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Language Education for Working-age Migrants in Finland and Germany

Comparative ethnography in two European settings

Miira Häkkinen

TURUN YLIOPISTON JULKAISUJA – ANNALES UNIVERSITATIS TURKUENSIS
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ABSTRACT

This dissertation investigates second language education for working-age migrants and refugees in Finland and Germany, focusing on institutional practices, learner experiences, and the production of social space. Empirical data were collected through two ethnographic field studies at education providers offering integration training aligned with the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) by the European Commission (2001). The research adopts a comparative and multidimensional approach, combining phenomenographic and interpretative phenomenological analysis with ethnographic observation to examine the perspectives of both educators and learners.

The findings reveal systemic challenges in language education shaped by administrative expectations, societal change, and professional identity. Finnish educators emphasize the importance of defending contact teaching, while German counterparts highlight the influence of external constraints on course design and learner progress. Learners underscore the centrality of language in fostering belonging, well-being, and future aspirations. Classroom interactions further illustrate how social affiliation and atmosphere support active participation.

Contemporary challenges, such as an aging population, the growing demand for a skilled workforce, and the increasing localization of integration services are pertinent to both Finland and Germany. However, differences in migration volumes and experiences between the two countries significantly influence how integration services, including language education, are structured. These contrasts provide a valuable foundation for comparative research, while the qualitative design of this study offers meaningful methodological insights.

By integrating institutional, experiential, and spatial perspectives, the dissertation presents both theoretical and practical contributions to the development of language education for working-age migrants and refugees in Finland during the 2020s and offers recommendations for similar programs in Germany and across Europe. Importantly, the findings contribute to a deeper understanding of adult education as a complex interplay of institutional structures, personal trajectories, and social dynamics, with implications for policy and practice across European contexts.

KEYWORDS: migration, integration training, language education, comparative ethnography, Finland, Germany

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TIIVISTELMÄ

Väitöskirja tutkii työikäisten maahan muuttaneiden kielikoulutusta Suomessa ja Saksassa osana työvoimapoliittista kotoutumiskoulutusta. Tutkimus selvittää, miten kielikoulutuksen opetuskäytännöt, oppijoiden kokemukset ja opiskelun sosiaalinen ympäristö rakentuvat kahdessa erilaisessa yhteiskunnassa. Tämä moninäkökulmainen lähestymistapa tarjoaa uusia näkökulmia kielikoulutuksen rakenteista, pedagogiikasta ja vuorovaikutuksesta.

Ajankohtaiset yhteiskunnalliset haasteet – kuten väestön ikääntyminen, työvoimapula ja kotoutumispalvelujen paikallistuminen – muokkaavat kielikoulutuksen järjestämistä sekä Suomessa että Saksassa. Vaikka koulutusta ohjaavat samat eurooppalaiset tavoitteet (Euroopan neuvosto, 2001), maiden välillä on merkittäviä eroja maahanmuuton määrissä ja kotoutumispalveluiden toteutuksessa. Nämä erot heijastuvat kielikoulutuksen rakenteisiin ja pedagogisiin ratkaisuihin ja tarjoavat kiinnostavan lähtökohdan vertailevalle tutkimukselle, joka tuottaa myös metodologisia oivalluksia.

Tutkimuksen aineisto koostuu opetustilanteiden havainnoista sekä kieltenopettajien ja -opiskelijoiden haastatteluista suomalaisessa ja saksalaisessa kotoutumiskoulutuksessa. Yhdistämällä institutionaaliset, kokemukselliset ja tilalliset näkökulmat väitöskirja tarjoaa sekä teoreettisia että käytännönläheisiä näkökulmia ajankohtaiseen keskusteluun työikäisten maahanmuuttajien ja pakolaisten kielenopetuksesta Euroopassa.

Tulokset tuovat esiin kielikoulutuksen rakenteellisia haasteita, joita muovaavat hallinnolliset odotukset, yhteiskunnalliset muutokset ja opettajien ammatillinen identiteetti. Suomalaiset opettajat korostavat lähiopetuksen merkitystä oppimisen edistämisessä, saksalaiset kollegat kuvaavat tarvetta tukea oppijoita kovan aikataulupaineen alla.

Sekä Suomessa että Saksassa opiskelijat kokevat kielitaidon keskeiseksi osallisuuden, hyvinvoinnin ja tulevaisuuden uskon rakentumisessa, mutta heillä on arjessaan hyvin erilaiset tukiverkostot. Kotoutumiskoulutuksen sosiaalinen yhteisö on siksi merkittävä kohtaamisen ja osallistumisen paikka uudessa kieliympäristössä opetustilojen koosta tai teknisestä varustelusta riippumatta, sillä vuorovaikutuksen tarve ei pääty maata vaihtaessa.

Väitöstutkimus tarjoaa konkreettisia ehdotuksia kielikoulutuksen kehittämiseksi Suomessa ja Saksassa sekä suosituksia vastaaville ohjelmille myös muualla Euroopassa.

ASIASANAT: aikuiset maahan muuttaneet, kotoutumiskoulutus, kielikoulutus, vertaileva etnografia, Suomi, Saksa

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Finally, to my loved ones at home—Jani, Eila, and Eini—this is where the tears appear: Thank you. With you, I feel the strongest.

Raisio, 19 November 2025

Miira Häkkinen

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Appendices

List of Original Publications

This dissertation is based on the following original publications:

I Häkkinen, M. & Mikkilä-Erdmann, M. Language teachers' accounts of challenges in two European settings of integration training. *European Educational Research Journal*, 2023; *22*(2), 254-280.

II Häkkinen, M. & Mikkilä-Erdmann, M. Experiences of language in migration: Communicating well-being in Finland and Germany. *Adult Education Quarterly*, 2025; *75*(1): 3-26.

III Häkkinen, M. & Mikkilä-Erdmann, M. Capturing moments in the social space of European integration training. *European Education*, 2025; https://doi.org/10.1080/10564934.2025.2590425

Häkkinen designed the sub-studies, collected and analyzed the data, interpreted the results, and wrote the articles. Mikkilä-Erdmann contributed to the planning of the sub-studies and supported the writing process by engaging in discussions about the approaches and results, particularly during the review processes of the articles.

In preparing the summary document of this dissertation, Häkkinen used the AI tool Microsoft Copilot (M365) to assist with proofreading for grammar and text flow. Häkkinen assumes full responsibility for the content and the final version of the publication.

1 Introduction

1.1 Enabling communication after migration

This dissertation explores language skills as an integral part of individuals' everyday lives following migration. It focuses on the context of formal education, examining how languages are taught and learned in adult language education as part of integration training in two European settings: Finland and Germany. These research settings represent distinct migration destinations, yet within the shared timeframe of the 2010s and 2020s, both face a common challenge: how to organize language education in response to the societal circumstances shaped by global mobility, and what priorities are reflected in the learning programs. The research focuses on the education of adults within the working-age population who participate in labour market-oriented integration training, yet have diverse needs for understanding and being understood in the language of their new living environment. The dissertation approaches these issues from three perspectives: that of language teachers, adult learners, and classroom interaction.

Literature review

Adult migrant language education has been widely studied across contexts, reflecting its central role in integration, social inclusion, and identity formation. As the following review demonstrates, with a particular focus on Finnish and German scholarship, existing research explores policy frameworks, pedagogical approaches, learner experiences, digitalization and affective engagement.

Research highlights the influence of policy frameworks on language education (Simpson & Whiteside, 2015). In Finland, language plays a central role in integration strategies (Pöyhönen & Tarnanen, 2015; Pöyhönen et al., 2019), while German policy research underscores federal integration programs and evolving approaches to meet social needs (Federal Office for Migration and Refugees, 2023). Recent scholarship promotes equity and intersectionality through socio-material and epistemic justice perspectives (Ennser-Kananen et al., 2023, 2025), critiques neoliberal discourses (Zschomler, 2020), and advocates multilingual support (Haznedar et al., 2018; Simpson & Pöyhönen, 2025).

Pedagogical research spans literacy development, vocational training, and multilingual workplaces. German integration courses highlight literacy challenges and structural factors influencing language acquisition (Wienberg et al., 2022), Finnish studies examine language and literacy in social contexts (Suni & Tammelin-Laine, 2020). Research on vocational education has examined themes such as belonging and workplace preparation (Kärkkäinen & Tarnanen, 2022; Strömmer et al., 2023), as well as the notion of textbook agency (Saarinen & Huhta, 2023).

Studies focusing on language learners address challenges in English as a second language programs (Ugural Kamisli, 2023), identity work among highly educated immigrants (Chávez Rodríguez et al., 2025), and belonging in online learning (Intke-Hernández, 2023; Intke-Hernández & Kosonen, 2024). Multilingual perspectives inform discussions of language ownership (Kosonen & Intke-Hernández, 2024), and post-training investment illustrates diverse pathways (Seppälä, 2024).

Studies on language education link to inclusion and employment in programs that emphasize agency (Pötzsch & Saksela-Bergholm, 2023) and labor market participation (Brown et al., 2021). Migrants' meaning-making processes extend beyond education and work (Nyström et al., 2023), and evidence shows how language training improves civic engagement and economic opportunities in the U.S. (Heller & Slungaard Mumma, 2023).

Recent scholarship also foregrounds emotional engagement. "Affective literacy" highlights motivation and well-being (Toscano-Fuentes et al., 2024), and translanguaging practices influence emotional experiences (Franck & Papadopoulou, 2024).

Digitalization has transformed language education, especially during COVID-19. Finnish studies document technology use in literacy education (Malessa, 2023) and inclusive online integration programs (Hartikainen et al., 2020; Ahola et al., 2025). German research adds insights into digital tools for personalized learning and teacher training needs (Maahs et al., 2025). Concepts such as community cultural wealth show how digital platforms leverage learners' resources (Riuttanen, 2025).

Following this review, I will present literature that has closely informed this dissertation, providing the foundation for the research design and leading to the research questions guiding this work.

Research informing the present study

To demonstrate the gap this dissertation addresses, the following literature review presents studies that have closely guided the research. These studies span diverse global contexts, encompassing both English-speaking and non-English-speaking settings, and focus on learners' experiences as well as the role of language teachers within the broader framework of migration and integration.

Research on post-migration language experiences in North America often explores language as a component of identity (Adamuti-Trache, 2013; Guo & Lei, 2020; Huang, 2022; Norton, 2013; Skilton-Sylvester, 2002; Ugurel Kamisli, 2021), and examines how language proficiency relates to experiences of social support (Alfred, 2003; Warriner, 2007) and to interpersonal and societal conflicts (De Fina & King, 2011; Mantou & Noels, 2019). Language is also viewed as a central element in individuals' life histories (Lee, 2013; Stewart, 2015), their motivation for language learning (Kisiara, 2021), and in connection with motherhood (Omar, 2024; Zhu, 2020).

Studies from Australia investigate immigration-related language experiences through the lens of digital literacy (Tour et al., 2023) and emotional dimensions (Westcott & Vazquez Maggio, 2015). In contrast, research from the Kurdistan region of Iraq focuses on the psychosocial support immigrants receive while learning a new language (Ateek, 2022). In South Africa, scholars have examined immigrants' experiences with xenophobia (Mesthrie et al., 2022), linguistic challenges in post-migration life (Mutasa, 2014), and professional networks for skilled migrants (Hurst, 2014). Research in Ghana has explored adult migrants' multilingualism and language practices (Amuzu et al., 2019).

In Europe and the United Kingdom, the language experiences of adult immigrants have been examined through the lens of meaningful learning (Abdulla, 2017; Ahlgren & Rydell, 2020; Kärkkäinen, 2017). Research highlights that language experiences play a significant role in shaping individual identities (Court, 2017; Stella & Gawlewicz, 2021). Several studies investigate language skills as a component of family integration (Farr et al., 2018; Föbker & Imani, 2017; Iikkanen, 2020; Intke-Hernández, 2020; Selleck, 2022). Additionally, language proficiency is linked to various aspects of communication (Jansen & Romero Gibu, 2021; Rydell, 2018; Van der Land, 2022; Zachrison, 2014), and is associated with social belonging (Ćatibušić et al., 2021, Häkkinen 2025), particularly from the perspective of women (Ennser-Kananen & Pettitt, 2017; Rzepnikowska, 2017).

In light of the research literature, this dissertation adopts the following perspectives. It examines the boundary conditions faced by education providers and the work of language teachers, while also exploring adult migrants' experiences of language and language learning during the challenging period following migration. Furthermore, it investigates how social space is both abstractly and concretely produced within language education, as observed in teaching and learning interactions. By comparing two case studies, the research aims to propose priorities for Finnish integration training and language instruction in the 2020s. Through its international research design and theoretical foundations, the study aspires to contribute to the development of similar adult education programs in Germany and, more broadly, in international contexts.

Finland and Germany—two non-Anglophone migration destinations—have not previously been compared in terms of language teachers' accounts of their educational practices, adult migrants' language experiences and well-being, and classroom interaction in adult language education.

1.2 Design of the present research project

The research design is based on three analytical approaches to examining the challenges and opportunities of language learning within the framework of integration training. An overarching research question for the dissertation is:

How does a comparative ethnographic analysis of adult migrants' language education in Finland and Germany illuminate the practice of European integration training?

To address this main research question, the dissertation comprises three studies:

1. Language teachers' accounts of their professional practice
2. Language learners' experiences of language and its learning in the context of post-migration life
3. Classroom interaction between language teachers and learners

The key elements of this dissertation are summarized in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Overview of the Central Elements of the Dissertation.

OVERVIEW OF THE DISSERTATION

Unit of analysis	professionals' accounts	individuals' experiences	professionals and individuals' interactions
Data collection	interview	interview	observation
Analysis	phenomenography	interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA)	directed content analysis
Theoretical framework	European educational space, site ontology	subjective well-being	production of social space, theory of moments, atmospheres
Scope of findings	challenges at work	learning goals in current life situation	positive aspects of learning interaction

As presented in Table 1, the units of analysis in this dissertation are professionals' accounts, individual experiences, and, finally, the interactions between professionals and individuals. Data were collected through interviews with various stakeholders

and through classroom observations of language instruction. The data were analyzed using a phenomenographic approach, incorporating Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) and guided by the principles of directed content analysis. The first sub-study focuses on professionals' experiences. The second sub-study emphasizes individual experiences. The third sub-study presents a socio-spatial analysis of classroom interactions. The theoretical frameworks span from the concept of the European educational space and Theodore Schatzki's site ontology (2002, 2010) to an understanding of multidimensional well-being. The third sub-study draws on theories such as the theory of moments (2002/1961), Henri Lefebvre's *Production of Social Space* (1991/1974), and Hermann Schmitz's concept of atmospheres (2023/2014). Based on these foundations, the research reveals findings related to the challenges faced by integration language teachers, the future aspirations of individuals undergoing significant life and environmental changes, and the positive aspects of learning interactions.

1.3 Rationale for the comparison: similarities and differences

This dissertation examines adult migrant language education within integration training programs in Finland and Germany—two European countries that serve as distinct yet comparable migration destinations. Both have experienced significant migration flows in recent decades, shaped by global crises and regional developments. A review of key migration trends reveals similarities in countries of origin and reasons for migration, such as displacement due to conflict or pursuit of economic opportunity. While the challenges of integration are shared, they also reflect contextual specificities, particularly the higher volume of refugees in Germany, which has influenced the scale and structure of its integration services. These differences and similarities form the basis for the comparative analysis conducted throughout this research.

In the 1970s, Finland received a small number of refugees from Chile following the 1973 coup led by Augusto Pinochet. During the 1980s, refugees arrived from Vietnam and Iran, although work- and study-related migration remained limited. This period marked the beginning of more structured immigration and integration policies. In the 1990s, migration from Russia and Estonia increased after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Finland also received significant numbers of refugees from Somalia and Bosnia due to the Somali Civil War and the Yugoslav Wars. From this decade onward, asylum seeking within Europe became a steady phenomenon in Western countries. Finland established its asylum system and began developing a formal integration framework. Key countries of origin included the former Yugoslavia, the former Soviet Union, Somalia, Iraq, Iran, and Turkey. In the 2000s,

asylum applications increased from Afghan nationals and citizens of West African and Eastern European countries. The expansion of the European Union led to labor migration from Estonia, Poland, and other Eastern European nations. Family reunification became a more common reason for immigration, and the number of international students, particularly from Asia and Africa, grew. (Välimäki, 2018.)

Germany's migration history was shaped early by its post–World War II economic boom. In the 1960s and 1970s, labour shortages led to bilateral recruitment agreements with countries such as Italy, Turkey, and Yugoslavia, bringing in guest workers (Gastarbeiter) for industrial jobs. Although intended as temporary, many—especially Turkish migrants—settled permanently. The 1973 oil crisis ended active recruitment, but family reunification increased. Germany also received refugees from Chile, and from 1978 onward, West Germany welcomed Vietnamese refugees. By the early 1980s, major migrant groups included Polish, Turkish, and Iranian nationals. In the 1980s, migration shifted toward ethnic German resettlers (Spätaussiedler) from Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, while refugees from Vietnam, Iran, and Turkey continued to arrive due to political unrest. East Germany hosted contract workers from socialist countries such as Vietnam and Mozambique. Toward the end of the decade, illegal migration from East Germany to the West increased. The 1990s saw diverse migration from Eastern Europe, primarily from Yugoslavia, Romania, and Bulgaria. In the 2000s, Germany formally recognized itself as a country of immigration. The liberalization of citizenship laws and the 2005 Immigration Act streamlined residence permits and emphasized integration. Migration was driven by EU expansion, with increasing numbers of workers arriving from Poland, Romania, and Bulgaria (Bundeszentrale für Politische Bildung).

Both Finland and Germany face similar challenges in organizing integration services, particularly in language training and employment support. In Finland, key areas for improvement include recognizing participants' competencies, enhancing information systems, and incorporating employers' perspectives. Language instruction should flexibly respond to individual learning needs and life situations (Shemeikka et al., 2021) and align with learners' skill levels and lived realities (Saarinen & Härmälä, 2012). This alignment should be informed by learners' perceptions of integration, especially their language learning experiences and social networks (Intke-Hernández, 2020; Kärkkäinen, 2017; Strömmer, 2017; Suni, 2011; Tarnanen et al., 2015; Pitkänen et al., 2019). Learners value both language proficiency and societal knowledge (Suoranta, 2011; Karinen et al., 2020) yet teaching highly specific professional vocabulary early on is often ineffective in heterogeneous groups, though such diversity can foster peer support (Shemeikka et al., 2021; Intke-Hernández, 2020). The need for linguistic support extends beyond formal language training (Vuori, 2015).

In Germany, targeted language courses are essential (de Pavia Lareiro, 2020), and interruptions do not necessarily indicate failure, as participants may return under different life circumstances (Homrighausen & Saif, 2021). Refugees show improved employment and income levels (Brücker et al., 2020) but face greater language challenges than other migrants (Fasani et al., 2020). Learning is often hindered by trauma, family separation, poor housing, low education, long waits for courses, shared accommodation, and uncertainty about residency rights (Fasani et al., 2020; Kosyakova et al., 2021; Tissot, 2021). Structured instruction supports slower learners and those without prior language skills (Kristen & Seuring, 2021), yet participation remains low among mothers with young children (Brücker et al., 2020) These developments in both migration and the associated educational challenges direct the discussion toward the specific timeframe and research context of this dissertation: integration training in Finland and Germany during the 2010s and 2020s.

2 Research context

2.1 Global mobilities to Europe in the 2010's and 2020's

This research project is anchored in an era of global mobilities shaped by major displacement events, notably the Syrian civil war and the Russian invasion of Ukraine. During the peak year of 2015, Finland received approximately 32,500 asylum applications, primarily from Iraq, Afghanistan, and Somalia (Finnish Immigration Service [Migri], 2020). In 2022, around 43,000 Ukrainians applied for temporary protection (Migri, 2022). In contrast, Germany received 1.5 million asylum seekers between 2014 and 2016, mainly from Syria, Afghanistan, and Iraq (Brücker et al., 2019), and approximately one million Ukrainian refugees in 2022 (Deutsche Welle, 2022).

This influx has contributed to growing diversity, reshaping demographic profiles and forming the backdrop for this dissertation. These mobilities also affect everyday well-being, manifesting in challenges related to housing markets, childcare availability, and interactions with integration services (Tissot, 2021, pp. 3–5).

In the 2020s, a common theme across Europe has been the aging population, which has prompted labor shortages. The arrival of Ukrainian refugees following the 2022 invasion added to existing migration flows. Countries of departure represent a mix of individuals seeking economic opportunities and fleeing political instability. Migration from Eastern Europe has primarily been economically motivated, while migrants from South Asia and East or Southeast Asia have sought better economic prospects and family reunification. (Immigrant Invest, 2025.)

Many of the countries of origin are represented among the individuals contributing to the empirical data in this dissertation. Common influences in both Finland and Germany include the increasing politicization of immigration, which has become a central issue in national elections, affecting social cohesion and policymaking. Education has emerged as a significant area of focus within integration efforts.

As shown in the previous overview, Finland and Germany have both received migrants and refugees from similar regions, albeit in different volumes. While not

exhaustive, the following summary (Table 2) illustrates key differences between the two research settings.

Table 2. Current Migration Facts: Finland and Germany.

TOPIC	FINLAND	GERMANY
Total immigrant population	2025: Approximately 386,000 people (about 6.97% of the total population) (World Population Review)	2025: Approximately 15.8 million (about 18.8% of the total population) (World Population Review)
New migrants	2024: ca. 64 000 (Statistics Finland)	2024: ca. 1,7 million (German Federal Statistical Office)
Net migration	2024: +47,051 people (Statistics Finland)	2024: +400,000 people (German Federal Statistical Office)
Overview of migration	2024: Family ca. 18,000, temporary protection and studying ca. 12 000, Work 11,000 (EMN, 2024)	2022: Free mobility ca. 328,000, labour migration 87,000, family members (incl. accompanying family) 100,000, humanitarian 147,000 (OECD, 2024)
Countries of origin	2024-2025: Ukraine, Russia, India (Statistics Finland)	2024: Syria, Afghanistan, Turkey 2025: Turkey, Ukraine, Syria (German Federal Statistical Office)

2.2 Integration Training in Finland and Germany: 2010s and 2020s

This section focuses on integration training and its characteristics in the research settings of Finland and Germany. Integration policies have traditionally been a pressing issue for larger cities. However, in Germany, asylum seekers are now distributed across the country to prevent their concentration in a few locations (Tjaden & Spörlein, 2023). From a European perspective, both Finland and Germany have highly autonomous local governments, and this autonomy is increasing (Ladner et al., 2016; Kettunen, 2021). Migration services, including integration training, are organized by both private institutions and public providers—such as liberal adult education institutions in Finland and the *Volkshochschule* in Germany.

In both settings, language education is guided by the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* (CEFR) (Council of Europe, 2001), which standardizes course content, structure, and proficiency levels across Europe. The CEFR's B1 level (independent user) has become a central benchmark for second language acquisition in integration contexts (Latomaa et al., 2013; Tarnanen & Huhta, 2008). Second language teachers in both countries operate within broader European policy frameworks, such as the *Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion*

2021–2027 (European Commission, 2020b), which outlines strategic goals for integration services, including education.

At the national level, integration training is shaped by distinct curricular and institutional structures. In Finland, the *National Core Curriculum for Integration Training for Adult Migrants* by the Finnish National Agency for Education plays a central role in guiding pedagogical practices and holds legal status (Pöyhönen & Tarnanen, 2015). It has been recognized as a strength of Finnish integration policy (MEAE, 2013), and its revised version is expected to further influence future developments (Ronkainen & Suni, 2019). In Germany, the *Rahmencurriculum* (Core Curriculum) primarily informs the development of language tests, textbooks, and course structures, but has less direct influence on pedagogical practice (BMI/Kaufmann, 2016).

The scale and funding of integration training differ significantly between the two countries. Both have experienced budget cuts. In Finland, state funding for integration training has ranged from approximately €82 million (National Audit Office of Finland, 2018, p. 11) to a proposed budget of around €68 million for 2024 (Finnish Ministry of Finance, 2024). In Germany, a reserve of approximately €720 million was allocated for integration training in 2019 (Federal Ministry of the Interior [BMI], 2019), but the €1.1 billion earmarked for 2025 is set to be reduced to €500 million (BMI, 2024).

Integration training is typically offered by both private institutions and public providers—such as Finland's liberal adult education institutions and Germany's *Volkshochschule*—and usually lasts around eight months. In Germany, an additional orientation course covers topics such as the legal system, history, and culture. In Finland, the course includes social, cultural, and life-management skills, as well as vocational planning, including a work placement period.

The following table summarizes key aspects of integration training in the two research settings: Finland and Germany.

Table 3. Comparison of Integration Training: Finland and Germany.

TOPIC	FINLAND	GERMANY
Governance structure	The Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment sets national policies. Municipalities implement and coordinate services locally (2025). Employment Services refer unemployed immigrants to training.	BAMF centrally manages the system. The Federal Ministry of the Interior oversees policy and funding. Certified course providers follow a national curriculum.
Key features	An initial assessment informs a personalized integration plan. Municipalities report outcomes to the Ministry; national evaluations are conducted periodically.	BAMF provides a standardized curriculum: 600 hours of language + 100 hours of civic orientation. Placement tests assign course types. BAMF conducts audits, evaluations, and teacher training.
Course srtucture	Finnish or Swedish language. Cultural and Social Orientation, Career Guidance and Professional Planning, Assessment and Individual Plans, Multilingual Civic Orientation	German language. Orientation course. Specialized Courses, Support Services: career counseling, job placement assistance, social services Final Exam for course completion and residence permit extensions.
Related legislation	*Act on the Promotion of Immigrant Integration* (reform in January 2025) Supporting laws: Aliens Act, Act on Public Employment and Business Services, Non-discrimination Act, Municipality of Residence Act	*Ordinance on Integration Courses* (part of the Residence Act, *Aufenthaltsgesetz*) (updated in November 2024) Supporting laws: Residence Act (AufenthG), BAMF Guidelines, Recognition Act
Funding	Public funding from Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment. Municipalities are primarily responsible for financing integration services. Employment Services co-finance training for unemployed immigrants.	Federal Government, primarily through the Federal Ministry of the Interior (BMI) and Federal Ministry for Migration and Refugees (BAMF). In 2025, Integration course budget in 2025 over €1 billion

The terminology commonly used to describe migration and integration training often emphasizes structural or policy-oriented aspects. This dissertation, however, focuses on the human dimension, specifically, the perspectives and lived experiences of individuals navigating post-migration life and participating in integration training in their everyday contexts. The following sections explore this perspective by presenting the theoretical frameworks and methodological premises of the study—an in-depth, experience-centered approach to human interaction that forms the core of this work.

3 Theoretical overviews

3.1 Theoretical interest in practitioner perspectives

The original subtitle of this dissertation, *From Visions to Voices,* continues to capture the essence of the research project. This phrase reflects the central aim: to explore how everyday actors in language education—teachers and learners—perceive their roles within the contested framework of integration training. While structural indicators such as income, housing, education, and health offer valuable insights (Berliner Institut für empirische Migrationsforschung, 2020), individual experiences are often overlooked in policy and economic analyses.

As elaborated in Sub-study 2, the voices of practitioners are particularly relevant in educational research, where public discourse is frequently dominated by political narratives. A more nuanced understanding is also needed of how teachers' experiences intersect with classroom interaction. To this end, the study employed in-depth interviews and qualitative observations, fostering trust and enabling sincere dialogue with participants.

This work complements large-scale register studies by emphasizing the lived experiences of language teachers and learners. It sheds light on the conditions shaping teaching, learners' motivations, and how individuals make sense of their experiences within specific social and institutional contexts. In this approach, the researcher's positionality throughout the different phases of the study is central. When acknowledged and transparently reported—as will be done below—the research process is as rigorous as any other form of data analysis.

The nuanced understanding of human interaction and learning situations, derived from interpreting participants' accounts of everyday phenomena and social environments, provides a strong foundation for engaging with theoretical concepts and frameworks, as demonstrated across the three sub-studies. Routine classroom interactions, often overlooked, emerged as significant in Sub-study 3. While no single moment was striking, subtle instances of human connection revealed the importance of researching the everyday. As Lefebvre (2000/1971, p. 31) notes, everyday life is shaped not only by family and friendships but also by institutional relationships that define our shared humanity.

Everyday activity, though less visible than structural or political dimensions, is equally valuable for theoretical analysis (Gardiner, 2004). The findings aim to inform integration education providers, EU policy development, language teacher education (both pre- and in-service), and adult education across Europe—not only in Finland and Germany. Based on these premises, the following sections will elaborate on the key theoretical ideas for the dissertation: the interest in everyday life, social spaces, and the theoretical value of comparing ethnographies of these two contexts.

Table 4. Key Theoretical Elements of the Dissertation.

KEY CONCEPT	DEFINITION	SUB-STUDIES 1, 2, 3
Everyday life	Everyday life is shaped not only by family and friendships but also by institutional relationships that define our shared humanity (Lefebvre 2000/1971, p.31)	Interaction influences multidimensional well-being.
Social spaces	Social space is not static but actively produced (Lefebvre, 1991)	Social spaces are actively produced through the interactions of individuals.
Theoretical grounding of comparative ethnography	The comparative logic works as a guiding principle for interpreting social phenomena and may lead to new theoretical contributions (Simmons and Smith, 2019).	Context matters, and its comparison can be approached as a methodological discovery.

3.2 Understanding everyday social spaces through comparison

This dissertation examines an educational practice situated within the context of language learning and shaped by the experiences of those engaged in the process—specifically, learning a new language to enable communication in a new living environment after relocation. Central to this inquiry is the question of how everyday life is experienced and how well-being is fostered within it.

A core element of this research is the role of interaction in well-being, explored through the concept of multidimensional well-being in Sub-study 2, which combines significant frameworks by Erik Allardt (1976) and Felicia Huppert et al. (2009). Language plays a crucial role in this process: our ability to communicate feelings, needs, and skills, and to demonstrate understanding of others—our interlocutors—within our immediate circles and beyond, where our everyday lives unfold. Today, this social space—a concept that will be used and further defined in this dissertation—is multilingual, multicultural, and in near-constant flux due to cross-border and global mobilities, as described particularly in Sub-study 2. In Sub-study

1, language teachers raise the temporal perspective of migration and its influence on integration efforts from the 1980s to the 2010s, situating this discussion within the social space conceptualized as the 'European education space'.

While human movement is not unique to the present era, its scale has increased, partly due to technological developments. These changes have altered how we experience encounters and interactions. Human interaction itself remains fundamentally the same, but technological tools have expanded our awareness of other people's everyday lives beyond our own, as argued in Sub-study 3.

Theoretically, this line of thought forms the overarching framework of the dissertation. Epistemologically, the dissertation values the knowledge generated through research on the everyday practice of an educational activity. As the empirical approach will show, the work is grounded in a strong interest in the everyday. Ontologically, the world under investigation is perceived as a social space shaped through interaction with the environment and with others. This social space is actively produced, as Henri Lefebvre (1991) argues.

To better understand the world we live in, this research adopts an ethnographic approach to studying everyday life in relation to education. Ethnographic research involves "immersion in the place and lives of people under study" (Wedeen, 2010, in Simmons & Smith, 2019). This dissertation seeks to understand the lived experiences of interlocutors, including how they make sense of their worlds (ibid.). Importantly, in seeking to understand a world in motion—where people across countries and continents interact both in person and through technological tools—the scope of research must be broadened. Therefore, this dissertation employs a comparative ethnographic approach. However, when comparing complex phenomena such as human interaction and language learning, it is essential to be sensitive to what and how comparison is conducted. One approach is to identify similarities in how people interact across different contexts, departing from the idea that what we all share is the social space of everyday life.

These elements form the theoretical framework of this dissertation, which will be further elaborated through its main concepts: an interest in everyday life, the social space produced through interaction, and the theoretical premises of comparative ethnography as a means of investigating these phenomena.

3.2.1 Everyday life

Although Henri Lefebvre's writings were introduced only in the third sub-study of this dissertation, they offer conceptual insights that ultimately frame the entire research project. A key reference in this regard is Michael E. Gardiner's (2004) work, which discusses Lefebvre's conception of everyday life and its study through

critique. In what follows, I draw on Gardiner's discussion to outline Lefebvre's ideas that inform the theoretical framework of this dissertation.

As noted earlier, this dissertation focuses on the everyday—specifically, language teaching and learning for everyday communication among individuals who have relocated. Lefebvre's approach resonates strongly with how I perceive the value of researching the everyday in this project. According to Gardiner's (2004) interpretation, Lefebvre views daily life as a form of "everyday utopianism," where routine and creativity, the trivial and the extraordinary, are not opposed but productively intertwined. In other words, studies of everyday life are concerned not only with "memorable, highly visible or extraordinary events of the sociocultural world" but also with less visible phenomena. For example, in this dissertation, classroom interactions that might appear casual or scientifically insignificant at first glance become, through theoretical lenses such as Lefebvre's theory of moments (2002/1961) and the production of social space (1991/1974), critical empirical data for understanding educational practice.

In the context of this dissertation, this theoretical framing leads to a central argument: when Gardiner discusses Lefebvre's "everyday utopia" as the interplay of routine and festival, the core of this study emerges not as a search for festival but as a desire for routine. Relocating to a new environment and acquiring a new language constitutes a profound disruption; thus, the ultimate aim of language education may be understood as restoring routine to adult learners' lives.

Similarly, findings from the first sub-study indicate that language teachers also value routine over exception or challenge in their daily practice, as stability enables them to support learners effectively. From this perspective, the practical activity examined in this dissertation—particularly from the learners' standpoint—fundamentally aims to re-establish the unexceptional rhythm of everyday life, reducing the cognitive and emotional demands of daily functioning. This interpretation is further supported by the second sub-study, which demonstrates that adult learners' multidimensional well-being is closely linked to their language proficiency in the new environment.

Overall, at the core of this dissertation is the idea that everyday life is profoundly connected to all human activities; it is the "connective tissue" of the social world. Lefebvre's "moments" are organically linked to everyday life and intensify its "vital productivity." As Lefebvre (2002, p. 351) observes, "The moment is born of the everyday and within the everyday. From here it draws its nourishment and its substance." These moments can be captured, as demonstrated in the third sub-study of this dissertation, within the social spaces of language education, which I will describe next.

3.2.2 Social spaces

A central concept and interpretative framework for understanding social phenomena (Larsen & Beech, 2014)—such as language learning and interaction in this dissertation—is the idea of social space. This concept is elaborated in detail in the third sub-study. As discussed in the following section, the overarching theoretical and methodological approach of this dissertation—interpretive and comparative ethnography—rests on the premise that context matters, and that context, in this case social space, is actively produced (Simmons & Smith, 2019; Wedeen, 2009).

The idea of social space is key because, as Lefebvre (1991, p. 288) argues, space is continuously produced through dynamic processes. For Lefebvre, space must be understood not only as a concrete material object but also as ideological, socially constructed, and subjective (Larsen & Beech, 2014). Subjectively, social space constitutes the environment of the group and the individual within it; it is the horizon at the center of which they position themselves and which they inhabit. The extent of this horizon varies across groups according to their situation and activities. [xx] Social space consists of a relatively dense fabric of networks and channels. This fabric is an integral part of everyday life (Lefebvre, 2002, p. 231).

Although this dissertation focuses primarily on social space rather than social time (Lefebvre, 2002, p. 231), the third sub-study incorporates Lefebvre's notion of moments, which implicitly relates to time in a non-chronological sense. In this way, the dissertation follows Lefebvre's principle of not privileging time over space (Larsen & Beech, 2014) while still acknowledging both dimensions. To unpack this, I briefly refer to Lefebvre's distinction between social time and biological, physiological, and physical time scales.

Lefebvre's ideas on cyclical and linear time scales offer theoretical inspiration for future research and support a holistic understanding of everyday life, which is central for this dissertation. Cyclical rhythms reflect organic flows and movements of nature, while linear rhythms are defined by repetition and regular intervals (Lefebvre, 1996, p. 231, in Gardiner, 2004). Cyclical rhythms stem from natural processes—growth, death, rebirth—whereas linear rhythms relate to knowledge, reason, and technological progress. Interactions between these rhythms form the texture of everyday life (Lefebvre, 2002, pp. 231–232).

Although the primary focus here is on social space, references to everyday routines implicitly embed notions of social time. Each group has its own tempo, varying between work and life outside work, creating a multiplicity of social timescales (Lefebvre, 2002, p. 232). In this dissertation, language education exemplifies a more linear rhythm—structured and institutional—while learners' lived experiences reflect cyclical rhythms tied to emotions, biological states, and life stages. These rhythms together shape the *everyday life* of language education.

Within the social space of language education, Lefebvre's triad—spatial practice, representations of space, and representational spaces—is particularly relevant, as empirically applied in the third sub-study. In brief, these three dimensions are defined as follows. Spatial practice refers to the material routines of everyday life—the physical use of space and commonsense perceptions. Representations of space denote the dominant spatial logic conceptualized through plans, statistics, and documents produced by professionals such as administrators and researchers. Representational spaces are directly experienced and imagined by inhabitants, overlaying physical space with symbolic meaning through images, symbols, and cultural signs. This triad conceptualizes how space is socially constructed and experienced through a complex interplay of perception, conception, and lived reality. (Lefebvre, 1991, pp. 38–40.)

This "complex interplay" resonates with the core of this dissertation: comparing human interaction in two educational settings. The aim is to learn more by comparing educational spaces as social spaces. Given the complexity of human interaction and learning, a comparative ethnographic approach requires not only methodological description but also theoretical grounding. In this dissertation, the focus is not only on *how* the research is conducted but also on *why* this interpretive angle has been chosen to study the social phenomenon of adult migrants' and refugees' language education.

3.2.3 Theoretical grounding of comparative ethnography

As the third and final component of the overarching theoretical framework of this dissertation, the approach of comparative ethnography will be elaborated specifically from a theoretical perspective. This approach will also be revisited in Section XX when discussing the overview of the analytical methods employed in this work. Comparative ethnography refers to ethnographic research that explicitly and intentionally builds an argument through the analysis of two or more cases by moving back and forth between them to identify similarities or differences in processes, meanings, concepts, or events, ultimately serving broader theoretical arguments (Simmons & Smith, 2019). Focusing on the choice of comparative ethnography as a theoretical lens, it can be argued that this approach is valuable for the research design because it may reveal new and distinctive insights that sharpen a study's theoretical contribution and enhance its impact on knowledge in the field (Simmons & Smith, 2019).

Theoretically, as noted in Table 4 above, the comparative logic functions as a guiding principle for interpreting social phenomena such as cultural variation, power relations, or social structures. It helps conceptualize how local practices relate to broader systems (Simmons & Smith, 2019). To further elaborate on why

comparative ethnography was chosen, the following arguments—interpreted from Simmons and Smith (2019)—can be outlined: It offers a way to demonstrate how research findings from one case "enter into dialogue" with findings from other research contexts. Comparison may lead to insights that would have been overlooked if only one case were examined. Reflecting on the sub-studies, the stage of comparison—although challenging due to the complexity of qualitative data—enabled a deeper understanding than would have been possible without it. For example, when analyzing notions such as felt challenges, experiences of human interaction, or atmospheres of empathy, comparing two cases in different contexts clarified conceptually how the findings "spoke" to each other.

Moreover, given the qualitative nature of the data and the relatively small datasets, the opportunity to compare two ethnographies helps address critiques regarding the representativeness of a single case. The comparison also facilitated clearer identification of the phenomena under study and highlighted contrasts in practices across field sites. Looking ahead, similar designs shared among multiple researchers could create opportunities for scholarly collaboration, generating new research questions and theoretical innovations. Finally, as Simmons and Smith (2019) argue, comparative ethnography may make ethnographic studies more accessible to scholars who do not typically employ the method. In sum, with comparative ethnography, the goal is to view social phenomena in a new light—an aim that leads directly to the methodological premises of this dissertation.

4 Methodological premises

4.1 Conception of the human being

When beginning to investigate the individual experiences of research participants in the second sub-study, it was necessary to define a conceptual approach to the human being that would serve as a foundation. What kind of understanding of the human being guides the individual and their experience as the subject of this study? A model that resonated with my approach—focusing on individuals navigating changes in daily life, where language proficiency evokes both positive and negative emotions—was Lauri Rauhala's holistic view of the human being. In particular, Rauhala's (2005; 2014) concept of the *situational adjustment circuit* proved pivotal. According to this view, a person is a holistic entity—embodied, conscious, and embedded in a unique situational context—within which a dynamic interplay of positive and negative factors unfolds. For example, fear may be alleviated in the presence of others (Rauhala, 2014, pp. 46, 60–61, 114–115).

The situational adjustment circuit helps to structure how the world becomes meaningful to a person in their specific situation (Backmann, 2016, p. 94). This dynamic understanding of the human being provided a fitting starting point for exploring individuals' experiences of language and its learning, and how these experiences affect well-being. Although this conceptual foundation remains implicit in the dissertation, it played an important role in shaping the analysis and findings—for instance, in understanding how well-being develops through both positive and negative language experiences.

4.2 Researcher's self-reflection and ethics

The researcher's positionality influences research outcomes (Åkerlind, 2007, p. 323). In this dissertation, I conducted ethnographic fieldwork as a Finnish researcher fluent in German, with prior cultural knowledge relevant to the context. Having previously been both a language learner in a multicultural migrant group (mid-1990s) and a language instructor in Finnish adult education, I approached current European integration training systems as an outsider (Delamont & Atkinson, 2018,

p. 71). This blend of insider experience and outsider perspective proved valuable for comparative educational research (Judge, 2000, p. 155).

In the first sub-study, my background in language teaching supported the co-construction of a conceptual framework with teacher participants (Säljö, 1997), enhancing shared understanding (Orgill, 2012). In the second sub-study, I drew on personal experiences as an adult migrant in Germany and a parent in Finland. Familiarity with participants' cultural backgrounds and first languages aided interpretation. In Finland, participants spoke Spanish, Thai, German, and German/Twi; interviews were conducted in Spanish, English, and German. In Germany, participants had more diverse linguistic backgrounds: Arabic, French, Russian, Ukrainian, Bulgarian, and Spanish, with conversations held in German, English, and Spanish. While some Finnish participants with German as a first language also spoke English, most others reported only their first language and the Finnish they were learning.

In Germany, participants were notably plurilingual, with some speaking up to six languages, including Arabic, English, Turkish, Thai, Portuguese, Kazakh, Russian, Greek, French, Polish, Kirundi, Kinyarwanda, Kiswahili, and Lingala. I highlight this diversity to reflect critically on my researcher position. While I could communicate fluently in English, German, and Spanish, languages shared with some participants, many spoke additional, often non-European languages. My language skills were central to the research design and enabled meaningful engagement, especially with Spanish-speaking participants. However, I acknowledge that these languages were not necessarily always the most comfortable for all participants. My background as a trained translator supported the multilingual nature of the interviews, allowing for careful translation of data excerpts and capturing subtle nuances in participants' expressions.

In the third sub-study, which focused on classroom observation, my engagement drew more from personal experience as a former participant in German-as-a-second-language education than from my professional background as a language teacher in Finland. Positioned among the students and following instruction at their pace, I spoke little and felt more like a peer than a colleague. This dynamic surfaced in subtle moments—such as silently acknowledging a fellow student checking a word on their phone—where I responded as a participant rather than an observer.

While my experiential background did not encompass all gendered experiences or the impacts of severe trauma, I was deeply moved by the personal nature of many participants' accounts. Their openness suggested a sense of safety within the interview setting. I remained attentive to the topics they chose to discuss, even when diverging from the interview guide, allowing their narratives to unfold on their own terms. Ethical integrity was maintained throughout, in line with the European GDPR Association Union's research data policy. The extent of personal disclosure was

determined by each participant, and all data excerpts were anonymized to protect sensitive information (Tolonen & Palmu, 2007, pp. 101–102).

4.3 Comparative ethnography as discovery

A central theme throughout this dissertation—and across all three sub-studies—has been the challenge of comparing the two data sets from Finland and Germany in a way that respects their qualitative nature. Unlike large-scale quantitative data, which lends itself to direct comparison, qualitative material requires a more nuanced approach. The aim was to present both the differences and similarities between the research settings and the data they generated, while remaining sensitive to the contextual richness of each.

This comparative task proved both intellectually stimulating and methodologically complex. To address this, the perspective offered by Simmons and Smith (2019) was particularly resonant. They describe the research process as a form of discovery, arguing that a case is not a pre-existing entity—such as "Finland" or "Germany"—but rather an analytic construct that emerges through the research itself. This view encouraged openness to emergent concepts, meanings, and dynamics, allowing for a more nuanced understanding of the phenomena under study.

The international comparison in this dissertation was designed to generate insights that might remain unnoticed within a single context. As Simmons and Smith (2019) suggest, comparative ethnography offers distinct advantages over non-comparative studies, deepening our understanding of global systems and the actors within them. Importantly, this discovery-oriented methodological approach emphasizes *processes and practices* as the primary units of analysis, rather than fixed outcomes. From my perspective, this approach reflects the three ways of conducting comparison in this dissertation.

The foundations of comparative ethnography form part of this dissertation both as a theoretical perspective—the "why"—and as a methodological approach, as well as a lens for understanding the analysis methods employed in the three studies. Accordingly, the subject of comparative ethnography is discussed within the theoretical frameworks of this dissertation in Section 3 and will be further elaborated in connection with the overview of analysis methods in Section 6. Building on this foundation, the following section introduces the ethnographic research conducted in Finland and Germany, outlining the types of data collected, the preparatory phases leading to the fieldwork, and the specific datasets that constitute the primary material for this dissertation.

5 Ethnography in Finland and Germany

5.1 Overview of data and data collection

This dissertation is based on ethnographically oriented fieldwork conducted in Finland and Germany. The term ethnographically oriented acknowledges that, while data collection followed ethnographic principles and was highly intensive, the field studies themselves were relatively short. The dissertation consists of data collected during two field studies: one in Finland during the summer of 2016, and another in Germany at the end of 2017. Each phase lasted approximately two weeks.

Selection of research sites

Preparations for the field studies began with my identification of representative education providers, whom I contacted through established specialist networks in Finland and newly formed ones in Germany. The selected organizations were experienced providers of labor market integration training in large urban centers (cities with over 100,000 inhabitants) and had more than 40 years of experience in adult education and offered instruction in Finnish and German as a second language, aligned with the objectives of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (Council of Europe, 2001). They were major education providers: one a foundation-funded organization, the other a limited liability company (GmbH).

Recruiting participants for interviews

After receiving written consent from organizational leaders, I contacted potential teacher participants, either via email or in person, to inquire about their willingness to participate. Selection was primarily based on participants' interest, while also considering variation in their educational and professional backgrounds. At the time of the interviews, all participants were teaching Finnish or German as a second language in integration courses. In Finland, all teachers taught in their mother tongue, whereas in Germany, teachers' native languages varied.

The second phase involved recruiting student participants, supported by the teachers, using purposive homogeneous sampling. In Finland, participants were recently arrived migrants; in Germany, they included both recently arrived and settled migrants and refugees. All learners were attending either Finnish or German as a second language courses, or professional language courses (German Berufssprachkurs). Five individuals were interviewed in Finland and nine in Germany. Participants were selected based on their interest and ability to converse with the researcher in Spanish, English, or German. The learners had arrived in Finland for various reasons, often accompanying Finnish partners or spouses. In Germany, migration reasons included humanitarian protection, employment, or a spouse's studies. Participants came from Ecuador, Argentina, Thailand, Germany, Syria, Cameroon, Kazakhstan, Ukraine, Bulgaria, Lebanon, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and Spain. All were of working age (20–64 years) and represented both service and knowledge-based professions.

In total, I interviewed thirteen teachers and fourteen learners. I also held informal conversations with organizational leaders; while some of these were recorded, they served as background information to contextualize the study rather than as primary data for analysis.

Observation data

The work at the research site was grounded in an analysis of the Core Curriculum for Adult Migrants' Language Education (Finnish National Agency for Education, [FNAE], 2012), which provided a structured foundation for identifying relevant curricular themes to guide data collection. These themes were reflected in both the observation schedules and the interview guides (Attachments 1 and 2). The observation phase focused on the everyday practices of the educational organizations, with particular attention to language instruction across different stages of the program and among learner groups with varying proficiency levels. Establishing trust with both students and teachers was essential, as many of the same individuals were later interviewed. I deliberately adopted the role of a fellow student rather than that of a researcher evaluating their activities. This approach facilitated rapport and openness. The decision to take unstructured notes proved effective, allowing for the capture of rich, detailed observations, including sequences of interactions and dialogue.

The observation phase was initially planned to follow structured protocols, but the first classes demonstrated that taking free-form notes would better capture the interaction flow and the atmosphere rather than attempting to quantify aspects of instruction (see Walford, 2009). Writing notes seemed more discreet when sitting among the participants, as opposed to filling out official-looking forms. This verbal

data set consisted of 118 handwritten A5 pages of descriptive field notes (Jeffrey, 2018, p. 113) gathered during 54 classroom sessions. This material contributes to Sub-studies 1 and 2, where the observations laid the groundwork for interviews with teachers and students. It also serves as the primary data source for Sub-study 3.

Interview data

Interviews with teacher participants were conducted in their working languages—Finnish or German. To familiarize myself with the instructional setting, I observed teachers during their workday prior to the interviews. These classroom observations informed the interview process, enabling both myself as the interviewer and the participants to reference shared experiences. Each interview lasted approximately 60–90 minutes and followed a semi-structured format designed to capture personal experiences (Marton, 1997, p. 99). To foster a dialogic interview approach (Marton, 1997; Säljö, 1994), I shared relevant professional knowledge and experiences with the participants. An identical set of guiding questions, based on themes from the Finnish Core Curriculum for Adult Migrants (FNAE, 2012), was used in both case settings. The interview questions are presented in Annex 1. Interviews concluded with questions about participants' hopes for their professional future and development, using the future dialog method to encourage imaginative and positive reflections (Arnkil, 2006). Upon completion, I transcribed the interviews and translated selected excerpts into English.

Student interviews were conducted on-site at the respective organizations. These oral interviews were held in the participants' first languages or a language of their choice, enabling them to speak freely and reflect on their experiences (Smith & Nizza, 2022, p. 19). Depending on the strongest shared language between the participant and myself as the researcher–interviewer, interviews were conducted in Finnish, English, Spanish, or German. These shared language skills fostered a trusting environment, which was especially important for students to express themselves without the constraints of limited language proficiency. Anonymity and sensitivity to emotional responses, particularly when discussing difficult or painful experiences, helped ensure a safe and supportive setting. Additionally, I argue that conducting interviews in languages other than my first may have helped balance the power dynamics between researcher and interviewee (Tolonen & Palmu, 2007).

Artifacts

Additionally, I collected artifacts such as samples of teaching materials and took photographs of the teaching environments. I participated in the activities of the educational institutions in a diverse manner at their various locations and recorded

my observations in my field diary. Such situations included, for example, discussions in the teachers' lounge, the weekly meeting of teachers, lunch conversations with the institution's staff, information sessions for students, entrance exam situations, and informal hallway discussions with students.

Additionally, I conducted group interviews with students during teaching sessions, taking notes on discussions that naturally emerged under the teacher's guidance. This format allowed students who lacked time or confidence for individual interviews to share their experiences. Unrecorded in-class discussions also provided insights from students with whom a shared language was insufficient for arranging individual interviews, including participants from Somalia, Syria, Algeria, Iran, Russia, Iraq, and Afghanistan.

Although these artifacts, including the group discussions, were not analyzed in the sub-studies, they contributed to a deeper understanding of the organization's roles and practices—a particularly valuable perspective at the German research site, where the context was less familiar to me.

5.2 Field study data in Finland

At the Finnish research site, I observed 12 lessons and conducted 13 interviews (five teachers, five participants, the Head of Pedagogy, and the Head of the Organization). Of these, 10 interviews—five with teachers and five with participants—were used as empirical data for the sub-studies. The classroom observation data consisted of field notes, learning materials, and photographs, while the interview data comprised audio recordings and written notes. The different data sets are described in more detail below.

Classroom observation

In Finland, I observed instruction in five different student groups during their workday (08:15–13:15). The course types included integration training and a literacy course. The integration training groups were at different stages of their programs (e.g., 3rd and 7th month) and progressed at varying paces according to the learners' study skills: slow, normal, or fast.

Interviews with teachers

The teacher participants' background information, including their education and professional experience, is described in detail in the first sub-study: *Language Teachers' Accounts of Challenges in Two European Settings of Integration Training*. Table 4 below presents the interview details with the teachers. All interviews were conducted in Finnish.

Table 5. Data in Finland: Recorded Interviews with Teachers.

TEACHERS	COURSE (OBSERVED)	DURATION
1 (M)	integration training, normal pace	91 min.
2 (M)	integration training, fast pace	77 min.
3 (F)	integration training, normal	44 min.
4 (F)	integration training, normal	71 min.
5 (F)	integration training, slow (literacy)	64 min.

Interviews with students

The learner participants' background information, including their language skills and interview languages, are described in detail in the second sub-study: *Experiences of Language in Migration: Communicating Well-being in Finland and Germany*. Table 5 below presents the interview details with the teachers.

Table 6. Data in Finland: Recorded Interviews with Students.

PARTICIPANTS	COURSE	COUNTRY OF DEPARTURE	INTERVIEW LANGUAGE	DURATION
1 (F)	Intergation training	Germany	German	72 min.
2 (M)	Integration training (mid)	Argentina	Spanish	65 min.
3 (F)	Integration training (mid)	Ecuador	Spanish	76 min.
4 (F)	Integration training (mid)	Germany/Ghana	German	40 min.
5 (M)	Integration training (slow)	Thailand	English	63 min.

Discussions with organizational leadership

As part of my site visit, I held background discussions with the Head of Pedagogy and the Head of Organization. These conversations were not part of the official data collection but served to inform my understanding of the organizational context. I clarified this to both individuals prior to recording, and they provided their consent. In my meeting with the Head of Pedagogy, we discussed current migration themes in Finland, the integration training provider's perspective on the present situation and future developments (e.g., competition, national policy conditions), the organization's pedagogical strengths, and the political climate surrounding migration and integration. We also explored trends in working life and future scenarios in Germany and the EU. This discussion lasted approximately one hour. My conversation with the Head of Organization focused on similar themes, including migration in Finland, the management perspective on national and European-level

steering (e.g., Finnish National Agency for Education, European Council), the organization's strengths and competitive position regionally and nationally, and broader political and labor market trends in Germany and Europe.

Photographs

The photograph below exemplifies the casual photos I took at the research sites. I aimed to be discreet when capturing images; therefore, all photographs were taken either before or after class. This particular photo illustrates a typical classroom where the language courses took place.

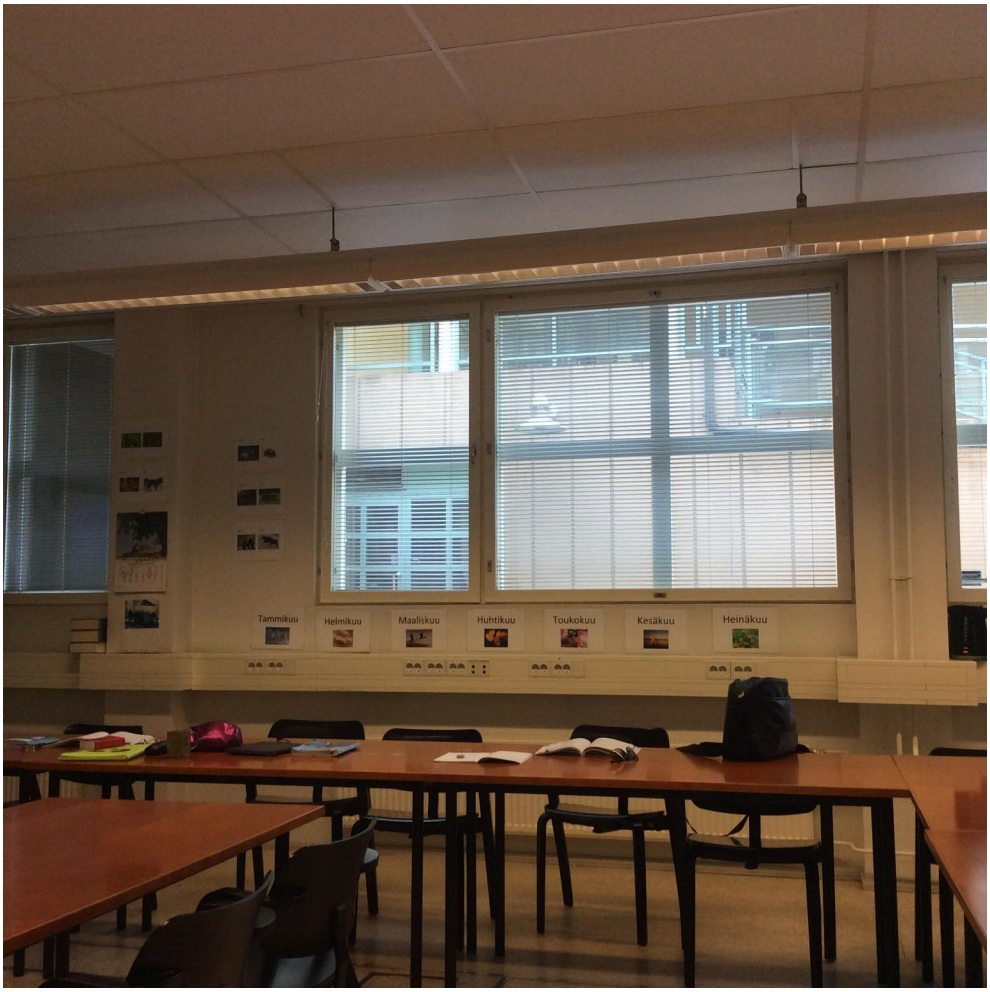

Photo: Miira Häkkinen

5.3 Field study data in Germany

At the German research site, the courses showed greater variation. The teachers worked at different stages (Modules 1, 2, 6, 9, and 10) of either an integration course, a literacy course (Alphabetisierungskurs), or an occupational language course (Berufssprachkurs). I observed 54 lessons (each 45 minutes long) across nine groups and conducted a total of 16 interviews. As in Finland, the data collection in Germany included field notes, recorded interviews, photographs, and samples of learning materials and official forms. The research data is described in more detail below.

Classroom observation

In the German research setting, I observed a total of 54 lessons across eight distinct groups at three different sites, representing four group types at various stages. Each student's day consisted of five 45-minute lessons, typically running from 08:30 or 09:00 until 12:45 or 13:15. The course types included: Alphabetisierungskurs (Modules 6 and 9), Berufssprachkurs (B2, B2, and B1) across three sites, Integrationskurs (Modules 1 and 4), Integrationskurs mit Alphabetisierung (Module 10). Additionally, I participated in *Einzelcoaching Deutsch für den Beruf* (C1) to observe and discuss this specific instructional format. Beyond classroom observation, I also monitored the initial assessment of two students at different levels (literacy course and B2) at the educational institution (test by the Goethe Institute). These sessions included both interviews and written components, involving the teacher and prospective student. Furthermore, I attended one weekly meeting of language teachers at one of the sites of the education provider.

Interviews with teachers

The table below details the content of the teacher interviews. The teacher participants' background information, including their education and professional experience, is described in the first sub-study: *Language Teachers' Accounts of Challenges in Two European Settings of Integration Training*. Table 4 below presents the interview details with the teachers. All interviews (377 min.) were conducted in German.

Table 7. Data in Germany: Recorded Interviews with Teachers.

TEACHERS	COURSE (OBSERVED)	DURATION
1 (F)	Alphakurs, Modul 9	50 min.
2 (F)	Alphakurs, Modul 6	46 min.
3 (M)	Berufssprachkurs (B2)	83 min.
4 (F)	Integrationskurs, Modul 4	60 min.
5 (F)	Integrationskurs, Modul 1	43 min.
6 (F)	Berufssprachkurs (B1)	38 min.
7 (F)	Integrationskurs mit Alphabetisierung, Modul 10	57 min.

Interviews with students

The learner participants' background information, including their language skills and interview languages, are described in detail in the second sub-study: *Experiences of Language in Migration: Communicating Well-being in Finland and Germany*. Table 7 below presents the interview details with 9 students totaling 200 min. of recordings.

Table 8. Data in Germany: Recorded Interviews with Students.

PARTICIPANTS	COURSE	COUNTRY OF DEPARTURE	INTERVIEW LANGUAGE	DURATION
1 (F)	Alphakurs, Modul 9	Syria	German	26 min.
2 (M)	Integrationskurs, Modul 4	Syria	English	13 min.
3 (M)	Integrationskurs, Modul 4 / group 1	Cameroon	English	11 min.
4 (M)	Integrationskurs, Modul 4 / group 2	Kazakhstan	German	17 min.
5 (F)	Integrationskurs, Modul 4 / group 2	Ukraina	German	37 min.
6 (M)	Berufssprachkurs (B1)	Bulgaria	German	23 min.
7 (M)	Berufssprachkurs (B1)	Libanon	German	21 min.
8 (M)	Berufssprachkurs (B1)	Democratic republic of Congo	English	24 min.
9 (M)	Berufssprachkurs (B2)	Spain	Spanish	28 min.

Discussions with organizational leadership

The first discussions were held with the Director of Integration Training. We addressed current immigration issues in Germany, the training provider's perspective on migration trends, and their implications for regional and national competition among education providers. We also discussed the pedagogical competencies required of language teachers and administrative staff in this context. The conversation extended to the political climate surrounding immigration and integration, as well as trends in the labor market in Germany and Europe. This initial meeting lasted approximately 60 minutes, during which I took free-form notes. A follow-up meeting was held toward the end of my site visit, lasting around 90 minutes, with 47 minutes recorded for reference in later publications. Subsequently, I met with the administrator responsible for integration training. We discussed administrative processes, stakeholder roles, challenges, areas for development, and future prospects. This meeting lasted approximately 90 minutes. I took notes and received relevant forms and brochures.

On another campus, I met with the Director of the Educational Institution and the Head of Integration Training. They outlined their institution's role within the state and compared the German and Finnish systems in terms of teacher training, PISA performance, pedagogical competence, and challenges. We also discussed the impact of immigration and integration training on daily educational practices. This 90-minute discussion was documented through free-form notes, later used as background material for the dissertation. A phone conversation with the Director of Development focused on the objectives of my research, initial impressions, and early comparisons between Finland and Germany. We also explored possibilities for future collaboration. This conversation lasted approximately 30 minutes, and I documented key points afterward. The final discussion involved the operational management team, including the responsible administrator and the head of the local office. We reviewed the objectives of my visit, discussed preliminary findings, and reflected on differences between Finland and Germany in terms of labor market changes, skills needs, and broader European trends. We concluded with joint reflections on development proposals. This final meeting, including farewells, lasted about 60 minutes and marked the conclusion of my data collection.

Photographs

This photograph illustrates a classroom at one of the German research sites.

Photo: Miira Häkkinen

6 Overview of methods of analysis

6.1 Ethnographic foundations

This dissertation applies the principles of ethnographic research, which Wedeen (2010, p. 257) describes as "immersion in the place and lives of people under study." The ethnographic approach adopted here is interpretive, emphasizing the meanings and experiences of people within their cultural contexts. It assumes that reality is socially constructed and that the researcher's interpretation plays a central role in analysis. Key elements include meaning, context, and reflexivity (Wedeen, 2010).

Interpretive ethnography goes beyond observing behavior; it seeks to interpret the symbolic and cultural dimensions of social life. Drawing on Clifford Geertz's concept of "thick description", it aims to understand how people make sense of power, ideology, and everyday practices. Reflexivity is essential, requiring the researcher to critically examine their own role and assumptions throughout the process. (Wedeen, 2009.)

Wedeen (2010) contrasts interpretive ethnography with positivist ethnography: the former focuses on meaning-making and context, while the latter seeks generalizable patterns. Interpretive ethnography values complexity, embraces ambiguity, and advocates methodological pluralism and interdisciplinary dialogue.

As noted earlier, data for this dissertation were collected through semi-structured interviews and classroom observations. Observations informed interviews and provided essential contextual understanding. Interviews that were conducted in Finnish, German, and Spanish were translated into English for reporting, requiring careful interpretation to preserve meaning.

6.2 Analytic approaches and shared principles

Table 8 below summarizes the different approaches to data analysis in this dissertation and is followed by a discussion of their core elements and interrelations.

Table 9. Overview of the Methods of Analysis.

COMPARATIVE ETHNOGRAPHY

Sub-study	ANALYSIS METHOD	INVESTIGATES	GOAL
1 Teacher accounts	phenomenography	qualitatively different ways of understanding a phenomenon	For the researcher to understand and make sense of experiences in a social context that is actively produced by interpreting and participating
2 Learner experiences	interpretative phenomenological analysis	personal lived experiences and its sense making	
3 Classroom interaction ethnography	directed content analysis	validating and extending an existing theory	

Building on this ethnographic foundation, each sub-study employs a distinct qualitative method aligned with its research focus.

Sub-study 1: Phenomenography identifies qualitatively different ways people understand or experience a phenomenon (Marton, 1981). Here, it analyzes language teachers' accounts as professionals, focusing on institutional language (Säljö, 1997). The analysis produced categories of description and an outcome space for datasets from Finland and Germany, compared using the framework of sayings, doings, and relatings (Schatzki, 2003, 2005; Kemmis et al., 2014).

Sub-study 2: Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) explores personal lived experience and sense-making (Smith et al., 2009; Smith & Nizza, 2022). It employs a double-hermeneutic approach: both participant and researcher interpret experiences. Translation and language differences required heightened interpretive rigor. Cross-case comparison highlighted variations in social support and contextual factors such as mono- or plurilingual environments.

Sub-study 3: Based on ethnographic observation data, directed content analysis begins with existing theory and seeks to validate or extend it (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). The analysis, including a comparison, draws on Lefebvre's theory of moments (2002/1961), the production of social space (1991/1974), and notions of atmospheres (Schmitz, 2023/2014). It examines how classroom interactions produce social space and moments of human connection.

All three methods share key priorities: understanding meaning from participants' perspectives, applying rigorous categorization to qualitative data drawn from small samples, maintaining reflexivity and positionality throughout the analysis, and recognizing language as central to interpreting culture (Wedeen, 2009). The following section presents the sub-studies.

7 Sub-studies: theory, analysis, main results

7.1 Overview of sub-studies and research questions

The three sub-studies are listed below by using the title of the corresponding publication and the research questions described in them.

Table 10. The Sub-study Publications with Research Questions.

SUB-STUDY	RESEARCH QUESTIONS
Language Teachers' accounts of challenges in two settings of European integration training	1. What are the qualitatively different ways in which second language teachers experience challenges in their daily work in Finland and Germany? 2. How do the discovered accounts contribute to the institutional discourses on adult migrants' language education in a European integration education framework?
Experiences of language in migration: Communicating well-being in Finland and Germany	1. How do participants experience learning the language of their new living environment? 2. How do these experiences reflect subjective well-being? 3. How do the findings vary in the two research contexts? 4. What are the implications for adult education practices?
Capturing moments in the social space of european integration training	1. How is social space produced in adult migrants and refugees' language education? 2. What reflections of Lefebvrian moments can be observed? 3. What can be learned from comparing two cases?

7.2 Sub-study 1: Teachers' accounts in Finland and Germany

The first sub-study of this dissertation examines the work of second language teachers within the context of integration training. The publication *Language Teachers' Accounts of Challenges in Two European Settings of Integration Training* explores existing research on language teachers involved in integration efforts across Europe. To contextualize the study, it analyzes integration policies and economic frameworks in Finland and Germany, drawing on academic literature and official reports. The concept of the "European education space" is also reviewed through relevant scholarly sources.

The study incorporates theoretical insights from Theodore Schatzki's (2002, 2010) site ontology, which provides a conceptual framework for comparing the two research contexts and understanding the situated nature of teachers' practices. It addresses two research questions:

1. What are the qualitatively different ways in which second language teachers experience challenges in their daily work in Finland and Germany?
2. How do these accounts differ between the two national contexts, and what are the implications for a European integration education framework?

7.2.1 European education space and site ontology

The theoretical approach of the first sub-study integrates the European education policy context with the ontological framework of social sites, contributing to a nuanced understanding of how integration through language education is shaped by structural conditions. Although the ideographic nature of the cases limits generalizability (Kallo, 2018), ontological concepts are employed to bridge the gap between descriptive analysis and practical application (see Penalva, 2019). This ontological "metadiscourse" facilitates cross-national dialogue between two complex and multidimensional integration systems.

Central to this framework is Schatzki's theory of social sites (2002, 2010), which, when applied to educational practice (Kemmis et al., 2014; Heikkinen et al., 2018), highlights the significance of context in social phenomena. It emphasizes the dynamic interplay between human practices, material arrangements, and temporal-spatial conditions (Schatzki, 2003, 2005). These dimensions of social practice—semantic, material, and relational—are interconnected across different spaces: Sayings in semantic space (language and meaning), Doings in physical space-time (activity and work), and Relatings in social space (solidarity and power) (Kemmis et al., 2014, pp. 31–34).

Second language teachers in both Finland and Germany operate within the policy frameworks of the European education space, guided by documents such as the *Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion 2021–2027* (European Commission, 2020b). Within the domain of language education, the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* (Council of Europe, 2001) defines target proficiency levels and informs curriculum development and assessment practices. The broader European discourse on skills development (e.g., European Commission, 2020c, 2020d; OECD, 2019, 2020) connects language education to wider societal goals, including labor market integration and skills matching. These objectives reflect a strategic response to demographic challenges, such as the need for a qualified workforce in aging societies.

In sum, this framework situates language education within European policy while using site ontology to reveal relational, material, and semantic dimensions of practice. It offers a lens to examine how language integration unfolds across contexts. By linking policy discourses with educational contexts, it offers a lens to examine how language integration is enacted across settings.

7.2.2 Phenomenographic approach

In the first sub-study, the notion of *institutional language* (Säljö, 1997) aligns with my observation that teacher participants tend to adopt a more collective and professional stance in interviews, whereas student participants often speak from a more personal or identity-based perspective. I chose phenomenography, which views experience as "collective but individually and culturally distributed" (Marton, 1996, p. 172), as it better suited this context than a strictly phenomenological approach. My perspective leans toward a discursive view, emphasizing the role of language in shaping experience (Säljö, 1994, 1997). Accordingly, I use the term *accounts* rather than *conceptions* to highlight how linguistic expression mediates experience.

The analysis involved two main stages for both data sets: (1) grouping accounts into categories of description, and (2) compiling a summarizing outcome space (Marton, 1986, pp. 33–34). These categories reveal qualitative variation in how a phenomenon is experienced or conceptualized. Such variations are assumed to be finite and relatively limited (e.g., Richardson, 1999), with conceptions being subjectively constructed and—crucially for my approach—most accessible through language (Svensson, 1997). The abstract outcome space provides a structured framework for validating the relationship between the two interview analyses. It ensures that the challenges in language teaching in Finland and Germany are qualitatively comparable, thereby supporting a meaningful scientific comparison

(see Melin, 2005, pp. 55–56). The concrete steps of the data analysis are described in the published sub-study.

7.2.3 Results

In Sub-study 1, Finnish second language teachers shared their perspectives on language education in the context of anticipated changes driven by increasing numbers of integration training participants. Their accounts reveal tensions between administrative bodies and practitioners, highlighting conflicting views on the goals and implementation of integration language education. The prospect of reform further intensified these challenges, as teachers navigated shifting expectations and organizational transitions. Their reflections often contrasted past and present working conditions, emphasizing a sense of professional confidence rooted in accumulated experience. The following examples illustrate the tensions and societal perspectives related to teachers' work, particularly in connection with labour market conditions.

Example from a category Perceptions of language education, Addressing a change

> The new teaching system required from us, this extremely fast language learning; well I don't know where it's based on, as it has not happened before either. We should increasingly be taking language learning towards working life, and I see many insuperable problems in how it cannot work the way it has been thought in some labor administration body. Maybe we'll have to bang our heads against the wall again.

Example from a category Perceptions of Teachers' work, Establishing the profession

> At the end of the '80s, we were living a huge economic upturn, and students were taken from the course even before it ended. At the closing ceremony, teachers were having coffee among themselves. There was nobody left there to give the certificate to, as they had all been taken to working life, with weak language skills.

Example from a category Perceptions of adult education, Priorities in language education

> Written language skills are needed. We live in a society where one must demonstrate a skill, and the skill must be demonstrated in the local language.

Teachers also expressed pride in their profession and questioned how their work is perceived both internally and historically. Their narratives offer a retrospective

view on the development of second language teaching for adults, shaped by political and economic contexts. These experienced educators critically examined the profession's evolution and its current standing.

Finally, the teachers discussed adult education, focusing on classroom dynamics and instructional priorities. They addressed challenges in teaching diverse adult learners, including group size and learner profiles, and reflected on how these factors influence daily decisions. Their insights span both experienced and novice perspectives, linking present practices to future considerations.

By late 2017, Germany had seen the full impact of the 2015 surge in integration training participants. This led to rapid hiring and expedited teacher training to meet Federal Ministry standards. Increased competition among education providers shaped the teaching environment. Teachers' accounts highlight key challenges related to prerequisites for teaching and learning, as well as psychological pressures.

Teachers identified external demands and course design as major prerequisites for teaching. These include administrative requirements and constraints that shape second language instruction and daily planning. The relationship between teachers and higher-level administration is central, with current political and economic conditions, learner volume, and profiles influencing practice. Many teachers felt their professional capacity was limited.

Regarding learning prerequisites, teachers pointed to issues with methods, materials, and adult learner-specific challenges. These include cognitive learning processes and teacher-learner dynamics. External directives and learner diversity further complicate instruction. Teachers expressed a need for additional training to address these challenges effectively.

Finally, teachers described psychological pressures, including feelings of inadequacy and burdensome interactions. Concerns about supporting learners and maintaining motivation were common. These challenges were linked to both external conditions and internal reflections on professional well-being. Group size and learner profiles were again noted as key factors. Teachers emphasized the importance of experience and ongoing professional development in managing these pressures.

7.3 Sub-study 2: Learners' experiences in Finland and Germany

The second sub-study, presented in the publication *Experiences of Language in Migration: Communicating Well-being in Finland and Germany*, investigates how adult migrants experience language learning in relation to subjective well-being, social participation, and future orientation. The analysis employs Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) and integrates a conception of well-being that draws on Erik Allardt's (1976) framework of 'having, loving, and being,' alongside

Felicia Huppert and colleagues' (2009) emphasis on psychological functioning and emotional experience. The analyzed experiences ultimately led to various implications both within and beyond the classroom, encompassing social interactions outside the learning environment and pedagogical approaches within it.

The second sub-study was guided by four research questions:

1. How do participants experience learning the language of their new living environment?
2. How do these experiences reflect subjective well-being?
3. How do the findings vary across the two research contexts?
4. What are the implications of these findings for adult education practices?

7.3.1 Multidimensional well-being

Prior research highlights a strong connection between language proficiency and well-being in the context of migration. Language skills influence migrants' ability to form social relationships (Siegert, 2019) and navigate institutional processes such as asylum applications (Castañeda et al., 2018, p. 53). Well-being itself is shaped by both external living conditions and internal capabilities and preferences (Karvonen, 2019). High levels of social well-being—measured through indicators such as language proficiency, employment, civic participation, and local belonging—are systematically associated with successful integration (Castañeda & Kuusio, 2019, p. 130).

Central to this dissertation is the recognition that language proficiency in the host country presents integration challenges in both Finland (Karinen et al., 2020, pp. 44–45; Yijälä & Nyman, 2017, p. 16) and Germany (Brücker et al., 2020). At the same time, psychological and physical well-being can facilitate language learning (Baier et al., 2020, p. 8), which in turn supports labor market participation (FinMonik, 2020, p. 49; Auer, 2018). Language proficiency also plays an intergenerational role, enabling parents to support their children's education and transitions into further studies and working life (Tissot, 2021; Intke-Hernández, 2020, pp. 81–84).

This is the core idea of the second sub-study: well-being is inherently multidimensional, encompassing both personal and interpersonal feelings and actions. Beyond receiving support, the ability to give, act, and contribute—such as through volunteering—also plays a vital role (Huppert et al., 2009). Language proficiency contributes to well-being not only through tangible outcomes like quality of life and standard of living, but also through intangible resources tied to social relationships and self-realization (Allardt, 1976, cited in Uusitalo & Simpura, 2020). Emotional connection to one's environment, fostered by psychological and physical well-being, enhances language acquisition and a sense of belonging (Kristen & Seuring, 2021).

However, language can also act as a barrier to integration and well-being. Limited proficiency may lead to social isolation and loneliness (Castañeda & Kuusio, 2019), especially in reception centers where opportunities for interaction are scarce and finding a common language is difficult (Suoranta & FitzSimmons, 2020). Traumatic experiences may further impair concentration and learning (Alanne, 2010). For many migrants, language teachers and officials are often their only regular local contacts, making language courses an important source of well-being. In this sub-study, the data reflect both improvements and deficits in well-being (see Uusitalo & Simpura, 2020) related to developing language skills.

Consequently, drawing on Erik Allardt's (1976) classic model, the second sub-study conceptualizes well-being in terms of *standard of living* ("having") and *quality of life* ("loving, being"). Felicia Huppert et al.'s (2009) model adds further dimensions of *personal and interpersonal feeling* ("feeling") and *action* ("having, being"), and its application in the European Social Survey (ESS 3 2006/2007; ESS 6 2012/13) situates this framework within a contemporary research context (European Social Survey, 2021).

7.3.2 Interpretative phenomenological analysis

The second sub-study employed Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) to explore the emotional dimensions of adult migrants' and refugees' lived experiences of language learning. IPA provides a rigorous framework for examining how individuals make sense of their experiences within personal and social contexts (Smith et al., 2009; Smith & Nizza, 2022). Rooted in phenomenology, hermeneutics, and idiography, IPA values nuance and complexity, aiming to illuminate the ambiguities and tensions that arise when participants reflect on personally significant experiences (Smith & Nizza, 2022, pp. 4–6).

In this study, IPA was particularly suited to investigating emotionally charged experiences related to language learning and integration. The analysis began with linguistically and culturally sensitive interviews conducted in multiple languages, allowing participants to express themselves in ways that were authentic and meaningful. Central to IPA is the researcher's interpretative role, which underscores the dynamic interplay between language, culture, and personal meaning-making.

The objective was to get as close as possible to the participants' lived experiences, examining how they made sense of language learning as part of their broader post-migration lives (Smith & Nizza, 2022, p. 4). The structured stages of IPA—outlined by Smith and Nizza (2022, pp. 32–56)—were followed to guide the analysis. These stages helped identify and interpret the emotional nuances embedded in participants' narratives, revealing how language learning intersects with identity, belonging, and well-being. The use of IPA in this sub-study highlights the

importance of capturing both the complexity and the emotional depth of adult learners' experiences.

7.3.3 Results

This sub-study explored participants' experiences through symbolic expressions and abstract nuances, revealing complex interrelations between language use, well-being, and social belonging. Across all themes that emerged, participants described tensions between closeness and distance, though the focus varied; some referred to their closest relationships, while others emphasized external social connections.

Participants articulated well-being in terms of value dimensions, particularly social needs (Allardt, 1976). These were not limited to family and kinship but extended to the local community and active friendship patterns. Language use was deeply interpersonal, often manifesting in altruism, caring, and social engagement, and contributing to a sense of belonging. Participants emphasized the reciprocity of social support—the importance of both receiving and giving—as well as the need for autonomy and active participation. Their personal feelings encompassed both satisfaction and negative affect (Huppert et al., 2009), reflecting the emotional complexity of their lived experiences.

Participants' interactions within institutional settings, such as migration services and formal education highlighted the interplay between individual participation, family constellations, and daily activities, including language education. Well-being here was tied to material and impersonal needs—income, housing, employment, education, and health (Allardt, 1976)—as well as personal feelings of self-worth and autonomy. Encounters with institutions shaped their sense of belonging, social recognition, and perceived societal progress, while also revealing a strong desire for competence and learning (Huppert et al., 2009).

Participants' experiences also delved into material and immaterial aspects of well-being, including social relations, personal fulfillment, and even existential reflections (Allardt, 1976). Participants discussed language in terms of "doings", but with a future-oriented perspective, emphasizing goal setting, resilience, and personal growth (Huppert et al., 2009). This abstract layer of analysis underscored the potential and risks of language learning in shaping individual life stories and well-being, with nuanced implications for adult education.

The following examples conclude the results by illustrating core dimensions of well-being—particularly social needs—not only within family and kinship networks but also in relation to the broader community.

Participant Example – Theme: Getting Closer or Being Pushed Away

> "I'm getting tools to defend myself. I'm in a way starting to relax mentally, you know?"
> Researcher: In the group or society?
> "Society. We live in a new era with new ways to communicate. Technology, the social form has been shaped. Pedagogy should be revised, so that we would learn how to express ourselves in the new society. If the society's language is completely different than what's taught in the course, it's frustrating, as it feels as if you hadn't learned anything."

Participant Example – Theme: Building the Future—and Future Existence

> "It's difficult in our situation. When you're seeking asylum, you only do things under stress, because you're alone in your situation, all the time. Still, I believe that . . . when you know what you want, you can make it. I've been stressed about my situation, or that I don't have any situation; no documents, can't get a job. I've lost so much time. If I would've been concentrating only on school, I could speak German now, maybe, and could have gotten better opportunities…"

> "Germany is my last option. I haven't managed to succeed anywhere else. . . . I am looking for a better life, and Germany is the only country where I have a chance to start my life again. I have no child, no wife, so I think I have all the possibilities to concentrate and to make it. So, I'm going to make it. I really want to make it."

7.4 Sub-study 3: Classroom interactions in Finland and Germany

The third sub-study, *Capturing Moments in the Social Space of European Integration Training*, focuses on the analysis of observational data through theoretical frameworks that support a spatial lens: the theory of Moments (2002/1961) and the *Production of Social Space* (1991/1974) by Henri Lefebvre. Additionally, a central concept is Hermann Schmitz's notion of *Atmospheres* (2023/2014). A directed content analysis (Assaroudi et al., 2018) and the method of 'explorative casing' from comparative ethnography (Simmons & Smith, 2019) are employed to investigate how the social spaces of adult language instruction are co-produced by all participants, what kinds of moments emerge, and how these affect the atmospheres within the learning environment.

The study responds to the following research questions:

1. How is social space produced in adult migrants' and refugees' language education?
2. What reflections of Lefebvrian moments can be observed?
3. And what can be learned from comparing two cases?

Theory of moments

Greil Marcus (1989, p. 144) offers a vivid description of Lefebvre's *moments*: "Moments of love, hate, poetry, frustration, action, surrender, delight, humiliation, justice, cruelty, resignation, surprise, disgust, resentment, self-loathing, pity, fury, peace of mind—those tiny epiphanies in which the absolute possibilities and temporal limits of anyone's existence are revealed."

Henri Lefebvre's theory of *moments* aligns with the third sub-study's focus on everyday life and the significance of analyzing human communication (Lefebvre, 2002, pp. 341–342). Moments, as conceptualized by Lefebvre, represent expressions of what Gardiner (2004, p. 243) calls *everyday utopianism*. They introduce a vital intensity to daily life—enhancing its performance, communication, and enjoyment (Lefebvre, 2002, p. 352). Moments disrupt the monotony of routine existence, transforming it into "festivals" by overlaying spontaneous ambiguity with new social forms (Lefebvre, 2002, p. 352). Shields (1999, p. 58) describes Lefebvre's moments as follows: A moment is a fleeting, euphoric experience that resists commodification and the logic of consumer capitalism. It functions as an 'escape hatch' from the alienation of everyday life—an experience that can arise unexpectedly, in any place and at any time.

In the third sub-study, moments are interpreted as markers of hope. As Lefebvre observes, 'structures of society influence our everyday life, but we produce everyday life […] through our conditions of life, as well as the possibilities for changing our situation' (Lefebvre, 2002, pp. 110–111). From my perspective, the emergence of such moments depends on a trusting atmosphere. Herman Schmitz (2019) describes this atmosphere as an emotional space that enables authentic expression of both positive and negative experiences, fostering a sense of human connection.

The abstract, timeless, and context-independent nature of moments makes them particularly relevant to this study, which examines how globally diverse individuals with varied socio-historical backgrounds come together to co-create social space through interaction.

Spatial theorizing: The social production of space

Another theoretical element in the third sub-study is Henri Lefebvre's theory of the production of social space (1974/1991), which emphasizes the inherently social and processual nature of space. For Lefebvre, social space is not static; it is continuously produced through dynamic processes that encompass both abstract and concrete dimensions (1991, p. 288). Importantly, Lefebvre's framework is not binary but structured as a triad, consisting of three interrelated dimensions: spatial practice, representations of space, and representational spaces. These dimensions are not mutually exclusive but overlap and interact.

Spatial practice, associated with *perceived space*, relates to the routines of everyday life and urban reality. This dimension is empirical and material—rooted in commonsense perception and the physical use of space. It reflects how societal and material structures manifest in local practices, involving the body, hands, limbs, and sensory organs.

Representations of space, or *conceived space*, refers to the dominant spatial logic within a society or mode of production. This space is conceptualized through systems of verbal and intellectual signs—plans, statistics, and documents produced by professionals such as administrators, planners, researchers, and developers. It is the space of official discourse, where the body is abstracted and theorized.

Representational spaces, or *lived space*, are directly experienced and imagined by inhabitants and users. This dimension overlays physical space with symbolic meaning, using images, symbols, and non-verbal signs to express emotional and cultural significance. It is the space of appropriation and transformation, shaped by lived experience and creative interpretation.

Together, these dimensions illustrate how space is socially constructed and experienced through a complex interplay of perception, conception, and lived reality (Lefebvre, 1991, pp. 38–40).

Atmospheres

A central concept in the third sub-study is the notion of *atmospheres*, which can be defined as subtle yet powerful elements in everyday communication. Atmospheres bridge the subjective inner world and the objective outer world, both shaped by emotional experience (Böhme, 2019, pp. 16–33). The joy or sorrow of an individual—or a few—can influence the emotional tone of a space, affecting everyone present (Schmitz, 2023; 2007, pp. 24–25). Rather than being simply positive or negative, atmospheres are affective occurrences that are collective, spatial, and elemental. They arise naturally but can also be intentionally shaped through structures such as economy, law, and social norms (Philippopoulos-Mihalopoulos, 2014, pp. 109–122).

According to Hermann Schmitz (2023), atmosphere is a sensorial and affective quality that permeates space—a tonal presence that influences how we experience our surroundings. It is not confined by visible boundaries, yet it envelops us, resonates within our lived body, and draws us into shared emotional and spatial experiences. Atmospheres illustrate how emotions and moods extend beyond individuals, becoming spatially distributed and collectively felt.

Central to this concept is the *felt body*, which responds to emotional atmospheres. This body is neither purely physical nor purely mental; it is spatially extended in a

way comparable to sound. Communication through the felt body can occur without direct contact, representing a fundamental form of perception. (Schmitz, 2023.)

Studying atmospheres, as done in this dissertation, involves analyzing involuntary or unintentional experiences—especially those that emotionally "tonalize" everyday life. These subtle yet pervasive emotional tones shape how individuals relate to their environment and to one another, making atmosphere a key concept in understanding shared human experience.

7.4.1 Directed content analysis

In the third sub-study, the approach to analyzing empirical data was the most theoretically driven among the three included in this dissertation. The analysis began with Henri Lefebvre's triad of social space, which provided a conceptual framework for interpreting the data. Instances of human interaction were identified as representations of *lived space*—the space of users—while migration statistics and curricular documents were interpreted as manifestations of *conceived space* Lefebvre 1991, pp. 39–40). This conceptual division guided the subsequent analysis, as I traced references to all three dimensions of social space within selected data extracts.

At this stage, I also integrated Lefebvre's *Theory of Moments* into the analysis. Applying this theory proved challenging due to its philosophical and less structured nature, particularly in empirical contexts. Nonetheless, the complexity of the task was intellectually stimulating, and I remained committed to this line of inquiry.

The third theoretical element introduced was the concept of *atmospheres*, which emerged later in the process and was developed as the final stage of the analysis.

Against this theoretical backdrop, the overall analytical approach was directed content analysis. I applied theoretical concepts to identify initial codes (see Hsieh & Shannon, 2005), thereby validating a conceptual framework (Assarroudi et al., 2018; Elo & Kyngäs, 2008). Existing theory helped establish relationships between codes by offering predictions about relevant variables and their interconnections. Key concepts included Lefebvre's (1991, pp. 39–40) dimensions of social space: *perceived*, *conceived*, and *lived*.

Given the strong theoretical orientation, the analysis can be described as *Lefebvrean*. This type of analysis seeks to uncover the rhythms of complex social relationships embedded in the production of space as an ongoing encounter. It encompasses both latent and dynamic forces—objects and humans, sounds and silences (Christie, 2013). The analysis is attuned more to moods than to images, and to atmospheres rather than discrete events (Lefebvre, 2004, pp. 87–88; Löfgren & Ehn, 2010). In the observed classroom exchanges, both formal and informal elements were significant: "The specific does not preclude the formal […] and the

particular does not preclude the general" (Lefebvre, 2002, p. 180, as cited in Gardiner, 2004, p. 238).

Concrete steps of the analysis are described in the article *Capturing Moments in the Social Space of European Integration Training*.

7.4.2 Results

Across both Finland and Germany, the classroom emerged as a dynamic social space shaped by students' emotional states, shared experiences, and interactions in the target language. While the atmospheres differed, each setting revealed dimensions of perceived, conceived, and lived space (Lefenvre, 1991). In Finland, the classes took place immediately after students had completed a high-stakes language examination, marking a moment of closure in their integration training. This transition fostered a notably light and informal atmosphere. Students expressed relief and spontaneity, engaging actively with their instructor and each other, often in the new language. The space was shaped through humor, smiles, laughter, and expressive boldness, reflecting a shared sense of accomplishment. In contrast, the classroom in Germany presented a more complex emotional landscape. While moments of calm and positivity were present, they were interspersed with signs of emotional fatigue and mental health challenges affecting some individuals. Despite these fluctuations, the group had developed a strong sense of cohesion and trust, rooted in shared life experiences. One student's personal story, involving his immediate family, deepened the collective sense of solidarity. The classroom became a space of both engagement and withdrawal, offering a collective pause within the rhythm of everyday life. These observations underscore how classroom environments in integration contexts are not merely instructional settings, but social arenas where emotional and linguistic relations intertwine. Whether marked by lightness or complexity, both spaces reflected students' evolving identities and their navigation of new cultural landscapes. These findings highlight the significance of adult language classrooms as social spaces where participants can be seen and heard in their multifaceted roles—as learners, individuals, and active members of society.

The following example from the empirical data illustrates a theme titled *Fighting Alienation*, which effectively captures the multifaceted nature of classroom interaction—encompassing both empathetic care and a gentle encouragement toward learning and adapting to the culture of exams.

Instructor: "Amir, do you still do sports?"
Amir: "No, not anymore."
Instructor: "Why?"

The student speaks in Arabic, and another one translates into German.

A student remains quiet.

Instructor: “Hassan, do you do gymnastics?”
Hassan: “No…” He begins to talk about his sports hobby but only with a few words.
Instructor: “Form a full sentence, please.”

Hassan responds, seemingly hurt: “I’m sorry, I’m trying, but I have a lot of worries in Germany… I’ll have a meeting with a lawyer, but some receipts are missing.”

Another student joins the conversation: “I’ve got a problem with a raise in my rent.”

The instructor looks at him sympathetically and promises to look up a social pedagogue during the break. She then turns to a student who seems absent-minded: “Have you caught a cold? Would you like some water?” He shakes his head.

Instructor: “Are you sure? Let’s open the window.”

The instructor returns to her desk at the front of the classroom: “Okay then, let’s listen. This is how it will be in the exam too, you’ll have to listen.”

This excerpt shows how emotional and practical concerns permeate the classroom atmosphere, shaping interactions. The instructor’s attentiveness and care reflect the classroom’s role as a social space, where language learning intersects with broader experiences of integration, vulnerability, and support.

8 Discussion and Conclusions

8.1 Findings

This dissertation investigated adult education programs aimed at enhancing language learning among adult migrants and refugees. It focused on how language education is organized and delivered as part of integration training, guided by the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* (Council of Europe, 2001).

The research design was structured around three complementary approaches to analyzing language learning within this framework:

1. Language teachers' accounts of their professional practice
2. Language learners' experiences of language and learning in post-migration life
3. Classroom interaction between language teachers and learners

As discussed in the following three sub-studies, the findings converge toward shared conclusions and recommendations. These are accompanied by a critical reflection on the strengths and limitations of the research, along with suggestions for future study.

8.1.1 Sub-study 1: Site ontology reveals the sayings, doings, and relatings central to teachers' work

The two cases of sub-study 1 stemmed from a qualitative variation of experiential perspective (Marton, 1981), which, as noted in the article, highlight problems to be addressed rather than presenting "facts" or "realities" (Nóvoa & Yariv-Mashal, 2003, pp. 436–437). The comparison presented methodological complexities, which led my shifting the perspective to an ontological level, as a response to what Penalva (2019) describes as a methodological leap from descriptive analysis to practical suggestions. Upon discovering Schatzki's (2010, p. 124) context-driven framework of social sites, I identified an ontological "metadiscourse" that helped to engage with the cross-national findings in a way that honored the complexity and multidimensionality of the two research settings. This framework emphasizes the role of context in social phenomena—not limited to spatial dimensions alone—but also encompassing human practices, material arrangements (Schatzki, 2003), and the

specific temporal-spatial conditions that shape those practices (Schatzki, 2005). I found that this approach supported my interpretation of the conceptual implications of the identified challenges and allowed me to propose meaningful connections for future empirical research. The aim was to make implicit ontologies explicit (Schatzki, 2003) in order to enhance the pragmatic validity of the findings beyond the national case contexts (Åkerlind, 2005). To me, the findings were epistemologically situated at the intersection of "lexis" and "praxis" (Penalva, 2014, p. 408), thereby encompassing the semantic, material, and relational dimensions of social practice. This perspective is illustrated through Schatzki's (2002, 2010) model of site ontologies, as applied to educational practice (Kemmis et al., 2014; see also Heikkinen et al., 2018). In presenting the findings by national context, highlighting both their convergence and divergence, I drew on the following conceptual distinctions: *sayings* in semantic space, expressed through language; *doings* in physical space-time, manifested through activity or work; and *relatings* in social space, shaped by solidarity and power (Kemmis et al., 2014, pp. 31–34).

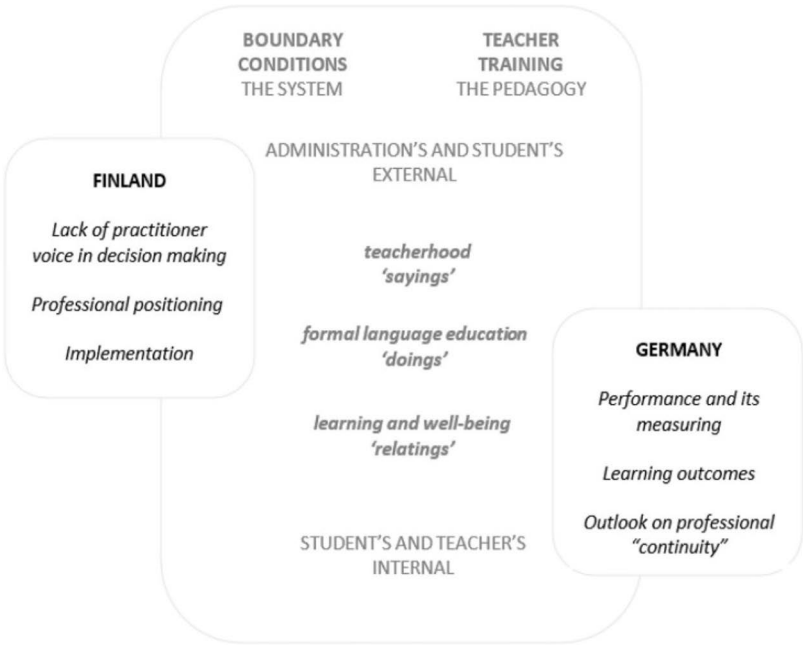

Figure 1. Foci in comparing the challenges among the national contexts.

The findings show that in Finland, concerns center on sustaining existing good practices, while in Germany, teachers face more immediate, practical challenges. In both contexts, external factors shape classroom dynamics: administrative demands in Finland and students' personal issues in Germany. Unrealistic expectations for

language teaching appear as systemic undervaluation in Finland and as daily pressures in Germany.

In Finland, a sense of compromised teacherhood aligns with earlier findings (Montonen & Lappalainen, 2017), with teachers advocating for more—not less—contact teaching. German teachers, by contrast, express isolation and frustration with unattainable goals, particularly when working with slower learners. Classroom interaction is seen in Finland as a learning space, and in Germany as a site of broader support, including non-academic matters.

Competition among providers affects both countries. It is strongly criticized in Finland, while in Germany, its pedagogical implications are more actively discussed (Heinemann, 2018; Kurki et al., 2018). Learning materials, a key issue in German research (Becker, 2014; Gargova, 2017), are less prominent in Finland, though acknowledged in the literature (Pöyhönen & Tarnanen, 2015).

Assessment practices constrain pedagogical autonomy in both settings, with official language tests causing stress due to their impact on participants' legal and financial status (Heinemann, 2018). In Germany, this pressure is particularly acute.

While Finnish teachers note the intensity of student-teacher relationships, German teachers more often highlight their counseling role (Becker, 2014). Finnish teachers emphasize learners' agency, whereas German colleagues report conflicts stemming from bureaucratic duties like attendance tracking (Heinemann, 2018) and unrealistic expectations of teachers' roles (Castañeda et al., 2018; Saukkonen, 2020).

Teachers in both contexts strive to support learners but struggle to monitor progress or predict outcomes (Becker, 2014; Colliander, 2019). In Germany, this tension is especially pronounced, influencing teachers' career plans and contributing to compassion fatigue (Castañeda et al., 2018).

8.1.2 Sub-study 2: The comparison underscores differences in social support for processing experiences

The findings of this dissertation reveal both positive and negative experiences related to language learning in the context of migration. Participants described feelings of happiness and empowerment as their language skills developed—particularly those in Finland who lived with a partner and had more opportunities for meaningful interaction. In contrast, both migrants in Finland and refugees in Germany reported experiences of loneliness and emotional strain, often linked to limited opportunities for communication and social integration. Despite differing life circumstances, as can be seen in the Table below (Table 9.), all participants viewed the majority language as a vital tool for active participation in society. Many expressed a deep, even existential, connection to the language, seeing it as central to their future and identity. These findings align with previous research showing that language

experiences in migration influence identity negotiations (Court, 2017; Morrice, 2013; Stella & Gawlewicz, 2021), highlight the need for psychosocial support in institutional settings (Ateek, 2022; Jansen & Romero Gibu, 2021), and reflect a desire for autonomy in the private sphere (Intke-Hernández, 2020; Zhu, 2020).

The study also underscores the importance of human interaction in shaping subjective well-being across linguistic, cultural, and geopolitical boundaries (Beier & Kroneberg, 2013). From this perspective, adult learners' experiences of language learning are deeply multidimensional, encompassing emotional, social, and practical dimensions of well-being (Talbot, 2021).

Adult language education plays a key role in addressing social isolation by providing structured opportunities for interaction and community-building, especially when contact with locals is limited (Fejes & Dahlstedt, 2020; Morrice, 2013). In-person instruction, particularly in physical gatherings, was found to foster spontaneous interaction and informal conversation, which are essential for learners' sense of belonging. Educators and course planners are encouraged to incorporate time for such interactions into teaching sessions.

Table 11. Comparison of Data Elements Across Personal and Socio-Political Contexts.

CONTEXTUAL PERSPECTIVE	CONVERGENCE	DIVERGENCE	
		FINLAND	GERMANY
Life situation	Adult learners with migration experience	Voluntary migration	Forced and voluntary migration
Scope of references	Change, identity negotiations, material and immaterial needs	Personal sphere; questions of identity, material well-being	Public sphere; loneliness and coping, future existence
Social context: oublic language norm	Non-Anglophone context, language policy framework	Plurilingual: minor language, integration in Finnish or Swedish	Monolingual: dominance of German
Social support for processing experiences	A rather stable Western society, more individual than collectivist	Partner or family	Partly weaker

In sum, the findings highlight the complex interplay between language learning, emotional well-being, and social integration. The two research sites differed notably in participants' life situations and the availability of social support.

8.1.3 Sub-study 3: Moments of shared humanity emerge across differently perceived spaces

Sub-study 3 presents its findings through a comparative analysis of classroom cases using the dimensions of social space and the concept of *moments*. Initially, both classrooms reflected *conceived space*—structured by institutional codes such as language proficiency levels and labor-market-oriented curricula. As instructors and students interpret these codes together, the space transforms into *lived space*, evident in shared meaning-making and validation of language use. In both cases, students respect their instructor, speak their native languages, and share personal matters, fostering trust. Humor—dark and cultural—is used to challenge norms.

The most striking differences lie in *perceived space*. The Finnish classroom is spacious and tech-equipped (smartboard, PC, smartphones), shaping interaction rhythms and visual engagement. The German classroom is smaller, tech-limited, and relies on physical materials (chalkboard, handouts), prompting more physical movement.

As *lived space*, the Finnish class evokes imagined environments—nature, urban life, and digital platforms—while the German class centers on home, family, and the present. The Finnish instructor maintains a personal but slightly distanced approach; the German instructor is more nurturing and attentive. German sequences are more instructor-led, with students expressing both joy and frustration, highlighting peer dynamics. Humor in Finland often relates to cultural identity, while in Germany it is gentle and tension-relieving. The tight seating in Germany reflects social closeness.

Inspired by Delamont & Atkinson's (2018) comparative imagination, a thought experiment arises: What if the instructors swapped groups? The Finnish instructor's challenging style might not suit the German group, which thrives under gentler guidance. Though speculative, this contrast illuminates pedagogical nuances.

In both classroom contexts, I was able to capture moments infused with a wide range of emotions, such as frustration, action, surprise, and peace of mind (Marcus, 1989, p. 144). These emotional currents shaped the social space and revealed the depth of human experience within educational settings. The German learners, in particular, were in a vulnerable position and clearly benefitted from the instructor's care and empathy, which extended beyond the classroom into their everyday lives. Their emotional openness and need for support made the classroom a vital space for connection and trust. In the Finnish class, emotional moments emerged through the playful rhythm of interactions, highlighting the possibilities embedded in everyday life (Lefebvre, 2002, p. 343). These interactions pushed the boundaries of what had previously been considered possible (Halvorsen, 2010), suggesting that even within institutional frameworks like integration training, there is room for spontaneity and creativity.

Both settings demonstrated that the classroom can serve as a reflective social space, where learners engage with their changing realities in a friendly and supportive atmosphere, fostering a sense of togetherness (Brown & Schweisfurth, 2024). Despite the rise of more distanced modes of participation, this study argues that educational spaces should continue to cultivate opportunities for interpersonal engagement (Młynarczuk-Sokołowska, 2024) and mutual learning from diverse life trajectories (Brown & Schweisfurth, 2024). Experiencing a shared emotional atmosphere—being "in the grip of emotions"—can generate a powerful sense of commonality (Schmitz, 2014, p. 59). This was especially significant for the German learners, for whom classroom norms and behaviors were less familiar (Lynett, 2019). In both cases, trust emerged as a foundational element, enabling spontaneity and humor among students.

Importantly, both educators adopted pedagogical approaches that extended beyond the curriculum, allowing for the emergence of moments "characterized by playfulness, the overthrowing of orthodoxies, and attempts to replace domination by appropriation" (Lefebvre, 1996, p. 171, as cited in Middleton, 2017). These approaches helped transform the classroom into a space of possibility, resistance, and shared humanity.

8.2 Implications

8.2.1 Theoretical and Methodological Implications

This dissertation demonstrates that language is a crucial element in any future theorizing on integration and well-being. Theorizing adult learning in this context is compelling due to its depth and complexity. For example, transformative learning theory (e.g., Nohl, 2009) offers a framework for understanding learning as a deeply personal process, beyond simply acquiring vocabulary. This is reflected in the sub-studies, especially sub-study 2 on learner experiences. Although not explicitly addressed in the published articles, this theoretical perspective emerged as a valuable insight during the research and has proven applicable in other adult migrant language learning contexts (Häkkinen, 2025).

As described in earlier sections, the core of this research lies in its methodological approach to comparing Finland and Germany. Site ontologies, developed by Theodore Schatzki (2002, 2010) and extended by Stephen Kemmis et al. (2014), offer a way to understand practices as situated within social, material, and temporal arrangements. Additionally, concepts of social support provide a lens for exploring the relational dimensions of language learning and integration, while Henri Lefebvre's theory of social space (1991/1974) helps analyze classroom interaction dynamics.

8.2.2 European policy implications

This dissertation advocates for acknowledging the increasingly common challenges faced across Europe and for making tacit knowledge explicit to higher-level administration. Recognizing and valuing practitioners' existing knowledge is essential—not only for supporting fellow educators but also for helping administrators align expectations and objectives regarding language teachers' work.

Strengthening multi-stakeholder collaboration among European actors is crucial (see European Integration Network, 2021). Promoting knowledge exchange that values teachers' perspectives can positively influence their professional identity (see EC, 2020a: 11; EC, 2020b: 24).

From a psychological and skills-development standpoint, in-service training offers peer support and addresses challenges such as classroom management in adult education (see EC, 2020a: 18–19). Mentoring programs can help reduce feelings of isolation, benefiting both new and freelance teachers.

Structurally, organizations should help mitigate external pressures on individual teachers, especially those working under the "fear of reclamation." Teacher evaluations must consider how labor market conditions affect educational outcomes. Slow transitions from integration training to employment should not be seen as a reflection of poor teaching performance. Shifting from inspection to consultation in educational interventions would better inform reform efforts by highlighting the constraints of daily teaching. This approach would also integrate language teaching expertise into administrative processes.

A key guideline for planning resources and instruction is to differentiate by adapting environments, methods, and materials. This includes offering specialized courses for advanced learners aimed at acquiring formal qualifications, such as profession-specific vocabulary. Modern technological infrastructures also offer valuable opportunities. In teacher-led contact learning, tools like interactive language labs and enhanced visual content can support focused group work, individualized oral practice, and phonological training, while accommodating diverse learning styles and needs.

Digital content enhances flexibility and multimodality in differentiated instruction. However, its development should involve collaboration with experts in adult language learning, learning difficulties (see EC, 2020b: 22), and labor administration—particularly regarding assessment. While technology offers valuable possibilities, it cannot replace the spontaneous and meaningful interactions that prepare learners for real-world, offline societal engagement.

8.2.3 Practical implications

The tacit knowledge gained through the practical work of language teachers in integration training has often gone unrecognized. Bringing this knowledge to the attention of upper administration is essential for developing professional practices and understanding how work evolves across different economic cycles. As integration-related issues become increasingly common across Europe, identifying and sharing effective practices is crucial.

This study offers insights into how language training has been successfully delivered under pressure, such as during the sharp increase in participation following the 2015 migration to Germany and again after the 2022 war. These professional experiences are valuable not only to fellow educators but also to administrative bodies. A deeper understanding of the multifaceted role of second language teachers within the integration ecosystem is key to aligning expectations and setting realistic goals.

The attitudinal climate plays a critical role in language learning (Aksoy et al., 2020). Empathy, understanding what it means to communicate in a new language in an environment where fluency is assumed, is essential. This differs from classroom settings where learners share a first language and lack of fluency is more accepted. Ultimately, this is a matter of well-being in one's living environment, with media also influencing public attitudes toward language learners.

I advocate for greater flexibility in language use, being open to using other languages when needed, while also ensuring learners have opportunities to practice the target language, rather than defaulting to English (Council of Europe, 2001, pp. 4–5; Häkkinen, 2025).

Achieving formal qualifications requires strong language skills. Specialized vocabulary courses tailored to professional fields are valuable, even for long-term residents. However, everyday language skills contribute most directly to well-being. Professional terminology cannot replace the value of small talk.

This research highlights the importance of in-person instruction, particularly in enabling spontaneous interaction. Findings from all three sub-studies, especially the third, underscore the need for time to ask how someone is doing and engage in informal conversation. Educators' actions, training, and course design can support this need. The first sub-study also emphasizes the importance of flexible use of instructional time. Ideally, the classroom becomes a space where students feel a sense of belonging and can participate without anxiety. Outside the classroom, however, language learners often face situations requiring persistence and risk-taking—interacting without knowing how the exchange will unfold. Doing so in a foreign language adds vulnerability, as power dynamics tend to favor the more proficient speaker (CoE 2001, p. 161).

Table 12. Summary of Implications.

IMPLICATIONS	MAIN ARGUMENTS
Theory and methodlogy	• Theoretically grounded approaches can support the comparison of small sets of qualitative data across diverse contexts, such as: • **Site ontologies**, developed by Theodore Schatzki and amended by Stephen Kemmis et al. provides a way to understand practices as situated within social, material, and temporal arrangements. • **Aspects of social support** as a theoretical lens to explore the relational dimensions of language learning and integration. • **Henri Lefebvre's dimensions of social space** offer a framework for analyzing the dynamics of classroom interaction.
Policy	• **Written language skills and access to formal language education** are essential for migrants' long-term professional integration. (EU's *Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion 2021–2027*) • **Improving the recognition** and remuneration of freelance language teachers can contribute to more equitable and effective educational systems. • **The human factor** must be central in the design of integration processes, including those involving technological solutions. (EU's *Digital Education Action Plan 2021–2027* for human-centric digital public services, including for migrants)
Practice	• **Teacher-led language education** plays a crucial role in providing social support for learners, particularly in integration contexts. • **Contact teaching** is essential for enabling spontaneous interaction, which supports both linguistic development and social bonding. • **The introduction of emotional vocabulary** should occur earlier in the curriculum, ideally before the B2 and C1 levels, to better equip learners for expressing feelings and navigating social situations. • Language education should prepare individuals for **risk-taking inherent in interaction**, including in distant modes of couumnication, where cues and feedback may be limited. • **Interlocutors' patience** is central: speaking slowly and allowing learners time to practice but also openness to use languages other than the local tto facilitate communication. • **The role of media** in shaping public perceptions of migration and integration should be critically examined.

8.3 Strengths, limitations and suggestions for future research

Among the strengths of the study is the careful preparation of the fieldwork phase, guided by the themes of the Core Curriculum. Although the observation schedules (Annex 2) were only used during the initial classes, their creation helped establish a structured mental framework that guided both the interviews and observations. This framework enabled high-quality thematic implementation in dynamic settings where quick thinking and improvisation were often required.

Another strength was the shared professional—and partly also personal—experiences that fostered deep and meaningful conversations. The ability to connect with both professionals and learners, partly through shared language skills, contributed to the richness of the data and grounded the findings in real-life cases.

A deliberate aspect of the researcher's embedded role in the setting was the decision not to use video recordings. This choice aimed to avoid disrupting the learning environment with visible research tools and instead allowed for seamless integration. Trustful interactions with participants also enabled a sensitive and nuanced analysis later in the research process, allowing perspectives such as professional challenges and personal well-being to emerge—even though these were not initial focal points.

Most notably, intuitive attention to classroom situations inspired new theoretical ideas to surface naturally, such as Lefebvre's concept of *Moments*, culminating in the analysis of *atmospheres*. The inductive nature of the study presents limitations for strict comparison between the two cases and datasets, implying weaker generalizability. However, the in-depth qualitative approach encouraged new ideas and offered a more nuanced perspective on comparison—one that avoided factual juxtaposition and instead treated the cases as unique representations of their respective contexts, in this case, Finland and Germany in the 2010s.

A notable strength of the research design was the inclusion of a diverse range of migrants and refugees. Learners were approached as individuals rather than statistical categories. However, a limitation emerged in participant selection: when teachers asked who would like to be interviewed, the more confident individuals volunteered first. Over time, others expressed interest, but time constraints prevented their inclusion. This enthusiasm was encouraging and highlights the importance of analyzing not only active participation but also less visible behaviors—an area ripe for future research, particularly regarding non-participation in physical or virtual classrooms. Additionally, with teachers, my approach to educational problems was probably more conceptual than that of the practitioners, which may have naturally influenced the analysis.

While the use of multiple languages was a strength, including more languages could have enabled additional interviews and broadened the scope of analysis. A

particular challenge in analyzing the classroom interaction was defining the concept of a "good atmosphere." Although not an analytical concept, it clearly played a central role in the evolving analysis. This issue ties back to the human factor discussed earlier: as an observer of interpersonal interaction, I interpreted the atmosphere through the lens of my own background and emotional responses. These subjective impressions, rather than being limitations, became meaningful analytical cues. They served as important bridges to theoretical elaboration—an approach I consciously adopt and defend as part of the interpretive framework of this study.

Future research could broaden the scope of the design by complementing qualitative analysis with large-scale comparative datasets. For instance, the European Social Survey (2023) provides interesting data on public attitudes and behaviours across European countries. Additionally, incorporating a greater number of cases through a broader multi-sited ethnographic approach would enrich contextual comparisons. In particular, examining the role of rural versus urban settings, or focusing on virtual spaces of teaching and learning, presents timely avenues for investigation. These dimensions could be explored through theoretical frameworks such as the production of social space and the concept of atmospheres, extending the analysis beyond educational contexts.

8.4 Conclusions

This dissertation examined language education for working-age migrants in two European contexts: Finland and Germany. While these countries represent different migration destinations, they ultimately face a shared challenge: how is language education organized in response to the societal circumstances of migration, and for what purposes? An analysis of the daily professional practice of language instruction within integration training revealed that the professional perspective of teachers has been largely overlooked in both research and political decision-making over the past five decades. Instead, structural factors—such as Finland's favorable labor market prior to the 1990s recession, or the more challenging employment landscape of the 2010s and 2020s—have shaped public perceptions of integration training, often mediated through media coverage. Germany, having received significantly more migrants and refugees than Finland, has been compelled to adapt its educational offerings accordingly, including addressing the needs of diverse target groups.

Yet in both cases, education takes place within a constantly evolving world, where learners' backgrounds and motivations vary widely, even as many share common reasons for relocation, such as war or the pursuit of employment. The external world plays a crucial role in shaping the conditions under which language can be taught to adult learners, particularly in relation to future employment and the political climate. This is where the findings from the teachers' perspective, as

presented in this dissertation, become especially valuable. The extensive professional experience and the characteristics of contemporary teacher training, as described by the interviewed language instructors at various stages of their careers—offer a meaningful foundation for understanding the realities of integration training in both Finland and Germany. This reality is particularly important to grasp, as language teaching intersects with broader societal concerns—such as labor market shortages in aging populations—which also have significant economic implications.

One of the core findings of this dissertation is that the ability to communicate in the local language is not solely a matter of employment. It is a complex and fundamental aspect of human well-being, influencing daily life at home, family dynamics, and one's confidence in the future. The flow of everyday interactions affects the willingness to participate in society. Because learning inherently involves making mistakes and trying again, the attitude of interlocutors and the surrounding society plays a significant role. While the need to learn is often a personal imperative, social support and networks greatly influence the emotional resilience required to invest time and effort, especially when facing the discomfort of not being fluent.

For migrants and refugees, social networks must often be rebuilt in a new linguistic environment, making interactions in official settings, children's daycare and schools, or even on the street, critical to the learning process. The role of interlocutors is central, as we all actively shape the social spaces in which we live and interact. One of the first social spaces where local language interaction occurs after migration is within language education as part of integration training. As this dissertation demonstrates, the adult education classroom can serve as a vital space where individuals are seen and heard, particularly when affective engagement with the new language remains a sensitive issue. When the broader social environment includes speech or attitudes that feel hurtful, integration training can serve as a refuge. In this space, professional teachers not only understand the learners' challenging life situations and care about their well-being, but also recognize and support their need to learn—and, importantly, to take ownership of their learning. Such empathetic support offered by teachers may not be available in other integration services.

The findings revealed the positive atmosphere that emerges in language classrooms when adult learners feel relaxed and safe. The interaction is not about "returning to childhood" or feeling "like a dog on a leash," as one learner described, but rather reflects the adult scope of life, with sharp humor, sarcasm, and critique, all expressed in the new language. This sense of being a subject, rather than an object, in one's current life situation is essential for the motivation to learn and remain engaged. With the importance of teacher-led formal language education, this dissertation returns to its starting point. In this form of adult education, the goal is often rapid entry into the workforce, and the diverse group of language learners who

participated in this research did not resist the goal of fast employment. However, their motivation for language learning extended beyond employment, it encompassed the diverse settings of daily human interaction that are central to their sense of well-being. Our need for interaction and well-being does not pause, even when we physically relocate.

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Appendices

Appendix 1. Interview schedules for Teachers and Students.

Teacher Interviews

Background Information

- Education
- Work experience in current role

1. Present Situation

1.1 Planning Instruction

- How would you describe **your goals** in your teaching work?
- How much **influence** do you have over course planning (duration, content)?
- To what extent is it possible to consider **students'** a) goals and b) interests in planning instruction?
  How does this affect your workload? Group dynamics?
- How can **everyday language situations** be incorporated into teaching?
- How can **learning environments** be adapted during the course?
- What methods are available for **differentiating** instruction (content, methods, time management)?
- What types of **exercises** have worked well in your experience?
- How do you apply **information and communication technology** in your teaching? What about the students?
- How does defining ***sufficient language proficiency*** appear in your work? (accuracy vs communicative ability)
- How do students' **emotions about their future** affect your instructional planning?
- How do you experience giving feedback and assessment in your work? (easy/difficult)

1.2 Teaching Situation

- How can **students' interests** be considered during lessons?
  *) What impact does this have?
- How can **individual learning styles** be addressed in teaching?
- How do you **talk about your own culture** (Finnish/German/other identity, parenting, etc.)?
- What methods do you use to ***illustrate*** **culture** (e.g., customs)?*
- How does your **own foreign language proficiency** show in teaching situations?*
- How can a positive group **atmosphere** be created?
- How does **humor** work in the classroom?*
- What methods are used to practice **everyday language situations**?
- How are **successes and failures** in language use addressed?*
- What **strategies** are used **for communication** when language skills are limited?
- What kinds of **conflict situations** have you encountered?*
- What methods are used to guide students toward **their own initiative** (e.g., toward peer support)?
- How do students demonstrate their skills to the teacher and the group?

1.3 Students

- How do **future-related topics** appear in teaching situations?
- How do students react when discussing the future (or when the topic comes up)?
- How do emotions related to integration show up in teaching situations?
  > How does this affect your work?
- What role does the **integration training teacher** play in students' lives?

1.4 Working Life

- How does **work-life relevance** appear in your work a) in planning and b) in teaching?
  > What are the benefits for adult language learners?
  > What are the challenges?
- How do students' **successes or failures** in job-related language situations (job search, workplace communication) manifest?

2. Students' Prior Knowledge and Skills

- What methods are used to bring out **students' prior knowledge and experiences**? What impact does this have?

- How does **students' first language** appear in teaching? When does it help learning? When does it hinder?
- How does **students' other language proficiency** show up in the course? When does it help learning? When does it hinder?

3. Future Language Education

Imagine a year has passed:

- *In relation to your current work, where do you see yourself?*
- *What brings you joy? What did you do to support positive development? Where did you get support?*

- How would you like to develop your professional skills?
- How would you like to develop your organization? (resources, leadership, knowledge sharing)
- What would ideal Finnish/German as a second language instruction look like?
- Would you like to add anything?

Student Interviews

Background Questions

- What is your native language?
- How long have you been in Finland/Germany? (How did you arrive?)
- Have you worked or studied before?

1. As a Finnish/German Student

- How would you describe your current goal for learning Finnish/German? What do you need Finnish/German for most right now?
- How well do the language-use situations practiced in the course fit your current life?
- What role does your native language play during lessons?

2. Language Skills and the Surrounding World

- When you first arrived in Finland/Germany, do you remember the first situation where you needed Finnish/German? Who was involved? (Where did you learn the words or phrases you used in that situation?)

- Have you spoken Finnish/German in all the situations where you wanted to?
- When or where did you not want to speak Finnish/German? Why?
- Have these kinds of situations been discussed in class?
- What kinds of language-use situations are important for your life?
- How do your life experiences and previous knowledge influence your Finnish/German studies?

3. Guided Group-Based Learning

- Is the course schedule suitable for you (too little instruction, just right, too much)?
- How do you feel in your group? Do you enjoy attending lessons? Why / Why not?
- How do other students in the group support your learning?
- Is the pace of study suitable for you: do you have enough time to complete tasks and exercises? How do you feel about the amount and difficulty of homework?
- How does the speed (or slowness) of other students affect your learning?
- In what ways can you showcase your own skills and progress during lessons?
- How is Finnish/German culture discussed in class?
- What kind of humor is present in the classroom? How have you experienced those moments?
- What role does technology (mobile devices: smartphone, tablet, PC, language lab) play in your learning during lessons and in independent study?

4. The Teacher's Role

- What do you appreciate most about your teacher?
- How has the teacher best helped you learn?
- How does your teacher respond to mistakes?
- How has your teacher encouraged you to practice language skills or try again?
- Do you feel you've received feedback on your skills? How has the teacher's feedback influenced your language studies?

5. The Future

- How are topics related to your future addressed in class? How does that feel?
- What emotions are currently connected to your integration into Finland/Germany? How do these affect your language learning?

Let's imagine a year has passed from now:

- Where do you see yourself?
    - What role does your native language play in that situation? What about Finnish/German? What other languages do you think you'll need?
- With whom do you use Finnish/German the most? (In what situations?)
- Have you used Finnish/German at work?
    - How well did the language course help in language-use situations a) during job search, b) at work?
- In what kinds of situations at work did you use Finnish/German?
- With whom did you speak Finnish/German at work? Where did you learn those things?
- Would you like to continue studying Finnish/German after this course? If yes, how/where?

Appendix 2. Observation schedules focusing on Student, Group, and Teacher based on "times during class" in different observed groups.

Observation schedule: Focus on student

THEME / STUDENT	OBSERVATION PROMPTS	STUDENT
Prior knowledge and experience	How is students' prior knowledge and experience referenced during instruction? *	Refers to their prior knowledge (excluding Finnish language)
First language	How does the student's first language appear in the teaching situation?	Speaks their first language
Other languages	How do the student's other language skills appear in the teaching situation?	Demonstrates language skills other than the target language
Roles	How are the student's different roles (e.g., parent, job seeker) referenced during instruction?	Refers to other roles than language learner
Future	How is the student's future referenced during instruction? Are any negative feelings expressed?	Talks about their future
Future work	How is the student's potential employment referenced during instruction?	Talks about work (e.g., job applications, professional language skills)
Own interests	How are the student's personal interests acknowledged during instruction?	ARTIFACTS: teaching materials and/or field notes
Own knowledge and progress	How is the student's prior knowledge and progress highlighted in class?	ARTIFACTS: field notes

*) For each prompt, include follow-up questions: Who initiated it? What kinds of reactions followed?

Observation schedule: Focus on group

THEME / GROUP	OBSERVATION PROMPTS	GROUP
Exchange of knowledge and expereicnes	How does the teacher initiate discussion within the group? How successful is the discussion?	"Discusses" initiated by the teacher (in pairs, groups, or whole class)
Learning: changes in thinking?	How do students' or the group's shared insights, i.e. learning, appear in the class?	Student expresses an insight
Solving conflicts	What kinds of conflicts emerge during instruction?	Coflict emerges (group management)
Peer support	How does mutual support appear among students?	Student helps another
Humour	How does humour appear in the situation?	Humour appears

Interaction In instruction	How does interaction between the teacher and the students appear? How does student-to-student interaction appear?	ARTIFACTS: field notes
Interaction between student and environment	How does the role of language between the individual and their environment appear in the teacher's or student's speech?	ARTIFACTS: learning material and/or field notes
Multiculturality of the group	How does the multicultural nature of the group appear in the teacher's speech and actions? In students' speech and actions? In learning materials?	ARTIFACTS: learning material and/or field notes

Observation schedule: Focus on teacher

THEME / TEACHER	OBSERVATION PROMPTS	TEACHER
Students' learning skills	How does the teacher guide students to be proactive?*	Guides learning techniques
Topics and own activity	How does the instructor encourage students to reflect on the topics they are learning or their own activity?	Guides to assess their own activity
Learning environment and styles	How does the physical learning environment support different learning styles? How are learning styles addressed in speech? How are environments or methods adapted?	Acknowledges student's learning style; modifies the learning environment
Ict (information and communication technology)	In what situations is ICT integrated into learning?	Initiates use of ICT; responds to students' initiative
Differentiation	How is instruction differentiated within the group: by content, materials, methods, methods, number of exercises, or time available?	Differentiates instruction (in speech and action)
Cultural differences	How does the teacher talk about cultures? Which cultures are discussed?	Discusses culture
Feedback	How does the teacher provide feedback?	Provides feedback
Assessment of language skills	How does assessment of language skills appear in the teacher's or students' speech?	Talks about assessment of language skills; gives feedback on progress
Connetion with the external world	How is the role of language in human life addressed: in teacher's or students' speech, or in learning materials?	ARTIFACTS: Learning materials and/or field notes
Atmosphere	How does the teacher create a positive learning atmosphere? (through speech or actions)?	ARTIFACTS: Field notes
Motivation	How does the teacher's interest in students appear in classroom activities? How does this affect student behavior?	ARTIFACTS: Field notes

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