<b>GAP 1</b>			
What do you believe students expect from the online Finnish language courses?			
<b>GAP 2</b>			
Do you believe that the service you deliver (i.e., e-learning) was designed with customer expectations in mind? If so, can you explain why you believe this?			
What service quality goals and standards were set for your classes?			
<b>GAP 3 + Technology/E-learning (*) / Cultural Differences (**) Factors</b>			
Do you believe that you are able to meet the specified standards, goals, and customer expectations during your lectures? If so, can you explain why you believe this?			
What kind of instruction/training has Villa Victor provided you to be able to perform your role as an educator? Also, are there any further instructions/training you would want to receive?			
Do you believe that you, your colleagues, and the senior management work together towards a common goals? If so, can you explain why you believe this?			
Do you believe that what the senior management expects from you as an educator is unrealistic? If so,			

can you explain why you believe this?			
Are you motivated and/or rewarded by the senior management to perform well in your role as an educator? If so, can you explain how you are motivated and/or rewarded?			
How often do you receive feedback from the senior management regarding your performance?			
Do you believe you have control over your own classes? (e.g., are you allowed to make certain decisions yourself or do you believe you need approval from senior management before making any decisions?) Please elaborate.			
Is there an active communication taking place between yourself and senior management concerning the language courses? If so, what do these communications entail and has this information ever resulted in changes being made to the language courses?			
Have you received the necessary technology and equipment to perform your tasks? (Both hardware and software) Please elaborate.			
Do you believe that the software used for these courses (i.e., Microsoft Teams) fit your teaching, and student learning needs? If so, can you explain why you believe this? (*)			
Do you perceive the software as usefull, accessible, and easy to use? If not, could you explain why?			
Would you describe your lectures to be more teacher-centered (i.e., based only on instruction) or more student-centered (i.e., are classes			

focused on students' individual needs)? (*)			
Do your lectures involve group discussions or group tasks? (*)			
How often do you communicate with your students about their problems (e.g., learning problems, problems with using the software); and are you able to give guidance to your students to help with these problems? (*)			
Do you communicate to your students how much time they should spent on studying? (*)			
Do you communicate to your students what you expect from them and are students praised for performing well? (*)			
How do you monitor student performance?			
Do you provide feedback on their performance during the learning process? (*)			
How do you adjust your teaching style to the different learning strategies people from different cultural and educational backgrounds may use to learn a language? (*) (**)			
Do you believe that your teaching style complements these different methods of learning or may possibly conflict with these methods? (**)			
<b>GAP 4</b>			
What is your perception of Villa Victor's online Finnish language courses? (e.g., what does it aim to achieve?			
Are you aware of how the online language courses are currently advertised?			

Are you and the rest of the educators allowed to preview the marketing material and other external communication about the classes before it gets distributed? If so, are you and the rest of the educators allowed to give feedback on the marketing material?			
Do you believe that the current advertisement of the online language courses reflects your lectures properly and do you believe that you are able to meet the customer expectations resulting from the promises made in the marketing content? If so, can you explain why you believe this?			
<b>GAP 5</b>			
Do you have your camera on during your lectures so that students are able to see you?			
<b>Other:</b>			
Can you explain, in your opinion, why students choose to enrol in the online language courses provided particularly by Villa Victor?			
Are there any improvements you would personally like to make to the online Finnish language courses provided by Villa Victor?			
<b>ADDITIONAL OBSERVATIONS:</b>			

## Villa Victor Online Finnish Language Course Assessment Survey

Thank you for taking part in this survey. The following questions are focused on various themes to assess the current state of the online Finnish language courses being provided by Villa Victor through Microsoft Teams.

You will be asked to answer questions regarding, for example, your background, your perception of the online Finnish language courses, and other matters that may impact the courses.

The survey is intended to be anonymous and all efforts have been made to ensure anonymity, for example, personal information such as names, email addresses, etc. will not be gathered. The gathered data will be analyzed and used to form a conclusion which will be presented to Villa Victor so that they can use this information to strengthen the courses.

Your answers are highly valued; therefore, we would ask you to provide short and detailed answers to the questions so that Villa Victor can properly strengthen its courses for its students.

You can save your answers and continue later after finishing every page.

### Background:

#### 1. What is your native country?

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#### 2. What is your native language?

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**3. In which country do you currently live?**

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**4. What is your educational background?**

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**5. Are you currently:**

In employment, working as

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A student, studying...

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**6. In which online Finnish course are you currently participating?**

Elementary

Follow-up

Advanced

YKI-training

**7. Have you ever participated in similar language course before (either online or in a classroom)? If so, where did you participate in these language course (e.g., in your home country or somewhere else in Finland)?**

Yes, in...

\_\_\_\_\_

No

**8. Which strategies do you prefer to use to learn a language? (You can select multiple options)**

I say or write new words to learn a language.

I read texts to learn a language.

I have conversations with others to learn a language.

I attempt to relate newly learned words to my native language.

I attempt to guess the meaning of a word when I do not understand it.

Other, namely...

\_\_\_\_\_

**9. Has your preferred method of learning a language been taught to you in your native country? (i.e., do you know if its common in your country to study in this manner?)**

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**10. What do you personally expect to receive from the online language courses (e.g., quality of teaching) and what do you want to gain from these online language courses?**

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\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_





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**External Communication/Marketing:**

**13. How did you find out about Villa Victor's online Finnish language courses?**

- The Villa Victor website
- Social media
- From a friend/family member/acquaintance
- Other:

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**14. Based on how the online language courses were described to you (e.g., on Villa Victor's website, social media, and/or how it has been described to you by others) before participating in the online courses; do you believe that the description was accurate and has it met your expectations?**

- Yes, the description was accurate and met my expectations.
- No, because...

\_\_\_\_\_

**Perception of the service delivery:**

**15. How would you describe the online language courses that are being provided by Villa Victor to be like?**

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**22. How often does your teacher communicate with you about, for example, what he/she expects you to achieve, how much time you should spent on studying, or your performance? If this does not happen often, would prefer the teacher to provide more regular feedback and instruction?**

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**23. Do you believe that your teacher motivates you to perform well, and could you explain how you are motivated? If you feel that you are not motivated by the teacher, could you explain why you feel this way?**

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**24. Are you praised when you perform well during your classes? If so, how are you praised?**

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**25. Do you feel that you can approach the teacher with certain problems you are experiencing when using the technology (i.e., Microsoft Teams)? Please elaborate.**

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**26. Are you able to contact your teacher or other employees of Villa Victor when you have questions about the online courses in general and are you able to get answers concerning these questions from Villa Victor? Please elaborate.**

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**27. How fast do you get a response from teachers or other employees of Villa Victor about a question you may have about the course or other problems you may experience?**

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**28. How do you rate the online language courses given by Villa Victor compared to similar online courses you have participated in?**

- Better
- On the same level
- Worse
- I have not participated in any online courses prior to these courses.

**Other:**

**29. Do you believe that the online language courses provided by Villa Victor in its current state are worth paying for? NOTE: There are no plans to make the online language courses into a paid service.**

Yes, because...

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No, because...

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**30. What kind of improvements would you want Villa Victor to make to the online language course?**

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**31. How would you rate the online language courses on a scale of 1-10?**

