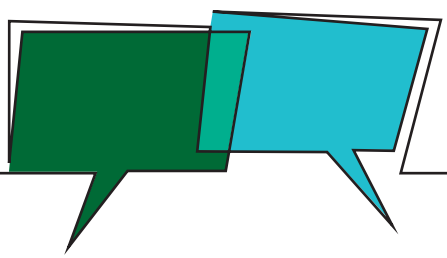
NOVEL TECHNIQUES AND APPROACHES IN LANGUAGE TEACHING

SHORT PAPERS FROM THE NoTALaT CONFERENCE

Reykjavík, 16–17 May 2024

Editors
Branislav Bédi
Lenka Štvrtecká



Rannsóknarstofa í máltileinkun

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The Árni Magnússon Institute for Icelandic Studies

UNIVERZITA KONŠTANTÍNA FILOZOFA V NITRE

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Foreword

The aim of the proceedings from the Novel Techniques and Approaches in Language Teaching (NoTALaT) conference is to shed light on the constantly evolving landscape of second and foreign language (L2) education. Hence, this publication presents a diverse collection of studies and reports from various educational contexts, focusing on effective methodologies that enhance L2 teaching and learning.

This collection includes 16 articles that discuss a wide range of themes, from employing tailored strategies to teach L2 to young learners, to educating migrant groups and international students in both school and public language courses, as well as self-reflection studies by teachers.

Themes of inclusivity, dynamic approach, and accessibility recur throughout many of these articles. They address the needs of learners with dyslexia and dysgraphia, highlight practitioners' flexibility and adaptability in teaching, online education, and underline the importance of community involvement.

Among the effective teaching strategies discussed are feedback mechanisms and learners' perceptions of teaching approaches, the use of the think-aloud technique to enhance reading comprehension, intervention strategies in reading, the essential role of picture books in stimulating young learners' linguistic curiosity, and the action-oriented approach in classroom settings.

The discussion also extends to online language teaching for adults and the creation of digital tools specifically designed to develop the L2 skills of children, thus highlighting their importance in L2 education. Furthermore, the exploration of community-based language learning, which fosters cultural and linguistic resources and encourages the practical application of language skills in real-world scenarios, is another important aspect that will be discussed here.

This collection of articles offers examples of studies shedding light on the multitude of ways in which language teaching and learning can be enriched and made more inclusive, thus possibly serving as a source of inspiration for further research in this dynamic field.

The Editors.

Employing intelligibility ratings of accentedness for learner-centred pronunciation instruction in Icelandic as a second language

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ABSTRACT

With teaching of second-language (L2) pronunciation having turned towards stressing L2 learners' intelligibility, questions have arisen as to how pronunciation teaching can support L2 learners in achieving their communicative goals. In this paper, we report on a pilot study, which, firstly, aims at contributing to the understanding of how those phonological features that are typically found in L2 learners of Icelandic with different first-language (L1) backgrounds influence intelligibility, and, thus, communication. Secondly, the study addresses teaching practices by aiming at incorporating the gathered knowledge from the phonological analysis into instructors' teaching routines, thus focussing on individualizing feedback tailored to the learner's L1. Results indicate that the most common deviations were atypical vowel quality, lack of preaspiration and voiced consonants in a devoicing environment. However, single deviations in segments often do not have a significant effect on intelligibility while accumulation in a segment has a greater effect. The commonality of words also plays a part as the listener can much more easily predict common words than rare words.

Keywords: *formal phonological features, intelligibility, learner-centred feedback, L2, accent, mixed L1 classroom*

Introduction

The number of immigrants in Iceland has risen drastically over the past three decades, now accounting for 18.1% of the Icelandic population (Statistics Iceland, 2022). These relatively fast demographic changes have brought about a new reality, both as to increasing numbers of L2 speakers of Icelandic and L1 listeners familiarizing themselves with L2-accented Icelandic. This can pose some societal and linguistic challenges since Iceland has, until recently, comprised a monolingual and monoethnic linguistic community with L1 Icelandic showing little internal phonological variation. The existing phonological variation is regionally distributed but partly receding (Guðmundsdóttir, 2022; Friðriksson et.al, forthcoming), at the same time as new age-bound variants appear to gain ground

(Sigurjónsdóttir, 2024). Consistent with rising numbers of L2 speakers in Icelandic society, the demand for instruction in Icelandic as a second language has increased over recent years (see Þorgeirsdóttir, forthcoming).

Against this background, the objective of this pilot study is twofold. Firstly, the study attempts to reduce the gap in knowledge on formal phonological deviation in L2 Icelandic by performing a phonological analysis of L2-speaker samples directed at ratings of accentedness and intelligibility. The analysis is based on ratings from a professional listener: a phonologist at the University of Iceland with rich experience in phonological analysis and an L1 speaker of Icelandic[1]. The size of the pilot study does not allow a larger sample of listeners and therefore the analysis is only based on a single trained person who can assess the deviations from a standard Icelandic pronunciation more proficiently than an average L1 Icelandic speaker. A trained professional is also able to better differentiate the effects of deviations on intelligibility from comprehensibility. Secondly, this knowledge is applied for individualizing feedback on L2 Icelandic pronunciation according to learners' L1 backgrounds, thus facilitating pronunciation instruction in the L2-learner classroom.

Before proceeding, it is important to stress that disentangling the concepts of accentedness and intelligibility as well as comprehensibility, has widely contributed to an understanding of the significance of including the (L1) listener or interlocutor into frameworks of successful communication between L1 speakers' perception and L2 speakers' production. To clarify the terms used, *accentedness* means how weakly or strongly an L2 accent is perceived, i.e. how deviant the accent is from the target L1 pronunciation (e.g., Thomson 2018). *Intelligibility* refers to "the extent to which a given utterance is understood by a listener" (Kennedy & Trofimovich, 2008, p. 461), whereas *comprehensibility* is understood as "the ease or difficulty a listener experiences in understanding an utterance" (Derwing & Munro, 2015, p. 5). Although related, the concepts differ from one another in the way that – coupled with ratings of accentedness – intelligibility is not necessarily impaired by perceptions of a stronger accent. In other words, L2 learners do often get their message across independent of degrees of accentedness. However, lower comprehensibility ratings, i.e. listeners' perceptions of greater effort required to understand an L2 speaker's utterance, frequently interferes with perceptions of accentedness; that is, L2 accents are perceived as stronger when coinciding with increased effort to understand the accent (cf. e.g., Derwing & Munro, 2015, p. 6; Thomson, 2018).

[1] The professional listener is one of two authors of the study.

Measures of accentedness and L2 pronunciation instruction

Over the past three decades, L2 instruction has seen a paradigm shift away from emphasizing native-like pronunciation according to L1-speaker idealism towards prioritizing intelligibility in the L2 speaker, thus acknowledging that L2 speakers resort to multiple models in their performance (e.g., Derwing & Munro, 2015; Moyer, 2014; Pennington, 2021). This acknowledgment is also evident in the CEFR companion volume descriptors of plurilingual competence (Council of Europe 2020). Amidst all of this, empirical evidence has shown that accentedness and intelligibility do not necessarily overlap (Munro & Derwing, 1995).

As for L2 pronunciation instruction, research indicates that teachers have found it demanding to identify common pronunciation problems in students with different L1s (Foote et al., 2011), whereas, in reality, this challenge is even greater considering the circumstance that instruction often occurs in mixed L1-classrooms. However, research also shows that pronunciation instruction with emphasis on the individual learner and their L1 can both significantly improve pronunciation with a long-lasting effect (Couper, 2006) and contribute to building the L2 learner's phonological competence as well as communication skills. This is especially the case when involving corrective feedback (Saito & Lyster, 2012; Saito 2021). At the same time, raising L2 learners' awareness towards certain pronunciation features has been shown to be important for improved production (Saalfeld, 2012), thus emphasizing the importance of perception for production.

Previous research has identified the possible influence of prominence, word stress, high functional load segments, vocal projection, and speech rate on comprehension (Derwing & Munro, 2015, p. 111). The specific features that effect intelligibility vary between L2s, as some features may have great effect in one language but less in another. For example, uvular [ʀ] and rhotic [ɹ] are both perceived as /r/ by L1 Icelandic speakers despite the standard variant being a trill [r]. Spanish, however, contains both taps /r/ and trills /r/ in its phonetic inventory, making a precise production of trill sounds more significant for intelligibility (Nagle, et al., 2023).

The Icelandic Context: L1 Pronunciation and the L2 classroom

L1 pronunciation in Icelandic, its inventory as well as prominent phonological features are well-documented, e.g., in Árnason (2011). Some of the most conspicuous features are preaspiration (aspiration before fortis plosives preceding a short vowel; /pakkɪ/ [pʰahcɪ]), devoicing of sonorants (when preceding a fortis plosive; /hampʏr/ [hamp̥ʏr̥]) and [t]-epenthesis (in the clauses /ll nn rl rn sl sn/: /varla/ [vartla]). Although common textbooks used in L2-learner instruction incorporate this knowledge (e.g., Garðarsdóttir & Þorvaldsdóttir, 2016; Kristinsson,

1988), research on L2 pronunciation in Icelandic is scarce, especially regarding possible influence from transfer of phonological systems and rules in students' L1. Concerning online learner support, the tool Computer Assisted Pronunciation Training in Icelandic (CAPTinI) is currently being developed. This tool aims at providing computer-assisted pronunciation training and, ultimately, corrective feedback for the individual L2 learner (Richter et al., 2022). However, this tool does not set out to analyse L2-learner backgrounds, nor does it consider measurements of intelligibility. On a societal scale, current investigations into L2 pronunciation are largely limited to sociolinguistic approaches of L2 accent evaluation as deviation from L1 speaker norms (Bade, 2019; Bade, forthcoming a), including evaluations of L2-speaker comprehensibility provided by non-professional L1 listeners (Bade 2023; Bade, forthcoming b).

In this paper, the focus is not only on examining those features that cause difficulties in L2 learners of Icelandic with different L1 backgrounds but also on how those deviations affect measurements of accentedness and intelligibility.

Methodology

Drawing upon an understanding of the significance of listener-based data for measurements of accentedness and intelligibility (e.g., Derwing & Munro, 2015), this pilot study makes use of several methods to identify phonological features in the speech of L2 learners.

Firstly, the study comprises a phonological analysis of five L2 learners of Icelandic, who read the same grammatically and stylistically sound text, used for L2 learners of Icelandic because it contains most of the inventory's sounds and sound clusters. Each recording lasted between 18–24 seconds. Reasons for choosing a read text lie in both the controllability for grammatical errors and the word choice likely to be found in natural speech, and the comparability between phonological features and their production across the L2 learners of Icelandic. To control for non-linguistic factors, all L2 learners of Icelandic were women between 25 and 35 years of age with similar L2 competence in Icelandic, as they were all students in the second year of the BA-program Icelandic as a Second Language at the University of Iceland. The L2 learners' L1s were Danish, American English, Lithuanian, Polish, and Tagalog.

Secondly, a professional listener listened to each recording once. While listening, the listener a) marked each word or words uttered by the L2 learner of Icelandic that were in some part different from standard Icelandic pronunciation; b) transcribed the utterance; c) analysed the phonological deviation, and then d) rated the effect it had on intelligibility. The rating was from 1–4 and had the following values: 1, a deviation is heard but completely intelligible; 2, a deviation is heard, and is intelligible due to the context of the text; 3, a deviation is heard, and intelligibility

is disturbed; 4, a deviation is heard, and intelligibility is disrupted. There can be more than one deviation in the pronunciation of a single word or segment, but the rating was given for each word or segment, not necessarily each deviation. An example of the rating is shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Ratings of effect on intelligibility by the professional listener.

Word(s)	Transcription	Deviation	Rating
Litla (little)	[lɪtla]	Lack of preaspiration	1
Af því að (because)	[aɸia]	Atypical assimilation: [ɸ]	1
Bíður (waits)	[pɪθʏr̥]	Vowel quality: [ɪ] Unexpected unvoicing: [θ]	3

Results and discussion

The following features were the most common deviations in the sample: atypical vowel quality, lack of preaspiration and voiced consonants in a devoicing environment. In addition, unconventional stress patterns, interrupted flow of speech and unexpected insertions and deletions were also frequent. Here, the commonality of deviations will not be discussed in detail but rather the effect they have on intelligibility.

The most common deviations mentioned before generally did not create problems for intelligibility, when they were the only noticeable deviation in the word. As can be seen in Table 1, when there is only one deviation noted in a syntactic segment (word or string of words), the effect on intelligibility is low. However, accumulation has a greater effect. Here, comprehensibility is involved as more than one deviation requires more effort from the listener to understand the segment. The example in Table 1 of the pronunciation [pɪθʏr̥] for the Icelandic word *bíður* (waits) has a rating of 3 for intelligibility (a deviation is heard, and intelligibility is disturbed) because the listener has to work out two sounds: the merge of the vowel [ɪ] with [i] and the unvoiced [θ] where a voiced [ð] was expected.

Measuring the effect of atypical vowel quality on intelligibility is subjective to each case. However, the effect on intelligibility and comprehensibility is understandably great when the produced vowel resembles a different phoneme in the L2 phonemic inventory from the target phoneme, i.e. substituting [ɪ] with [i], which represent different phonemes in Icelandic. Certain vowels and vowel contrasts in Icelandic seem more difficult than others for most L2 speakers and the confusion can most often be explained in two ways. On the one hand, the confusion is made due to the vowels being phonetically similar, and this confusion usually

applies to speakers whose L1 does not contain the same contrast. Examples of this type of confusion are the high phonemes /ɪ/ and /ʏ/ which are confused with lower /ɛ/ and /œ/. On the other hand, a confusion is often made by L2 speakers where both the sound of the phoneme and the orthographic representation are similar. This applies to the contrast between /ɪ/ and /i/, spelled *i* and *í;* /ʏ/ and /u/, spelled *u* and *ú*; /o/ and /ou/, spelled *o* and *ó*.

One of the findings by the professional listener was the different level of disrupted intelligibility depending on the confused vowel being in the word stem or in an inflectional morpheme. In Icelandic, only three vowels can appear in inflectional morphemes: *i, u* and *a* (/ɪ/, /ʏ/ and /a/). As these morphemes do not carry the meaning of the word, the difference in vowel quality from the target sound does not usually affect the intelligibility of the word. In addition, these morphemes always receive either no stress or secondary word stress, and syllables with no stress are usually more sensitive to lenition and phonological changes. For example, if the vowel quality in the word *fiskur* (fish), pronounced [fɪskʏr̥], is atypical, there is more effect on intelligibility when the quality of /ɪ/ in the word stem /fɪsk/ is unusual than when the quality of /ʏ/ in the inflectional morpheme /ʏr/: pronunciation [fiskʏr̥] or [fɛskʏr̥] is less intelligible than [fɪskur̥] or [fɪskœr̥].

Finally, the commonality of words often gave great support to intelligibility despite phonetic deviations. The lack of preaspiration seemed to depend to some extent on this, as can be seen by the comparison of two words in the text read by the L2 speakers: *litla* (little) [lɪhtla], and *Skoppa* (name for a pet) [skɔhpa]. The pet's name *Skoppa* is less common than the adjective and therefore the listener can more easily predict *litla* in a certain context than *Skoppa*. This was also found for the voicing of /n/ in a devoiced final position. One of the least intelligible words spoken by most speakers was *vænn* (kind, good), where many speakers produced a voiced nasal instead of an unvoiced nasal: [vaitn̥] ([t]-epenthesis due to geminate /nn/). However, the same error often occurred for the much more common word *nafn* (name), which received a lower rating for effect on intelligibility: [napn̥] (fortition of /f/ results in [p]). This was evaluated as an effect of word commonality.

Conclusion

The results of this study have shown that measurements of intelligibility – rather than of accentedness alone – can contribute to our understanding of what phonological features drive successful communication in the individual language context. Identifying formal phonological features deviant from L1 Icelandic pronunciation according to the individual background of the L2 learner of Icelandic can provide instructors at all levels of second language pronunciation teaching with knowledge and tools to raise awareness of those features and training L2 learners'

perception of them as well as to provide learner-centred corrective feedback to learners' production.

The results of this study have already been partly integrated into teaching practices at the University of Iceland, for example in beginner classes in pronunciation instruction. Drawing on several methods used in direct and indirect teaching strategies, special focus is put on differences in vowel quality, both in creating learners' awareness, practicing the sounds regarding perception and production, as well as using them outside the classroom. Explicit instruction with audiolingual learning and dictation clozes can aid the learner with developing awareness and training the ear. As to achieving learners' communicative goals according to the Common European Framework of Reference for languages, especially concerning accumulation of deviation and, thus, impact on intelligibility, it has been helpful to let students record, revise and re-record oral assignments and presentations. Additionally, as the results of commonality have shown, pronunciation teaching must go hand in hand with the teaching of other linguistic sub-systems such as vocabulary.

In the future, this study could be repeated with samples from a wider variety regarding the L1 backgrounds of L2 learners of Icelandic to gain further insights into features influencing intelligibility in the Icelandic context. Furthermore, it appears advisable to expand the study by, firstly, making use of both read texts containing a large variety of the features comprising the Icelandic phonological inventory, as well as natural speech. This could essentially contribute to catching suprasegmental features, also considering pragmatic influence, for example contrastive stress. Secondly, such a study could benefit from including more speakers sharing the same L1 to exclude individual L1 transfer. Finally, further research might explore effects of intelligibility ratings by presenting more L1 listeners with L2 Icelandic stimuli.

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Transitioning to online teaching of Icelandic as a second language in courses for adult learners: Lessons learned from the pandemic

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ABSTRACT

This article explores the transition from remote teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic to online teaching post-pandemic. The focus here is on courses of Icelandic as a second language (L2) at different institutes in Iceland. Both challenges related to remote teaching and the novel approaches adopted by teachers in online teaching during the pandemic and at present is discussed. This qualitative study involves structured interviews with eleven teachers of L2 Icelandic at different institutions, courses at private language schools and public university courses in Iceland. A purposeful snowball sampling method is used to recruit voluntary participants. Thematic analysis is used to analyse the data. A wide range of themes were identified, however, only five themes related to the transition mode and innovative teaching techniques will be discussed: tools and technology, digital skills, structure of the online class, assignments and tasks, and active participation. The most significant innovative approach is the flipped online classroom model, with integrated digital tools to enhance learner engagement during online class assignments to help practise specific language skills. Results demonstrate further strategies supporting the learner-centred learning style, enhanced engagement and participation, and the effective use of technology in language education.

Keywords: *Icelandic as a second language, online teaching, post-pandemic, remote teaching, teachers*

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic caused unprecedented changes in teaching delivery at most educational institutions around the word. During that time, emergency remote teaching (ERT) (Hodges et al., 2020) was adapted to replace in-person classes so that teaching was instantly delivered remotely in various modes and by using various online tools. The mode of teaching was either in live online classes (synchronous) according to the official timetable or in the form of a flipped classroom, with content reviewed before the live online class (asynchronous). In doing so, different tools were adopted to cater for different teaching modes and

purposes. For instance, video conferencing tools such as *Microsoft Teams* or *Zoom*, cloud-based storage services such as *Google Drive,* video channels such as *YouTube*, learning management systems (LMSs) such as *Canvas* or *Moodle*, and testing platforms such as *Inspera*, were utilised to enable live streaming of online classes, storage and sharing of pre-recorded lectures and learning materials along with assignments, and tests. This sudden reorganisation of teaching and adaptation to different delivery modes created a new challenge for many instructors. This challenge involved developing new digital skills, showing flexibility in class management, and applying innovative teaching approaches and methods more suitable for online delivery (Geirsdóttir, et al., 2020; Reuge et al., 2021; Carroll & Constantinou, 2023).

Similar to schools in other countries, schools in Iceland had to suddenly replace in-person teaching with ERT (Geirsdóttir et al., 2020; Gestsdóttir et al., 2020). This emergency measure took place following the gathering restrictions due to the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in the country and, as a result, ERT was adopted. This relatively new concept of ERT is an alternative to the more established concepts of online education and distance learning that had been used in the time before the pandemic. Online teaching emerged with the advent of the Internet in the 20th century, and stands for carefully designed courses that have either fully online and/or partial online and offline (i.e. hybrid) instruction modes, conducted during live online classes and/or preparation at home before joining the class (Sun & Chen, 2016). In contrast to online teaching, ERT is a response to an emergency shift in delivery mode from on-site to online (Hodges et al., 2020). As such, ERT represents ad-hoc adjustments, and in this way is a challenge to all participating parties who try to maintain access to on-site courses but in a changed online delivery mode.

This article examines teachers' experiences in teaching L2 Icelandic to adult learners on different language courses during the pandemic, and compares these experiences to online teaching post-pandemic. Research in this field has not yet been conducted in Iceland. The goal here is to gain insights into the state of online teaching of L2 Icelandic courses today, and find out whether ERT during the pandemic has in some ways influenced the teaching strategy today. The hypothesis here is that the COVID-19 pandemic caused pedagogical innovations and changes in teaching practices for the future of language education beyond the pandemic. The following research questions guided the research: 1) What pedagogical innovations and teaching strategies emerged from the transition to online teaching of L2 Icelandic; 2) How did the ERT model impact the roles and perceptions of teachers and learners within the online L2 Icelandic learning environment in courses for adult learners; and 3) What are the long-term implications of online teaching strategies for L2 Icelandic courses? Due to the specific focus on innovative teaching strategies in this article, only the first research question will be discussed

in the results section. In doing so, this article is aimed at language educators who are looking for strategies to enhance their online teaching practice in L2 courses consisting of groups of adult learners post-pandemic.

Theoretical underpinnings of the transition to online teaching

The transition to post-pandemic online teaching has already observed some development. For instance, Brown and Krzic (2020) indicate that recognising the importance of online resources including online exams, and offering the combination of simultaneous (i.e., synchronous or live online teaching), delayed (i.e., asynchronous or flipped classroom), blended (simultaneous and delayed) and hybrid (in-person and online attendance in class at the same time) delivery modes, may contribute to increased flexibility regarding different learning styles of learners and allocating more time to interactive engagement during class activities post-pandemic. Although the latter blended and hybrid modes are often used interchangeably as synonyms, the difference between those two terms will not be applied in this article and they will be used synonymously. Apart from flexibility, inclusiveness is another factor that plays an important role in online teaching. When course curricula are adjusted to offer distance learners equal participation in classes that they would otherwise not be able to attend due to location, then these curricula not only reflect flexibility but also inclusiveness, because they contribute to creating a more inclusive teaching environment for all learners on site and online (Evans-Amalu & Claravall, 2021). Such curricula support sustainable education through utilising space and time, which is reflected by the use of online tools and the adaptability to offer hybrid courses (Munir, 2022).

In the post-pandemic era, research indicates that teaching, whether in person or online, has indeed undergone some development. The main characteristics of online teaching at present are flexibility, adaptability, and utilising technology (Zhao & Xue, 2022; Richards & Thompson, 2023; Sato et al., 2024; Sia et al., 2023). This is in line with Gonzalez (2009), who had already explored online teaching approaches over two decades ago. Nevertheless, hybrid teaching has shifted the nature of fully online teaching even further towards those three characteristics, because it supports a more learner-centred learning environment. The hybrid teaching mode equally requires a more structural redesign of course curricula along with the implementation of different online tools to cater for learners that are on site and online at the same time (Sia et al., 2023, p. 7). Research by Sato et al. (2024) similarly highlights the importance of hybrid courses because they represent another form of inclusive education. In order to make online education even more effective, Richards and Thompson (2023) advocate for more changes, e.g., redesigning course materials and courses to offer more interactive elements, especially during online delivery, utilizing LMSs to better facilitate course

management, and developing institutional technological support. Focusing on interactive exercises with learners and dividing larger groups into smaller groups of learners may indeed help facilitate better communication between L2 Icelandic learners and the teacher, and help create a better online learning experience (Bédi & Roje, 2021).

Although the shift from ERT to traditional in-person learning may largely be seen as positive, this shift may, nonetheless, have a negative impact on both teachers and learners. According to Zhao and Xue (2022), some learners may be sensitive to shift from ERT back to traditional in-person teaching due to various factors such as distance, financial constraints, or even psychological pressure. Because of this change, it is recommended to consider some adaptability time and offer different teaching delivery modes to help these learners overcome barriers associated with these negative factors (Zhao & Xue, 2022). ERT had a mostly negative impact on teachers in terms of lack of institutional support regarding technology, readiness to use online tools, mental health, and the workload associated with this change (DeCoito & Estaiteyeh, 2022). All of this has influenced the teachers' readiness and attitudes towards online education. However, DeCoito and Estaiteyeh (2022) furthermore advise that letting teachers share their experiences of online teaching and acquired expertise in the use of digital resources and providing better institutional planning and preparation, may help overcome future challenges related to online teaching (p. 352).

Methodological background to the research

This research is qualitative in nature because it involves in-depth structured interviews with eleven participants. The research was conducted in the spring of 2024 with teachers of L2 Icelandic that actively taught different online courses including L2 Icelandic during the COVID-19 pandemic, and most of whom are still actively teaching L2 Icelandic online today. All participants were experienced teachers in L2 Icelandic ranging from 2 to 14 years of teaching practice at university or private language schools, five female and six male, with age range between 32 and 61 years. All teachers had a university degree in subjects related to Icelandic, L2 Icelandic or other languages, linguistics, or pedagogy. The participants have various backgrounds, three are L2 Icelandic speakers and eight are native speakers of Icelandic. The Snowball sampling method (Noy, 2008) was used to recruit volunteering participants based on recommendations from others. Consent for taking anonymous interviews was obtained from all participants.

Structured interviews consisting of twenty-one open-ended questions in English (see Appendix A) were undertaken with all participants. The interviews were conducted in English, but participants could use Icelandic to answer the questions. The reason for selecting English was due to the questions being adapted from

research by Foye et al. (2022) originally written in English, and the questions not translated into Icelandic. The average time of each interview was 32 minutes.

The methodology of thematic analysis (Riger & Sigurvinsdóttir, 2016, pp. 34–35) was employed so that the investigator, who is the author of this article, would be immersed into the data by transcribing and highlighting relevant information in respondents' answers, generating initial codes, reviewing the codes, and categorising them into common themes, reviewing the themes and establishing the final theme categories. However, more themes were identified than the space allows for discussion in this article. Due to the specific focus of this article, only five selected themes are explored to answer the first research question about pedagogical innovations and teaching strategies in online teaching of L2 Icelandic as stated earlier. The remaining themes will, nevertheless, be part of another research article about pedagogical implications and reflections on remote and online teaching.

Results and discussion

The hypothesis that the COVID-19 pandemic caused pedagogical innovations and changes in teaching practices for the future of language education beyond the pandemic was tested positive. Based on participants' insights, novel pedagogical approaches were developed as innovations to pre-pandemic online teaching, which was relatively rare except for individual online lessons. Novel strategies emerged in the transition from in-pandemic ERT to the post-pandemic online teaching of L2 Icelandic. Online teaching seems more normalised today than it had been before the pandemic.

Based on the thematic analysis of interviews, a number of main themes were identified. Due to the restricted focus on innovative online teaching methods in this article, however, only the following five themes are included for discussion: 1) tools and technology; 2) digital skills; 3) structure of online classes; 4) assignments and tasks; and 5) active participation. These themes will help respond to the hypothesis and answer the research question stated earlier, which, as the data in this section reveals, is confirmed. This is furthermore supported by the answer to the research question as well as by the discussion of five themes that emerged from the analysis. The results were categorised into the following themes:

1) **Tools and technology**: Teachers used a wide range of digital tools to adjust to ERT, e.g., conferencing tools *Microsoft Teams, Zoom, Google Meet, Skype*; collaborative platforms *Google Drive* and *Google Docs, Padlet*; tools supporting interactive tasks *Quizlet*, *Kahoot, BookWidgets*; different LMSs such as *Canvas, Inna,* or other self-developed or adapted tools supporting online class management; and some testing platforms such as *Inspera* or other (not specifically mentioned). Some tools were completely

new to some of the teachers, e.g. *Zoom, Microsoft Teams*, *Canvas*, other tools were familiar. However, some tools had technical issues, e.g. *Zoom*: "[A]s soon as I moved from one breakout room to the other it can happen that I cannot enter the second breakout room and I cannot exit to the main meeting", which affected the overall tools' usability in the online class. Other tools lacked the breakout rooms function at the early stage of ERT, e.g., *Microsoft Teams*, but were used based on institutional decision. Teachers often experienced technical issues with the internet: "[T]he only problem was when there were technical difficulties due to [internet] connection". Currently post-pandemic, teachers are more aware of the features different online tools offer, which eventually contributes to a more effective online teaching approach, e.g., various video-conferencing tools, tools for recoding and posting videos, different functionalities within an LMS or similar platforms. Some teachers (2 of 11) reported that having two screens (one for showing presentation slides and online documents, and the other for showing live streaming to see all the participants), and two cameras (one directed at the teacher and the other at a notepad that the teacher uses for writing) makes online teaching easier and contributes to a much better online learning experience to learners. All teachers agree that LMSs and similar platforms are useful tools for keeping teaching materials, exercises, assignments, and discussions in one place, enabling learners to access materials whenever needed, and for teachers provide feedback to assignments, monitoring learners' progress, and not at last for checking in with learners before and after the class via messaging. Letting learners use their own mobile phones for participating in online classes contributes to interactive participation and community building.

2) **Digital skills**: More than half of the interviewed teachers (7 of 11) had a high level of technological skill or felt comfortable using it, others (3 of 11) had low levels and one (1 of 11) did not feel comfortable at all using technology before ERT. Generally, all teachers showed flexibility in learning to use new digital tools for online teaching in the pandemic. Some teachers had their own preferred online tools, but others adopted tools available through their institution. Several teachers (4 of 11) had previous experience in teaching L2 Icelandic online prior to ERT, but others reported they could adapt very quickly to using technology for online teaching, although it was not always easy. One teacher, who had no previous experience in using technology before ERT, noted: "I think some of my friends and colleagues were maybe a bit scared [to use technology] but I thought OK let's see what's going on, we will try". Teachers found it useful to use features such as breakout rooms and online chat, both of which helped them both to keep learners

involved in the class and to create a more interactive online learning experience. Additional training provided either by their institution or self-initiative (seeking formal or informal study) enabled teachers to choose different tools more effectively, e.g., class management using LMSs or similar platforms, using online testing platforms, and other online tools for creating interactive exercises. One teacher noted: "I think it's good to use some extra apps or extra programs but not too many so that the students are [not] overwhelmed". Additionally, some teachers recommend that learners should receive instructions about how to use additional tools during online classes for a flawless teaching and learning experience.

3) **Structure of the online class**: During ERT, the structure of one-on-one online courses was flexible and adjustable to the needs of individual learners: "[I]t's very hard to describe private classes because they change so much with every individual person". Compared to the structure of online classes in groups, teachers experimented with the structure because many had to convert their in-person courses to online courses at very short notice. Overall, different delivery modes were adopted (synchronous or asynchronous) depending on the situation at the institutions and the nature of the course (general L2 learning course or specific courses on grammar and pronunciation, etc.). Some institutions took a top-down strategy and offered a flipped classroom model, but others used a bottom-up strategy and let teachers decide their own approach. In the context of parallel groups on the same course, neither the top-down nor the bottom-up strategy turned out to be more effective. Although learners in these parallel group courses are often at similar language levels, they may have varied language backgrounds. Some groups are more homogeneous, e.g., Polish learning L2 Icelandic, others are more heterogeneous regarding their linguistic background, which requires different preparation by the teacher. As such, teachers found it difficult to adjust their approach from in-person classes to online: "[T]he courses I teach are shared common courses and in these courses, I think, the development is very slow, right, so there are many people involved so you can't just (...) have an idea and then you implement that idea". Yet, some teachers were often not aware of how their other colleagues teach on different L2 courses at the same institution: "I would say do like me but I don't know what the others do at [my institution] and how it works, but I think this is a good recipe not have too long online meetings but just [focus on] exercise (...) so you would need to create material that people can use [before the online class] and, of course, it would be best that not every teacher would need to do it but like the institution maybe would create something".

Teachers (4 of 11) with prior experience in online teaching continued using their expertise but some had to adjust to teaching larger groups of learners to create some kind of online community, and send learners separate emails with feedback after the online classes. Using their prior experience in online teaching was reflected in their confidence in teaching, which possibly had a more positive impact on their class management, e.g., by keeping a more personal approach, maintaining a friendly atmosphere in the class, starting a class with a light conversation, e.g., an icebreaker, or being interested in learners' daily routines; providing interactive exercises during and after the class; preparing additional materials, e.g., video recordings and exercises to use before and after the class; and calling out learners' names to enhance participation in the online class. Some other teachers even tried to innovate their appearance on screen by selecting different backgrounds that would catch the learners' attention. Nevertheless, most of the teachers had to adjust their own teaching style and approaches to the new online environment mainly because of three factors: 1) time management: "[W]e just had to allow for a lot more time for exercises and explanations and checking in with students, in the classroom it's easier to do things like that, because you can look at everyone in the room and you can see their faces, you can see who is writing and who isn't", 2) learners' attitudes due to their unpreparedness for ERT: it makes a difference "that students (...) know what they're going into instead of having a mindset of thinking that [this online class] is instead of something better [on site] all the time"; and 3) getting feedback from learners is equally important: "[Y]ou really need feedback from the learners to know if you're going too fast or too slow or if you need to explain something further, that was difficult because not all the students necessarily wanted to have their cameras turned on". Development of online courses has been more towards learner-centred teaching: "[T]he style of online teaching has evolved ever since, you know, so for my next groups (...) I kind of switched to more like a teacher assisted self-study, from like simultaneous teaching online to more like giving more flexibility in learning". Based on the teachers' experiences in this study, the structure of online classes had undergone some observable development (see Table 1).

Table 1. An overall structure of the online class during the ERT compared to post-pandemic online teaching.

		Teaching during ERT (pandemic)	Post-pandemic online teaching
Before class		Less frequent *flipped classroom* model: the use of introductory materials or videos before live sessions. In-person classes converted to on-line classes; some teachers redesign the course curricula based on prior experience and preparation for online teaching from before the pandemic.	More frequent *flipped classroom* model: the use of introductory materials or videos before live sessions; more teachers are conscious about the need to redesign the course curricula to help learners come more prepared for the live sessions; managing learners' expectations from the course by providing more detailed course description.
During class	**Starting class**	Light and engaging conversation with learners, e.g., about daily life, weather in different locations where learners live; icebreaker; brief review of content from previous lesson.	Light and engaging conversation with learners, e.g., about daily life, weather in different locations where learners live; icebreaker; brief review of content from previous lesson; structured introduction of content in current lesson.
	Core lesson structure	Spontaneous adaptation of the lesson plan; motivating learners in live sessions; emphasis on learners' self-reflection in individual tasks during live sessions; use of e-mails for sharing materials from live sessions; pair and group work in breakout rooms.	Structured but flexible lesson plan with a clear sequence of interactive activities; pair work avoided, instead the focus on group work of min. 3 learners in breakout rooms; more integrated use of LMS (or similar) for uploading materials enabling learners to view them in case of weak internet connection; the use of additional online tools for assessing learners' knowledge during interactive tasks, e.g., quizzes; focus on weekly modules; integrating projects into class assignments for learners to meet in-person or online outside live sessions.
	Content delivery	Mostly live online classes (synchronous) and less frequently in a flipped classroom model (asynchronous); the use of different digital platforms for storing and sharing content, *PowerPoint* presentations, video lectures; assignments via e-mail;	More emphasis on discussion and application of concepts; strategic use of selected (1–2) digital tools to enhance spoken and written interaction; blended (hybrid) classes to serve different types of learners; content in live sessions trimmed down to key concepts; additional content provided before or after live sessions;

	Teaching during ERT (pandemic)		Post-pandemic online teaching
		technical challenge to live-stream hand-written explanations or the use of whiteboards; efforts to use the same content as in in-person classes.	shorter presentations on selected topics (approx. 15 min.) combined with interactive tasks; instant access to content in LMS; inclusiveness and dynamics are key features in selecting and designing content (e.g., delivering content by listening, watching videos, reading during or after the live session, and uploading explanations of content from live sessions to LMS for later review); additional exercises "in store" for later use during live sessions in case time allows.
	Interaction	Code of conduct about the use of microphone, camera, technical devices, participation not always present; cameras not always switched on; chat feature during live sessions used only sometimes; improvised exercises in breakout rooms with 2 learners (pair work) often ineffective; e-mail follow up after live session; notifications sent by teachers from LMS about assignments.	Code of conduct about the use of microphone, camera settings, the use of different technical devices, and active participation; cameras are required to be switched on; the use of name lists to have all learners take turns in tasks; strategic arrangement of larger groups into smaller sizes; group work of min. 3 learners in breakout rooms to facilitate productive collaboration; providing learners with precise instructions about tasks and what to do in breakout rooms; focus on creating meaningful interactions during live sessions by structured content and tasks related to specific topics; building learner community by letting leaners work together in small groups during and after the class (home assignments and projects).
	Learning	Mainly during live sessions and in-home assignments after class; some pre-class preparation; teachers providing explanations during live presentations; online polls and quizzes; tests.	Learner-centred learning; activities designed for direct learner involvement using different modes, e.g., interactive exercises and listening materials (songs, news with simpler Icelandic, e.g., for

	Teaching during ERT (pandemic)	Post-pandemic online teaching
		children "krakkafréttir" on *RÚV*[1], teachers create their own content for reading and listening); using *Padlet* for collaborative projects; online polls and quizzes to break the routine; tests, projects outside of live sessions.
After class	Occasional follow up via e-mail; notifications from LMS.	More frequent follow up via e-mail; reminders about assignments from LMS; additional exercises; class projects in smaller groups; building a learner community (some learners meet in person to study together after class or visit the teacher in a different city/country).

4) **Assignments and tasks**: Assignments in one-on-one classes in private lessons were tailor made. In contrast to assignments in group courses, these depended on the overall course syllabus and the teaching goals of each lesson. Here, assignments became more structured and linked to presented topics during each lesson; they became shorter and more frequent. The teachers came up with a variety of different exercises focused on speaking so that learners could take turns during the online class. Larger assignments such as mid-term and final projects kept similar structures as during in-person classes, i.e., presentation of projects, essays. Some teachers also provided home assignments for learners to do before the online class. Home assignments after the class were more frequent but also more varied to cater for different learning styles of learners. One teacher noted: "[The learners] always get like four assignments that they need to submit in this learning management system so then I know, I can also see who looked at Quizlet, who learned the words, and also who submitted [results]". Some teachers involved learners' own devices such as mobile phones to complete assignments during the online class, which enhanced interactivity and contributed to learner active involvement. Some of the teachers provided those learners who wanted to

[1] RÚV, The Icelandic National Broadcasting Service, https://spilari.nyr.ruv.is/krakkaruv/renningur/krakkafrettir.

learn and practise more, with additional home assignments. Repercussions for not completing assignments were given either directly (deducting points, marking assignments as incomplete, or giving absence due to unpreparedness) or indirectly (equally involving learners into open discussions where they showed lack of knowledge on the topic). These repercussions depended on the type of online course the learners participated in.

5) **Active participation**: Interactive participation during online classes is, according to the interviewed teachers, the key to effective online teaching. It is important to have the cameras turned on both to show presence in the online class, which also helps the teacher to notice feedback during the online class, and readiness to answer questions, which keep learners focused and involved. In addition, it is also the teachers themselves who contribute to learners' active participation: "[T]he teacher has to be present too, you are just a little picture on a screen, you need to be expressive, need to have energy without burning out, [and have some] humour always". Moreover, to keep learners active and focused, all teachers in this study used various interactive exercises during online classes, thus supporting writing and speaking skills, using a book for reading texts out loud, watching short videos, using chat for expressing ideas, using songs, and games (one teacher adjusted interactive games from in-person classes to the online mode). Using the name list of learners was practical because it helped the teachers to call out leaners' names when taking turns in exercises. Group discussion (not in pairs!) breakout rooms are only recommended with a minimum of three learners, and at least one learner needs to be the "better learner" who can lead the discussion. One of the key elements for a successful group work in breakout rooms is providing learners with clear instructions to help them achieve learning outcomes and to keep everyone in the group active: "[T]hey really need very clear instructions what they're supposed to be doing [in breakout rooms]". In classes with larger groups of learners, the advice is to create a flipped online classroom and assign learners to smaller groups, meeting them during shorter online sessions. One teacher noted: "[T]he groups are very small, [and] the people are not for two full hours [as in a usual online class with] (...) ten or fifteen people, [these are now smaller] groups with less people for one hour but they get more quality time, they get to speak". Maintaining active participation of learners in online classes does not only take more time in remote class management but also a longer time. One teacher noted: "[T]o make sure that people are active, you have to explain things very well, you have to give time [for them to take in information], you have to give people time to

prepare, and also to check in [with them] often". Having a lecture can be useful sometimes, but because the attention span of leaners is short, it is recommended to add some interactive exercises: "[A]ttention span is even shorter when you're in front of a screen, so every 15 minutes do something else".

Concluding observations

Dynamics, flexibility, and inclusiveness are the overarching characteristics associated with the transition from ERT to online teaching of L2 Icelandic post-pandemic. A summary of the transition from ERT to online teaching at present is described below (in Appendix B). The answer to the first research question is that the flipped classroom model with integrated specific digital tools enhancing in-class interaction, represented pedagogical innovation in online teaching. This strategy enables teachers to focus more on specific tasks through the nature of interactive exercises during live sessions, thus contributing to increased language output from learners. Shorter *Microsoft PowerPoint* (or similar) presentations (approx. 15 minutes) combined with immediate exercises seemed especially effective in the context of language learning classes online. Despite the challenge in adjusting to ERT during the pandemic, this situation had a relatively positive effect on teachers in how to better utilise available digital technologies in their online teaching post-pandemic, e.g., in using video recordings of presentations before the online class, using breakout rooms with no fewer than three learners, or creating groups of smaller sizes in online classes (e.g., Bédi & Roje, 2021), creating additional exercises for online classes to fill in the remaining time if the teacher had covered the content faster than anticipated, and in creating additional home assignments to enhance understanding of the content for learners.

The structure of online classes improved, so as to include a code of conduct for having learners' cameras switched on, give more responsibility to learners regarding preparation for the online session; include all learners in solving tasks during live sessions, open the live sessions with light and friendly discussions about daily life, do a brief review of the content from the previous session and a brief introduction of the new content at the beginning of the online session, use a whiteboard or a similar tool to write down examples and save these in an LMS for learners to review later, change activities more frequently and utilise chat options for enhanced interaction during live sessions, e.g. by asking learners to provide examples, and predict that learners will need more time to take in new information and practise it during live sessions (hence the flipped classroom model, e.g., Brown & Krzic, 2020). Having two computer screens and two cameras helps better navigate between presentations and exercises, gives the teacher a live view of the class in a separate screen, and teachers can live stream the writing of examples by

hand. Although the style and structure of online classes may depend on the institutional or teacher's preference and the teaching goal, it is of utmost importance to create discussion groups for teachers sharing their practical experience from specific online classes to create common guidelines. Some teachers felt that institutions prefer either using a top-down approach or let individual teachers apply whichever approach they consider suitable, thus retaining the chaotic effect of ERT in online teaching at present.

For more organised online teaching management, using teachers' practical experiences will not only contribute to designing more effective online teaching courses but also offer better learning experiences to learners. Therefore, a bottom-up approach should be combined with a top-down approach to enable creating common guidelines that will be regularly updated. Moreover, letting institutions create common teaching materials for online teaching may trigger redesigning course curricula and, in this way, enhance the efficiency of online teaching (e.g., Richards & Thompson, 2023), thus leading to more stable and structured online teaching. Offering different delivery modes may contribute to the development of inclusive education (e.g., Sato et al., 2024), thus enabling learners in different geographical locations and with different learning preferences to participate either in hybrid or fully online language courses (e.g., Evans-Amalu & Claravall, 2021).

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Appendix A

Interview questions

Content adapted from Foye and Grenier (2022): Reflections on the successes and challenges of teaching physical education during the COVID-19 pandemic. In E. Baumgartner, R. Kaplan-Rakowski, R. E. Ferding, R. Hartshorne, & Ch. Mouza (Eds.), *A Retrospective of Teaching, Technology, and Teacher Education during the COVID-19 Pandemic*, pp. 51–56. Association for the Advancement of Computing in Education (AACE). https://www.learntechlib.org/primary/p/221522/.

1. Tell me about yourself. How long have you been teaching Icelandic as a second or foreign language?
2. Describe your comfort level using technology prior to COVID-19.
3. How prepared did you feel when "your school" announced a changed teaching delivery mode? What sort of direction were you given? What did your first remote teaching lessons look like?
4. What virtual platforms/programs did you use with your classes during that time? What do you think is effective about these programs? What do you think is ineffective about these programs, or what do you wish was different?
5. Did your lessons evolve over the course of "your classes" as you continued to implement remote teaching? If so, how?
6. Did you receive any specific training to help you better serve your students at that time? Did you rely on any colleagues for support? To what extent did your administration provide support?
7. Did you interact with the students during the lessons? What did this look like?
8. Did you require students to send you evidence of learning or completion of assignments? If so, what did that look like? Were there any repercussions for students who did not submit evidence?
9. Can you describe elements of your remote lessons that seemed particularly useful to you during remote teaching?
10. Did you find any elements that were not particularly useful to you during remote teaching?
11. Do you recall any feedback from your students regarding their overall experience of the remote teaching they participated in?
12. Which learning model did your school utilise (remote, hybrid, in-person) during "your classes"?
13. Were your classes synchronous, asynchronous or a blend?

14. How does the content you are delivering now compare to what you would have been teaching in a typical school year before COVID-19?
15. Can you discuss your interactions with your students during “your classes” after the first transition year?
16. Can you describe what a typical online lesson looked like during “your classes” at that time?
17. In case you are teaching online now, can you describe what a typical online lesson looks like for you currently?
18. If you have experience with synchronous and asynchronous classes, can you talk a little bit about which you prefer and why?
19. Being an experienced educator, what advice would you give to future online teachers?
20. If the opportunity arises in the future, would you consider applying for a full-time online language education job? Why or why not?
21. Would you like to add anything?

Appendix B

A thematic summary of the transition from ERT during pandemic to online teaching post-pandemic.

Theme	ERT during pandemic	Online teaching post-pandemic
Tools and technology	Rapid adoption of diverse tools (e.g., Zoom, Teams, Google Meet) with a focus on enabling ERT; basic tutorials about using video conferencing tools.	Strategic integration and optimisation of digital tools with features supporting the teaching style of teachers to enhance learning experience for learners; institutions offer regular tutorials to teachers about using technology.
Digital skills	Quick training on how to use new digital tools and devices; adapting teaching materials for online use; low confidence in digital skills by teachers with no previous experience of online teaching.	Development in digital pedagogy and increase in digital competence of teachers; developing additional (own) teaching materials for online use, e.g., video and audio recordings, multimodal presentations, interactive exercises; increased confidence in digital skills by all teachers.
Structure of the online class	Experimental approaches to lesson delivery; adapting to remote teaching; experiencing technical and pedagogical limitations; exploring new possibilities.	Dynamic structure of class, e.g., changing activities every 15 min.; applying new strategies for online class structure, e.g., flipped classroom; supporting learner-centred approach, e.g., giving a choice of different ways to complete selected home assignments; designing course curricula bearing in mind learners' varied pace of learning.
Assignments and tasks	Adaptation of in-person assignments to online completion; focus on individual tasks and projects using digital media; online tests using testing platforms.	Teachers continue using digital component for intermittent assignments; the focus is more on collaborative projects that use digital tools effectively for testing different language skills; breakout rooms with min. 3 learners; providing clear instructions for tasks in breakout rooms.
Active participation	Trying out different strategies, e.g., interactive polls, quizzes, breakout rooms, to	Applying knowledge and experience from ERT to improve interaction during live sessions, e.g., using the list of students' names to include all students in solving tasks; a preference to use pedagogical

	engage learners and ensure participation.	approaches that engage all learners, regardless of their physical presence, i.e., hybrid and online teaching delivery; adapting in-class games to suit online use; supporting inclusion by offering hybrid delivery modes and by using LMS to save all teaching material including presentations for later review; using selected digital tools, e.g., *Kahoot*, *Quizlet*, *Padlet*, to enhance active participation; community building outside of online sessions.

Rendezvous with students' and teacher's linguistic repertoires in two Icelandic as a second language university summer courses during COVID-19: Teacher's reflections

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ABSTRACT

This article examines teacher's reflections on teaching Icelandic as a second language (L2) at a university summer course. The research questions of this inquiry are: How can the teacher utilize their linguistic repertoire to teach L2 in diverse groups of adult language learners? How can these diverse groups of adult language learners utilize their linguistic repertoires to learn L2 Icelandic and fulfill the requirements of the summer course? Findings indicate that the teacher's and students' linguistic repertoires are indeed utilized in multiple ways, i.e., for information flow, explanations and understanding of grammar, and understanding of tasks. Students who were the only speakers of their languages could not rely on linguistic resources shared with others, yet even they could utilize their mother tongues (L1) and linguistic repertoires for learning. Plurilingual approaches in L2 teaching can be empowering for language learners and the teacher, and they can support L2 learning in multiple ways.

Keywords: *Icelandic as a second language, linguistic repertoire, plurilingual pedagogy, reflexive thematic analysis, university course*

Introduction

Among Iceland's population of almost 400.000 people, 18.4% are currently immigrants. This immigration has steadily been increasing (Statistics Iceland, 2023). Icelandic language skills are considered a key factor in participating in the local society and a condition for receiving work that corresponds to the education of immigrants (Ministry of Social Affairs, 2007). The offer of Icelandic courses for immigrants, however, does not meet the demand or the needs of different groups of people, in particular at a higher language competence level. Curricular utility, evaluations, incompatible student groups, and a lack of opportunity to use the gained Icelandic knowledge in consequent education are among the challenges immigrants face (Hoffmann et al., 2021). In the summer of 2021, most of the

immigrant population found themselves confined to the island while facing increased unemployment (Karlsson, 2022). The authorities responded to the situation by offering financial resources to fund open and free tuition summer courses of L2 Icelandic for their current international students, prospective students, as well as the general population. Among these courses, the courses for beginners were the most popular. They were attended mostly by the general population with various linguistic and educational backgrounds.

This study aims to explore how the teacher of L2 Icelandic, who is the author of this article, utilized both her own and her students' linguistic repertoires to teach L2 Icelandic. In doing so, the goal is to contribute to the improvement of the teacher's teaching practice that would help empower students to learn the new language. Moreover, this case study showcases a pathway for utilizing plurilingual approaches in L2 education for adults.

Background to the university summer courses taught during the COVID-19 pandemic

L2 Icelandic summer courses took place in June and July 2021 at the University of Iceland. The courses were constructed so that the students could develop their general language competence in speaking, listening, reading, and writing, with a substantial focus on grammar and vocabulary learning. Each course lasted four weeks and entailed 64 lessons. The courses rendered 10 ECTS (European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System) credits. Here, the focus is only on two of those courses taught by the author. These were *Icelandic 1* for beginners at an A1 level according to CEFR[1] taught in June 2021 and *Icelandic 3* for students at an A2 level according to CEFR[2], each with four 45 min. lessons each day during four workdays a week, for four weeks each month. The materials were accessible in the learning management system (LMS) *Canvas,* and tests were administered electronically through the *Inspera* platform. Assessment in both courses consisted of home tests, projects in class, a final test, and participation. To be eligible for 10 ECTS, students had to attend 75% of the time, submit three projects along with the final project, and pass the final exam.

In both courses, English was intended to be used as the language of communication and to explain Icelandic language use and grammar. Other courses, that are not part of this case study, were on higher language levels and therefore took place only in Icelandic, but English would occasionally be used as a

[1] Council of Europe (2020): https://rm.coe.int/common-european-framework-of-reference-for-languages-learning-teaching/16809ea0d4
[2] Council of Europe (2020): https://rm.coe.int/common-european-framework-of-reference-for-languages-learning-teaching/16809ea0d4

support language in communication. As these courses for beginners were at the university level, the demands on the students were rather high, both linguistically, academically, and in terms of technological skills regarding the use of *Microsoft Word*, *PowerPoint*, the LMS, the testing platform, and the university's intranet *Ugla*. The courses therefore required some competence in using technology, as registration, learning environment, and tests were all online. It was possible to buy the printed version of the textbook or work with the book's online version which included access to audio materials. Additional online materials were recommended by the teacher and used in the courses.

Theoretical underpinnings to the case study

Approaching L2 Icelandic learners holistically as competent plurilingual individuals

The theories of dominant codes, translanguaging, and bidirectional learning, are used in this study to shed light on teaching methods that build on both the teachers' and the language learners' linguistic repertoires. Ideas of culturally sustaining pedagogy and the multilingual turn further informed the data collection and analysis which build on the personal narrative of the teacher.

Plurilingualism and new ideas about its pedagogical use have increasingly become represented in current research and policies (Cenoz & Gorter, 2022; Council of Europe, 2020). Languages and individual linguistic repertoires are connected in the minds of speakers, intertwined, and always active. It is therefore logical to recognize this plurilingualism in individual language learners as a resource that can be utilized constructively in teaching (Piccardo & North, 2020). Pedagogical use of translanguaging is demonstrated for example in translanguaging activities to support communication and learning at schools (Cenoz & Gorter, 2022; García & Kleifgen, 2019). By bringing in previous linguistic, academic, and other resources, language learners can connect new knowledge and concepts to what they already know (Gibbons, 2015). For instance, in university settings where the dominant linguistic code is the official language of the society (in this case Icelandic) and the dominant discourse is academic literacy, language learners' L1 and skills in other languages can shift the unequal language-power relations. By valuing language learners' diverse linguistic resources and identities, and utilizing these resources pedagogically, teachers can create culturally and linguistically sensitive learning spaces, thus enabling a bidirectional learning process in which the teacher learns from the students and vice versa (Parmegiani, 2019). In this way, linguistic, cultural, and other resources of both the students and the teacher are utilized and built upon, which is particularly important in classroom situations when

the teacher comes from the majority sociocultural background, while the language learners represent the minorities.

Culturally sustaining pedagogy provides a practical framework for the holistic approach to language learners (Paris, 2021). It suggests that language learners acquire access to the dominant cultural and linguistic competence while at the same time sustaining existing cultural and linguistic competencies originating from their communities. This approach aims at the balancing act of existing and new competencies while empowering the language learners and supporting the learning process (Paris, 2021).

Using the reflexive method for informing own and others' pedagogical practice

The methodology used in this case study is qualitative and builds on action research approaches. Action research provides a way for researchers and practitioners to systematically improve their work and share their experiences with others. Reflection and examination of own work underlie the process of data collection and data analysis in action research (Guðjónsdóttir, 2011). Action research develops in a conscious process that consists of several phases, mapping the current situation, exploring existing challenges, carrying out a possible solution for a better practice, and evaluating the process (McNiff, 2010). The findings from this case study will be based on the initial phase of action research that examines own teaching practice at two L2 Icelandic university courses.

Methods for data analysis

Reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2022) was used to analyze the data. It is a rigorous method of analysis that is situated and partial, and it offers tools for a systematic, deep engagement with data. The researcher's subjectivity is an important resource for the understanding, interpretation, and narration of the data (Braun & Clarke, 2022). The teacher, who is also the researcher, kept a diary throughout both courses. She wrote down her thoughts after each teaching day or recorded them on a voice recorder. From the course in June 2021, there are seventeen diary recordings, each between 4–26 minutes long. From the course in July 2021, there are fourteen written diary entries, each about 200–600 words long. The reason why recordings were used to start with was both pragmatic, related to time issues, and research-oriented, trying to catch the immediate impressions, ideas, and feelings. The written texts include images and are readily accessible for reflexive thematic analysis. The recordings were carefully listened to, and detailed notes were written down and subsequently analyzed with reflexive thematic analysis, together with the diary entries from June 2021. The texts were first read and skimmed for instances where the linguistic and cultural repertoires of the

teacher and students are mentioned in connection with teaching and learning. At the same time, instances of inclusive, culturally sustaining pedagogy were marked, as well as instances in which intercultural competence was employed. These instances were coded, codes organized, preliminary themes formulated and defined, themes finalized, and the analysis written up. This process is described in detail by Braun and Clarke (2022).

Participants

Two courses were the milieu in which the teaching and data collection took place. They were aimed at students who wanted to improve their practical and academic competence in L2 Icelandic. The main target groups were current students at the University of Iceland, new students who were planning to start their studies in the fall of 2021, and others who could be interested in taking the summer course at the University of Iceland, deepening their knowledge and developing in their study and work. There were no prerequisites for participating in the courses. The course Icelandic 1 took place in June 2021, and it was attended by 23 students who came from 13 different countries and spoke 16 languages. Additionally, the teacher comes from the Czech Republic and speaks Czech. Sixteen students spoke Arabic while the other languages were spoken by a single speaker. Languages represented in the class were Moroccan Arabic, Syrian Arabic, Kurdish, Farsi, Iraqi Arabic, Filipino, Vietnamese, Chinese, Spanish, Azerbaijani, Japanese, French, Maltese, Somali, and Czech. The students were of different genders, ages, and socio-economic backgrounds. The course Icelandic 3 took place in July 2021 and the same admission and COVID-19 rules applied. In the class, there were 23 students with 18 languages represented. Two students could speak Russian together, two students spoke Ukrainian, two students spoke German, and three students spoke Spanish. Other languages were spoken by single speakers. The researcher was the teacher in both of the courses. Her personal and professional background gave her the necessary tools to approach L2 teaching from the plurilingual perspective.

Discussion of results

The reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2022) of the data led to the formulation of four themes: 1) diverse groups of language learners; 2) inclusive teaching methods in the two L2 university courses; 3) intercultural competence in L2 teaching; and 4) building on language learners' and teachers' linguistic repertoires. The fourth theme, *Building on language learners' and teachers' linguistic repertoires*, is discussed below, and used to answer both research questions. Moreover, this theme brings together the various thoughts, approaches, and scaffolds that were built upon and used by the teacher and the students in the two courses.

The use of English in L2 Icelandic university courses

The first step in both the Icelandic 1 and *Icelandic 3* courses was to establish which language to select for communicating with the students. English was supposed to be the language of communication in both courses but the situation in these courses was complex and, therefore, using English did not seem to provide a suitable solution. The language learners at Icelandic 1 course did not share a common language with the teacher. Some spoke English, but the downside of using it in the class was that others would mistakenly think that they were listening to Icelandic when English was spoken because they had no previous knowledge of English or Icelandic. Students in the Icelandic 3 course had some knowledge of English, but the aim was not to use English too much but instead use Icelandic to provide increased opportunities to practice the language and communicate in it. However, there were instances when the language learners' Icelandic language skills were not sufficient for communication or reaching the learning goals. Then, English, or a shared language between students, or between the teacher and the student, served to bridge the communication gap. The teacher noted:

I am switching over to English to explain some complicated grammar, and sometimes I repeat things in English. I often say new grammar terminology [in Icelandic and] also in English, to make the connection with their previous knowledge. Slides with grammar are in English (Teacher's Diary, July 6 2021).

However, students in the Icelandic 3 course cautioned that their English skills were not advanced enough to understand explanations in English. The teacher noted:

We discussed that I needed to limit English or translate people's questions into Icelandic. I have to be careful; it is too comfortable to switch between English and Icelandic to explain grammar (Teacher's Diary, July 8 2021).

It became clear that neither in the Icelandic 1 nor in the Icelandic 3 course, did the use of English suit the needs of all students.

The use of learners' L1 in L2 Icelandic university courses

Students in these courses built on their linguistic repertoires to learn, communicate, and assist each other. For instance, the teacher noted:

Students are all somehow using their mother tongues. A student who struggled with pronunciation wrote it down with the help of the Arabic alphabet. One woman continued to translate for others in Arabic (Teacher's Diary, June 10 2021).

The use of students' different L1s in the class seemed to be unavoidable. For example, explaining a task to students was done by writing the instruction and playing it through Google Translate to the class in all their languages. Using Google Translate primarily between Icelandic and Arabic led to humorous situations when

translations were wrong, yet it also excluded the students who did not speak Arabic. The teacher noted:

I think it is important to use their mother tongues, students need to build on this previous knowledge of language, in particular the students who don't have any English and Icelandic (Teacher's Diary, June 1 2021).

Using Arabic as L1 was a premise for Arabic speakers in the Icelandic 1 course because they did not know English. Students who were the only users of their language, such as Vietnamese, Azerbaijani, or Farsi, would have needed more help but Google Translate was not used frequently in their languages as Arabic was spoken by half of the class. Students used Google Translate on their phones to communicate practical messages to the teacher. In the Icelandic 3 course, two students from Russian-speaking countries continued to speak Russian together to work on tasks, for grammar explanations, and for private purposes. In the same course, two students from Spanish-speaking countries sat together during the breaks and spoke Spanish together. Using the language learners' L1s, or languages in which these learners have a relatively solid competence, rather than the target language (Icelandic) could also be a question of concentration or the language learners' confidence. Toward the end of the Icelandic 3 course, the teacher noted:

We only use Icelandic both to explain and to speak, and concentrating for three hours takes a lot of energy. One student keeps speaking English with me, it is probably difficult to get out of her comfort zone. The Russian-speaking ladies almost didn't speak Russian in the class, only during the breaks (Teacher's Diary, July 19 2021).

Building on teacher's linguistic repertoire in L2 Icelandic university courses

The teacher used her linguistic repertoire to communicate with students in the courses, even in languages in which she had limited proficiency. For instance, the teacher used signs from Icelandic sign language that she knew to help her communicate with other students who did not understand any of the languages she spoke. Some signs were easy to understand for any language speaker, such as 'to see', 'to learn', 'to listen', and 'to remember'. The use of the Icelandic sign language was subconscious at first but then it became more intentional because it enhanced the overall communication and understanding of the topics discussed in the course. Regarding building on the teacher's linguistic repertoire, she noted:

How can I as a teacher use the students' languages? I realized today that by teaching Icelandic as a second language, I can use all of my knowledge of languages, for example, today I used my Russian, French, and German, by referring to grammar differences and similarities in vocabulary and grammar, and I could understand what two Russian speaking students were talking about; I could

compare German and Icelandic prepositions and the cases that they are bound with; I could compare viðtengingarháttur (Eng. conditional) and subjunctive in French… I cannot connect this way with students with languages I don't know, and they may be a bit disadvantaged this way (Teacher's Diary, June 23 2021).

Extending teacher's and learners' knowledge about languages

Knowing about learners' languages such as their L1s or any other language in which they had a relatively solid competence seemed to be particularly helpful for the teacher to both understand mistakes the language learners made and to focus on features that needed special attention in teaching, e.g., pronunciation of sounds and practising grammatical features that were not in the learners' languages. Moreover, the knowledge about learners' languages further enabled comparisons between languages to create a scaffolding of new lexical, grammatical, and other knowledge. The teacher noted:

Knowing, for example, that in Arabic one does not write vowels, helps understand frequent mistakes that Arabic-speaking people make, and point this out to them… I see that they are omitting vowels sometimes in their Icelandic writing. I think this is a transfer from their language. I need to focus on vowels with this group of learners (Teacher's Diary, July 11 2021).

Knowledge about language, or metalinguistic awareness, both informed learning and increased student engagement. Participants in the Icelandic 3 course enjoyed talking about languages, the origin of words, similarities, and differences. The teacher noted:

Two students explained the origins of words in their presentations… I enjoyed that, and it tells me that the students are interested in learning about language. The class is very responsive, they are happy to react and to sink into tasks (Teacher's Diary, July 13 2021).

Knowing about students' languages facilitated teaching. When circumstances allowed, translanguaging was used to convey meaning, such as in this example, which the teacher noted:

Ute knows that I speak German so when she asked a question, she said a sentence in German and asked in English (Teacher's Diary, July 15 2021).

The teacher had genuine interest in students' languages. After the Icelandic 1 course, she reflected upon it and noted:

When I remember my group from June in retrospect, I would have liked to learn some Arabic if I had more time. Just to please my students (Teacher's Diary, July 13 2021).

Concluding remarks

This article explored plurilingual approaches in teaching L2 Icelandic on two university courses during the summer of 2021, as opposed to teaching entirely in the target language. Results demonstrated that the linguistic repertoires were utilized in the classroom for different purposes by both the language learners and the teacher for various purposes, such as achieving lesson aims, establishing equal language-power relations among themselves and with the teacher, constructing an ambience of respect and trust, communicating complicated issues, information flow, explanations and understanding of grammar, and understanding of tasks. Although this practice was initially rather intuitive on the part of the teacher, she continued thinking about and utilizing her own as well as her students' linguistic repertoires in both courses, similar to Parmegiani's teaching practice (2019), while also making sure to use culturally sensitive and appropriate pedagogies (Paris, 2012).

After mapping the initial situation and establishing in which languages the students and the teacher could communicate, the teacher experimented and encouraged the use of all students' languages in the classroom to help the students achieve learning goals. This was done in the same fashion as Cenoz and Gorter (2022) suggest. The teacher also activated her linguistic repertoire to scaffold the learning of phonetic, lexical, and grammatical features of Icelandic (see, e.g., Gibbons, 2015), to give instructions, to communicate with students, and to understand the learners' seeming struggles in language learning. Knowing what languages students speak and write and having some knowledge about these languages, provided extra pedagogical tools to the teacher on the one hand and learning tools to students on the other hand (Council of Europe, 2020).

The teacher's non-Icelandic background, multilingual and multicultural competence, and her relatively wide linguistic repertoire allowed for empathy, understanding of the language learners' situations, and creating more equal language-power relations and trust in the course. The teacher's genuine interest in the learners' languages and admitting mistakes in one's language as well as learning some parts of students' languages placed the teacher in the position of a learner and lowered the power distances between the teacher and the learners. As such, the courses represented a safe language learning environment, in which students could leave their comfort zones and dare to express their ideas in L2 Icelandic (compare, e.g., Parmegiani, 2019).

To employ students' and teachers' linguistic repertoires for communication in the courses, e.g., through translanguaging (García & Kleifgen, 2019), at least two people had to share the same language. For students who were the only speakers of their language in the classroom, such resources were not available, and they had

to rely on learning Icelandic through the target language (Icelandic) while hearing other unintelligible languages. However, even these students used their L1s for taking notes or writing down pronunciation with their alphabet.

In the Icelandic 3 course, learners' L1 did not seem to play an explicit role in learning L2 Icelandic. In this group of learners, the explicit use of L1 was much less prominent, and less needed than in the Icelandic 1 course. That was partially because their Icelandic was more advanced and because most languages had only one speaker among the learners. Learners' linguistic repertoires were active throughout the learning process (compare, e.g., Piccardo & North, 2020) and helped learn new words, understand grammar rules, communicate, and assist others, yet they also led to confusion and wrong assumptions. In some cases, the transfer of pronunciation rules was incorrect and consequently led to a decreased clarity of utterances.

The classroom settings in both L2 Icelandic university courses showcase how teacher's and students' linguistic repertoires can be utilized; as such they represent an example of the multilingual turn according to May (2019) and the levelling of the power of the dominant codes according to Parmegiani (2019). This leads both to establishing more equitable teacher-student relationships and to confirming positive learner identities (compare, e.g., Parmegiani, 2019). The teacher's plurilingual approaches were informed by her positionality, and thus not uncritically transferrable to other classrooms or courses. However, the underlying principles of such practice can be tried out and adjusted.

Language learning and teaching can become a truly empowering experience for the learners and teachers. Teachers' interest in students' lives, languages, and cultures matters to students on a personal as well as pedagogical level. Through plurilingual approaches to teaching and learning, the students acquire multiple ways to engage with the teacher, with the material, and with each other, while the teacher continues learning about her students' languages and exploring new ways of employing plurilingual pedagogies, in the spirit of bidirectional, life-long learning. Not least, plurilingual approaches reflect the policy of the Council of Europe's competencies for democratic culture and social cohesion[3].

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International students' perception of teaching approaches in the university course of Slovak as a foreign language

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ABSTRACT

In this paper, we investigate how students perceive the use of different teaching approaches and strategies in the course of Slovak as a foreign language at Constantine the Philosopher University (UKF) in Nitra, Slovakia. We apply exploratory methods and the qualitative analysis of answers from 29 student surveys. Findings suggest that students prefer those teaching methods that support their development of communicative skills in the target language (Slovak). The preferred teaching approaches and strategies, as well as topics used in the study groups showed a considerably great variability, which requires a flexible approach in organizing the teaching process on the part of the teacher.

Keywords: *foreign language, international students, Slovak language, teachers, teaching approaches and strategies*

Introduction

Slovak as a state language in Slovakia is currently quite frequently taught as a foreign language, not only in language schools and other educational institutions, but also at universities for incoming Erasmus+ mobility students, and those international students who wish to study full time at universities in Slovakia. This need to teach Slovak is relatively new and perhaps deserves more attention in the local context, as the incoming students need to acquire target language skills both quickly and at such a level that it helps them to communicate. The way languages are taught is also connected with the expectations and demands of students. Language instructors often try to reflect these changes in their teaching delivery, e.g., by adjusting teaching approaches and strategies to meet these expectations and demands. This is the main reason why we started investigating students' perception of different teaching approaches and strategies in the course of Slovak as a foreign language for university students at UKF in Nitra, Slovakia. Our

hypothesis is that students' satisfaction with the approaches to teaching a foreign language in this course can increase their motivation to learn the language, to speed up both its learning and success with its learning, which is in accordance with Dörnyei (2014) and Riemer (2016). Thus, the aim of our case study is to survey how students perceive the teaching approaches and strategies of the respective course of Slovak as a foreign language at UKF in Nitra. In relation to the research objectives, the following research questions were formulated: 1) To what extent teaching approaches and strategies used in the lessons of Slovak as a foreign language engaged the attention of students; 2) which teaching approaches and strategies are the most frequently preferred by international students in teaching and learning Slovak as a foreign language; and 3) what aspects influence the teaching techniques perception and preferences among international students learning Slovak as a foreign language?

Literature overview of communicative language teaching

The development of foreign language education at present is characterized by a plethora of methods of teaching languages. The main idea of applied linguists is to refrain from absolutizing any method, or to completely reject one method in favour of another, but eventually to optimize teaching and promote a dynamic approach to enable teachers to combine various methods so that they fit well in specific situations within the teaching process (Larsen-Freeman, 2000; Richards, 2006; Hrehovčík & Shevel, 2009). The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR, 2020) has helped teachers to rethink their strategies and attitudes, and has opened new research perspectives in the field, thus assisting students to optimize learning and teachers to innovate their practices (Yufrizal, 2017**;** Sakiroglu, 2020). Learners look for practical solutions to their needs connected with communication in the target langauge in real contexts, and this has actually caused a radical deflection from the traditional teacher-directed teaching (Bykova et al., 2018). The ways teachers teach foreign languages can currently be described as the reform of the content, forms, and methods of training and measuring the level of students' achievements in accordance with European recommendations, the creation of interactive educational methods, which then ensures the effectiveness of learning and creation of conditions for the use of learner-oriented, activity-based, socio-cultural and communicative approaches to learning (Hu, 2010**;** Farooq, 2015**;** Ibrahim & Ibrahim**,** 2017**;** Jansem**,** 2019; Qasserras, 2023; Harmer, 2015).

Besides such language teaching and learning approaches as, for instance, communicative language teaching (CLT), content and language integrated learning (CLIL), cooperative language learning, task-based language teaching (TBLT), or the lexical approach, text-based instruction and neuro-linguistic programming (NLP),

the following also need to be mentioned: application of information and communications technology (ICT), new media-assisted language learning, language learning applications, and other efforts, e.g., collaborative online international learning – COIL, which are becoming increasingly popular. All these approaches and efforts can provide learners with real-life scenarios or gamification elements, and in this way contribute to increasing the motivation of learners to learn the target language and eventually make the overall learning and teaching experience more engaging (Hasibuan & Batubara, 2012; Lee et al., 2023; Harmer, 2015).

The role of teacher as "knower" and mentor has changed to that of a teacher, who observes and monitors, facilitates and mediates (Eacute, J., & Esteve, M., 2000; O'Dwyer, 2006; Nagy, 2021), and eventually guides the learner through their process of learning. At present, the teacher can frequently combine a variety of methods and approaches to teach content to students. One of the most useful methods is the linguo-sociocultural method, which contains two aspects of communication – linguistic and intercultural, i.e., a combination of language structures (phonetics, grammar, vocabulary) and speech activities (listening, speaking, reading, writing) with non-linguistic socio-cultural factors (using language for different purposes and functions, varying language register in relation to the situation, producing different types of texts, using different strategies to maintain communication despite one's limitations in the target language) (Cheremisina-Harrer et al., 2017; Thamarana, 2015). Another very popular method is the communicative method, the basics of which were developed by the joint efforts of teachers, psychologists and linguists (Hiep, 2007; Koosha & Yakhabi, 2013; Akkas & Coker, 2016; Kurniawan & Sumani, 2022). It is aimed at the simultaneous development of basic oral and written language skills in the process of communication. The communicative method involves the use of numerous game elements in teaching, the use of various forms of classes, and discussing topics of interest to students. It has eliminated the psychological barrier between the teacher and the student and allows a teacher to make lessons creative and exciting and take into account the individual characteristics of students (Nazari**,** 2007**;** Fahrutdinova, Fahrutdinov & Yusupov, 2016; Jansem, 2019; Straková et al., 2017). Methods dealing with intensive foreign language teaching are also popular today, (as Alfa level teaching, Superlearning, Suggestopaedia), which allow studying a high degree of stereotyping and the use of clichés, thus giving students unlimited opportunities for active interaction and communication in the target language (Lozanov, 1973; Muhacheva, 2010; Gluhova, 2013; Tolibova, 2019). The methods of interactive forms of learning a foreign language link the subjects of the educational process and give the learning process a truly active character. Although teachers may combine a variety of methods and approaches, their successful application is often

based on student feedback. Therefore, we aim to survey how students perceive the teaching methods and approaches of the selected course of Slovak as a foreign language at UKF in Nitra.

Empirical part of the study

Research methods

To investigate the research questions, we have chosen a mixed research method design in order to obtain a more complex and deeper understanding about students' preferences in the area of teaching techniques and procedures. To conduct this research, a reflection sheet (Appendix A) for students, developed by experts from UKF in Nitra and the Árni Magnússon Institute in Reykjavík, was used. This reflection sheet can be considered a type of questionnaire, and its aim is to identify the preferred teaching approaches and strategies, segments, and topics in each lesson, perceived as the most interesting and efficient in the Slovak as a foreign language course by different students in two learner groups. In compliance with the research objectives, the reflection sheet combined closed and open items and contained a total of four items in which the respondents commented on different questions (overall students' lesson satisfaction and enjoyment, their interest in the procedures, tasks and activities used) using a 5-point Likert scale. Other items of the questionnaire were open and served to explore the preferences and opinions of students about the investigated issue (Gavora et al., 2010).

In the quantitative part, we processed the answers to the closed items of the questionnaire using descriptive statistics. In the qualitative part of the research, we evaluated answers of the respondents to two open-ended questionnaire items:

1. Identify and briefly describe the segment of the lesson or specific activity that you found the most enjoyable.
2. Explain why this segment or activity was enjoyable for you.

The evaluation of the items was carried out in the form of a content analysis of the answers to the open-ended questions in the reflection sheets. Responses were coded using a categorial system that was defined based on the collected empirical material. The content analysis categories took into account two aspects: Preferred teaching approaches and strategies, and the specification of advantages of preferred teaching approaches and strategies.

The data were collected in December 2023, from two different groups of students attending the university course *Slovak Language for Foreigners*. At the end of the lessons, the members of the research team asked the participating students to anonymously fill in the reflection sheet, in which the students reflected on the teaching techniques and procedures used in the given lesson. As part of the research data processing, descriptive statistics of closed items were created using

SPSS software. The occurrence of each qualitative response category in our sample was evaluated in the percentage form.

Research sample

The research sample consisted of 29 students, who, at the time of the research, were attending this language course and were learning Slovak as a foreign language. The age of students ranged between 18 to 26 and they came from diverse cultural backgrounds with Slavic (21 students) as well as non-Slavic mother tongues (8 students). Information about gender was not collected. All of them were full-time students at UKF studying various study programs at various faculties.

The language course mentioned above was designed for beginners, but due to the diverse background of the students in both groups, there were learners with heterogeneous language levels of proficiency in Slovak ranging from A1 to B1.

Results

Based on the analysis, the following categories were identified in the item "Preferred teaching approaches and strategies": pronunciation, reading, listening, vocabulary, communicative activities, grammar, examples, presentation, quizes, everything. In the item "Specification of advantages of preferred teaching approaches and strategies", the following categories were identified: teacher, practical aspects, explanation, interactivity, novelty, language, culture, gamification, enjoyment, no answer. A detailed description and definition of each category can be found in Appendix B.

The descriptive statistics of the quantitative variables in our research are presented in Table 1. Evaluation of the overall satisfaction and enjoyment of the lesson, interest in the techniques, procedures and activities used was very high in our sample with a relatively low variance of values (mean for Overall enjoyment was 4.63, for Procedures used 4.59, for Activities applied 4.52). There was a high consensus among the students that they perceive the lessons in general, as well as the techniques and activities used, very positively.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics of quantitative research variables.

		Enjoyment	Procedures	Activities
Mean		4.63	4.59	4.52
Mean – Std. Error		.095	.110	.112
95% Confidence Interval for Mean	Lower Bound	4.43	4.37	4.29
	Upper Bound	4.82	4.82	4.75
Median		5.00	5.00	5.00
Variance		.242	.328	.336
Std. Deviation		.492	.572	.580
Minimum		4	3	3
Maximum		5	5	5
Range		1	2	2
Skewness		-.569	-1.055	-.716
Kurtosis		-1.817	.237	-.413

The percentages for each category of preferred teaching techniques and procedures in the group of international students learning Slovak as a foreign language are shown in Figure 1. The topics of different activities spontaneously mentioned by the students covered a wide range of linguistic and cultural phenomena, ranging from linguistic nature exercises (pronunciation, grammar) and language skills development (reading and listening comprehension) to complex structured communicative activities. The most preferred segment of the lesson in our research sample was interactive communication activities (40,7% of students preferred these activities), followed by visual presentations (25,9% of respondents preferred). The answer "Everything" was also a relatively frequent response of students to the first question (24.1%).

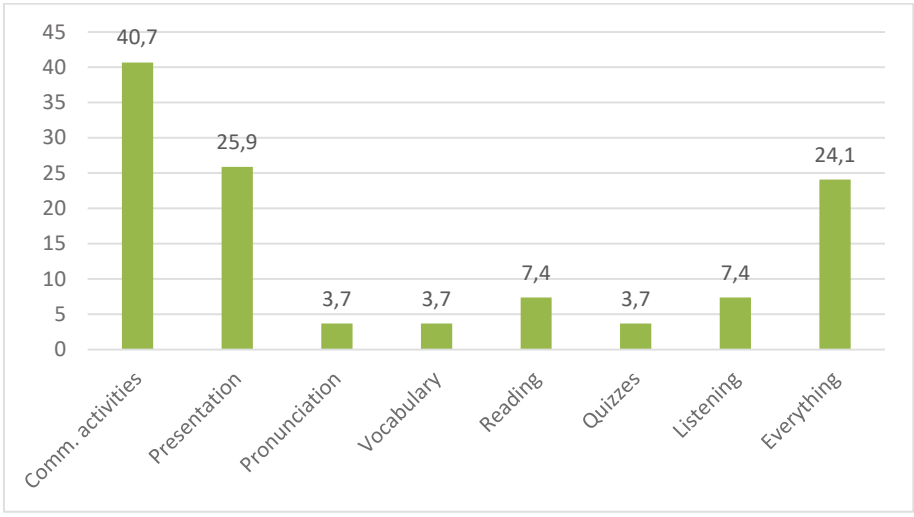

Figure 1. Percentage (%) occurrence of each category of the Preferred teaching approaches and strategies ("Identify and briefly describe a segment of the lesson or a specific activity that you found most enjoyable").

The percentage occurrence of each response category related to the second item of the questionnaire (Specification of preferences) is summarized in Figure 2.

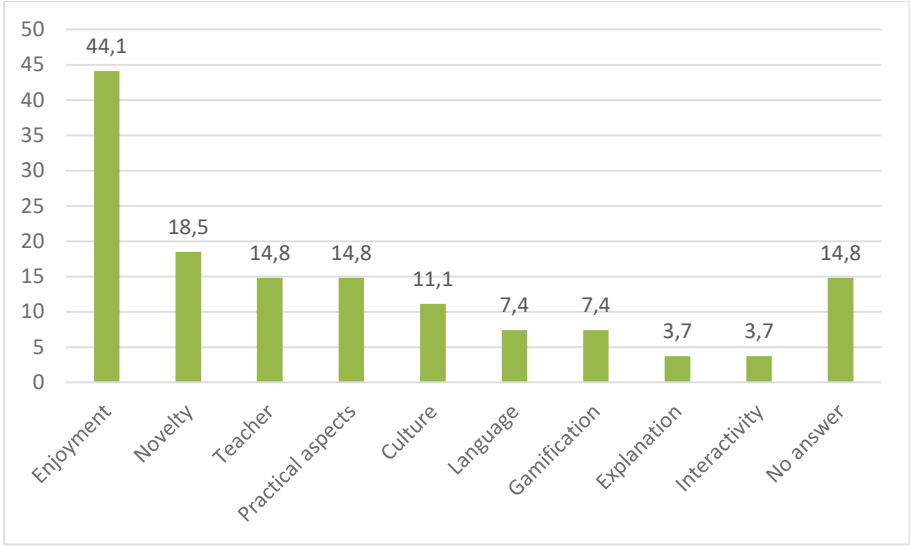

Figure 2. Percentage (%) occurrence of categories Specification of advantages of preferred teaching approaches and strategies ("Explain why this segment or activity was enjoyable for you").

For particular teaching techniques and activities, we can observe a significant predominance of the overall Enjoyment category (44.1%) having the highest percentage of responses. Typical answers in this category were "I liked everything very much", "All topics and their presentation were interesting". The students provided varied answers in other categories as well, but with significantly lower prevalence. The 10 percent limit of frequency of occurrence was exceeded in four other categories: category of Novelty (18.5%, with the statement, for example, "I learn many new words in every lesson"), Teacher (14.8%, with the statement, for example, "the teacher is nice, I like how she conducts our lesson"), Practical aspects (14.8%, with the statement, for example, "Because it is very useful for our everyday life") and Culture (11.1%, with the statement, for example, "Learning facts about Slovak culture"). Relatively a larger group of students did not give any answer to this item (14.8%).

Discussion

The results of our case study show that the two respective groups of international students at UKF in Nitra evaluate the Slovak as a foreign language course very positively. They like the lessons to a great extent (overall enjoyment), which was confirmed not only in the quantitative results, but also in the qualitative part of our research (44.1% of students spontaneously mentioned the category "Enjoyment"). Positive attitudes of students towards the subject and the lessons, and the relaxed atmosphere in the classes are the factors that loosen students' affective filters and create optimal conditions for receiving and processing new information in the learning process (Dőrnyei, 2014).

In the observed lessons, the teachers flexibly combined elements of different methods and used a variety of techniques as current trends in foreign language teaching often advise (e.g., Harmer, 2015; Qasserras, 2023; Sakiroglu, 2020). The analysis of the collected data furthermore shows that students of Slovak as a foreign language preferred mostly communicative language teaching approaches, i.e. categories of communicative activities and language skills of reading and listening comprehension. In accordance with the principles of the communicative method (e.g., Jansem, 2019; Straková et al., 2017), the students expressed their wish for language courses providing discussions on topics and issues that are most frequently used in everyday life and in spoken language. It can be justified by the fact that students in our sample live in a foreign language environment and may often be exposed to linguistic phenomena that they do not understand sufficiently. A specific and efficient source of their learning are the topics and questions that students themselves bring to class, that are closely connected to their personal experience of using the target language.

The use of *Microsoft PowerPoint* presentations with multimedia content was also a strongly preferred category in our research sample. The preference for presentations was typically manifested together with the categories “Novelty” and “Culture”. It appears that students consider the creation of a knowledge base about the Slovak language and culture to be an important factor, and they prefer techniques – possibly with the help of visualization and ICT technologies – that can speed up and make the acquisition of new information more efficient (Hasibuan & Batubara, 2012; Lee et al., 2023).

In our research sample the category “Everything” achieved a high percentage, typically in combination with justification in the category “Enjoyment”. This fact can be interpreted both as the students’ interest in a flexible combination of different methods and approaches (an example from the answers in the reflection sheet: “I liked all the topics, interesting combination of exercises”), but also as a lower level and willingness to reflect on the teaching. It is possible that the students had a positive global impression of the lesson, yet they could not identify and reflect on those segments of the lesson that seemed most interesting to them. Together with the categories “No answer” in the second item, these findings point to the need for topicality and development of critical thinking and self-reflection in the process of learning a foreign language.

An interesting moment in our results is the presence of the category “Teacher” in the justification of preferences. The teachers in the groups served as “models” of native speakers, they could explain linguistic and cultural phenomena that cannot be learned from the course-books. Furthermore, the learners also appreciated the teacher’s competence to create a friendly and relaxed atmosphere in the lesson. Although the investigation of the teacher’s role was not the main focus of our research, we can state that the congruence between personality, or the professional mastery of the teacher and the used techniques and procedures in the lesson are other important factors that affect the effectiveness of the teaching process (O’Dwyer, 2006; Nagy, 2021).

The limits of our research lie primarily in the exploratory nature and the relatively small number of students in the research group. Expanding the research sample in the future could increase the representativeness and general explanatory power of the results, especially in the case of quantitative variables. The findings of our exploratory research can serve as a starting point for further methodological modification of the research tool (reflection sheet) and for planning further, larger-scale research of a quantitative nature, ascertaining the divergence of perceptions and preferences regarding teaching procedures, techniques and activities.

Conclusion

Our research provided answers to the hypothesis and the three research questions stated earlier. The hypothesis that students' satisfaction with the approaches to teaching Slovak as a foreign language used by the teacher in this specific course contributed to their motivation to learn the language, was partially confirmed. Students report their general enjoyment with attending the course and the relaxed atmosphere in the classes, which according to Dőrnyei (2014) are important factors to help loosen students' affective filters and to create optimal conditions for receiving and processing new information in the learning process. The communicative tasks, the use of multimedia *Microsoft PowerPoint* presentation for visualisation of topics, and the use of various ICT tools kept students' attention engaged. As such, the communicative teaching approach was perceived by the students as the most preferred. This finding is similar to other research (e.g., Hiep, 2007; Hu, 2010; Jansem, 2019; Kurniawan & Sumani, 2022). The following aspects influenced the teaching approaches and strategies the most: the teacher's positive approach towards both the students and the teaching, the practical applicability of the subject matter in everyday communication, and the learning of facts about the Slovak language and Slovak culture, which increased the students' awareness about the target language environment. Learning about these preferences and their justification by individual students may enable teachers to plan their teaching process optimally and more effectively, thus tailoring it more to the varied needs of groups of learners in foreing language learning classes.

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Appendix A

Reflection sheet for students

Background information

This research is conducted in collaboration with Constantine the Philosopher University in Nitra, University of Iceland, and the Árni Magnússon Institute. Personal details of all persons involved will be kept anonymous and securely stored, with access restricted to participating researchers. Results will be utilized solely for research purposes, with any publications anonymized. For further information, please contact Anikó Ficzere (aficzere@ukf.sk) from Constantine the Philosopher University in Nitra or Branislav Bédi (branislav.bedi@arnastofnun.is) from Árni Magnusson Institute.

Course details

Date: _____ Place: _____

Language Taught: _____

Course Language Level (circle): beginners - lower intermediate - upper intermediate - advanced

What do you think is your own language level: _____

Mode of Instruction (circle): in-class / online

Student reflection

1. How would you rate your overall enjoyment of the lesson?

1 (Did not enjoy at all) - 2 (Did not enjoy much) - 3 (Neutral) - 4 (Enjoyed) - 5 (Enjoyed very much)

2. What aspect of the lesson captivated your attention?

Rate: 1 - 5 (1 = Not at all, 5 = Very much)

a. The topic of the lesson:

.....

1 2 3 4 5

b. The teaching methods employed by the teacher:

.....

1 2 3 4 5

c. The tasks and activities presented:

.....

1 2 3 4 5

3. Identify and specify the segment of the lesson or specific activity that you found most enjoyable:

.....
.....
.....
.....

4. Elaborate (specify) on why this segment or activity was enjoyable to you:

.....
.....
.....
.....

5. Were there any activities or tasks introduced by the teacher that particularly intrigued or surprised you (positively or negatively)? Specify:

.....
.....
.....
.....

6. Which activity introduced by the teacher do you believe was the most beneficial to your learning? Specify:

.....
.....
.....

7. What motivated you to enroll in this course?

.....
.....

8. Would you like to continue studying this language in the future? If yes, please, specify the reasons:

.....
.....

Appendix B

Categories of content analysis

Category	Definition
Preferred teaching approaches and strategies:	
Pronunciation	activities practising correct pronunciation
Vocabulary	activities expanding vocabulary
Grammar	activities practising linguistic elements and grammar
Reading	activities developing reading comprehension
Listening	activities developing listening comprehension
Communicative activities	activities developing communication skills in the target language (interactive speaking activities, discussion, and others)
Quizzes	use of quizzes
Presentation	use of computer presentations or other tools visualising learning material
Examples	analysis of concrete examples of correct (spoken or written) language use
Everything	explicit expression of satisfaction within all teaching methods used during lessons
Specification of advantages of preferred teaching approaches and strategies:	
Teacher – their personality and expertise	highlighting the personal qualities of the teacher and/or their professionalism
Practical aspects	preference for activities that have an immediate and practical benefit for everyday language use
Explanation	providing a good, clear and logical explanation of certain linguistic phenomena in the lesson
Interactivity	preference for activities providing opportunities for active communication in the group and with the teacher
Novelty	highlighting the need to learn something new and unfamiliar, to acquire new competences
Language	general interest in the target (foreign) language
Culture	interest in the culture of the target society
Gamification	interest in playful activities, quizzes, enjoyable tasks
Enjoyment	expression of overall, undifferentiated enjoyment from the lesson
No answer	

Using the pluricentric approach in teaching German as a foreign language at different school levels in Slovakia

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the topic of pluricentrism and the pluricentric approach in teaching German as a foreign language (L2) in secondary schools, grammar schools, language schools, colleges, and universities within the subject of German as a foreign language (L2) and other subjects related to the development of language competence. The main research question is whether teachers apply the pluricentric DACH principle in their teaching L2 German. Thus, the aim here is to explain to what extent teachers of L2 German focus when applying the pluricentric approach in their teaching process, and what is the teachers' motivation to learn different variants of individual standard varieties of German, mainly with an emphasis on vocabulary and pronunciation typical for German, Austrian and Swiss Standard German.

Keywords: *German as a foreign language, pluricentric language, pluricentric approach, schools in Slovakia*

Introduction

German, along with English, French, Spanish, and other languages, falls into the category of "pluricentric languages". This means that pluricentric languages have several geographic centres of influence and may hold an official or a co-official status in multiple countries. Regarding German, these geographic centres include countries such as Germany, Austria, Switzerland, Liechtenstein, and Luxembourg. Apart from a geographic centre at national level, German has also regional official status in other countries that do not have German as their national language, such as parts of Belgium (German-speaking Community) and a part of Italy (South Tyrol).

The principle of German as a pluricentric language has been explored by prominent linguists. Leading figures include Ammon (2015) and Kellermeier-Rehbein (2014) from Germany, Muhr (2016) and Ebner (2008) from Austria, and Bickel & Landolt (2012) from Switzerland. Their works provided the theoretical foundation for a shift in German language teaching. This approach emphasizes the equal value of standard varieties in Germany, Austria, and Switzerland, moving

beyond the traditional view of regional dialects. Additionally, it advocates for using authentic language materials to prepare learners for real-world encounters with the language. Some languages have common features that allow us to define languages as pluricentric. Muhr (2016) argues that a pluricentric language can essentially serve as an intermediary stage between a language and a dialect, with certain criteria distinguishing whether a language qualifies as pluricentric. One such criterion is the presence of the language in two or more sovereign states, where the language holds the status of a national official language, a regional official language, or a language of a national minority. Other criteria include the recognition of linguistic diversity by state institutions and speakers as part of the overall language, the codification of standard language variants in grammars and dictionaries, and the standard variety serving as the norm in legislation, administration, institutions, and schools. German fulfils each of the aforementioned criteria, thus is rightfully considered a pluricentric language. Similar criteria apply to other pluricentric languages worldwide, such as English, French, Spanish, Chinese, and others.

In Slovakia, Štefaňáková (2009) exemplifies the application of the DACH (Germany [D], Austria [A], Switzerland [CH]) principle by incorporating Austrian German into the L2 curriculum. Based on this, the focus here will be on practical aspects of teaching L2 German from a pluricentric DACH perspective in different schools in Slovakia.

Methodology

The research aim is to determine the representation of pluricentrism in the teaching of L2 German with regard to variables such as age, type of school, and teachers' motivation. The main research question is whether teachers of L2 German in Slovakia apply the pluricentric DACH approach in their teaching. Based on this question, other sub questions have been formulated to better define the focus of the research:

1. Do teachers aged 25 to 40 incorporate the pluricentric DACH principle into the teaching of L2 German to a greater extent compared to teachers aged 41 and older?
2. Do teachers teaching at universities/colleges and language schools apply the pluricentric DACH principle more in teaching L2 German compared to teachers teaching at grammar, secondary, and primary schools?
3. What is the motivation of teachers when working with the pluricentric DACH principle in teaching L2 German?

In selecting the research sample, the following criteria were taken into account:

1. Teachers or lecturers teaching L2 German at primary, secondary, language schools, and/or grammar schools located in Slovakia.

2. Teachers or lecturers teaching at Slovak public, state, and/or private universities/colleges, where the subject of their teaching is L2 German, or seminars/exercises focused on the development of language competencies and skills in German.

Suitable respondents had to meet at least one of these criteria. The method of selecting individual research participants was carried out according to Gavora (2010) through purposive sampling, as respondents were selected based on whether they met pre-defined criteria. The subsequent generalization of research results is tied to this purposive selection. All research participants remained anonymous. According to the available collected data, we can state that 215 respondents, professionally engaged in teaching German, participated in the study, with only 8 (3.7%) of them indicating that they work as native-speaking lecturers in Slovak schools.

The research was conducted from January 26, 2021, to February 24, 2021. Prior to the actual research, we conducted, processed, and analysed a pre-survey, aimed at testing and validating the questions in the final questionnaire (Appendix) as well as other components from linguistic, methodological, and technical perspectives. The questionnaire was distributed in Slovak exclusively via email using the publicly available email addresses of teachers or school administrators, who then forwarded the questionnaires to the target group. After the data collection had been completed, we analysed the individual results using descriptive statistics.

The representation of the pluricentric DACH principle in teaching L2 German was investigated through an electronic questionnaire titled "Questionnaire – Pluricentrism in Teaching German in Slovakia". The questionnaire was compiled using the MS Office Forms internet platform, and in terms of structure, it can be characterized as a mixed questionnaire because it contained both quantitative and qualitative questions. In creating the questionnaire, we followed the typology outlined by Gavora (2001), which categorizes questions into closed-ended questions (where respondents had a limited number of predefined answers), semi-closed questions (where respondents had the option to add their own answers in addition to predefined ones), and open-ended questions (where respondents had the opportunity to provide their own answers only). The questions were categorized into two groups: the first part comprised questions regarding personal data, while the second part included the personal experiences of teachers with the issue of the pluricentric principle in teaching German as a foreign language. Within this contribution, we descriptively evaluated only those data directly related to the research questions.

Discussion of results

Within the results, one can observe that the research sample was highly diverse. The youngest respondent was 23 years old with no experience, while the oldest respondent was 68 years old with 44 years of teaching experience. The largest group, accounting for more than a third of all respondents (36.7%), consisted of teachers aged 41 to 50 years. Another important indicator was the type of school where the respondents work. The representation of respondents was relatively evenly distributed, except for language schools, from where we received only 12 responses (5.6%). The largest group consisted of teachers from secondary schools, totalling 59 (27.4%).

Within the scope of the research questions, the aim was to find out whether teachers apply the pluricentric DACH principle in teaching L2 German. More than half, specifically 131 surveyed teachers (61.8%), stated that they address the issue of pluricentrism. From among those who responded positively to this question, further inquiry led to examining the reasons that motivated them to apply the pluricentric DACH principle in teaching L2 German. Only 4 respondents (3.1%) argued that it is somehow obligatory (within the educational curriculum, etc.). In contrast, 70 teachers and lecturers (53.4%) confirmed that they do so by their own decision, while the remaining 57 (43.5%) stated that it is their initiative, but partly also prescribed (see Figure 1).

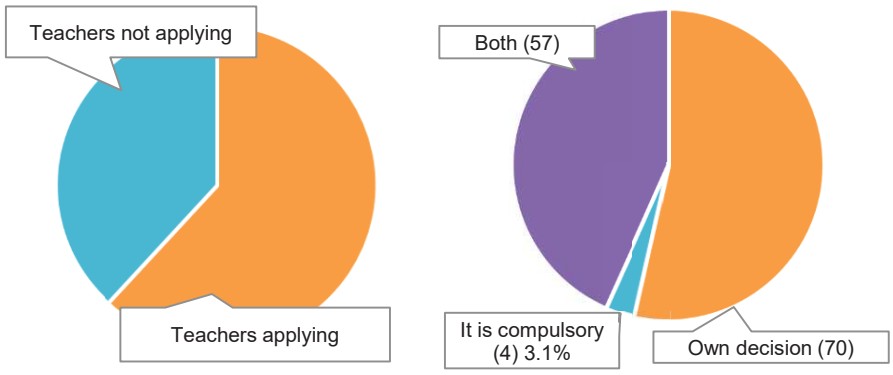


Figure 1. The ratio of teachers applying the pluricentric approach in teaching German as a foreign language and the reasons why they apply the pluricentric approach in teaching German as a foreign language.

The above data was correlated with the previously obtained data regarding the age of teachers and the type of school where they work. The first variable used here

was the age of teachers and lecturers. This variable was consequently used to assess the relationship to teaching L2 German using the pluricentric DACH principle. The results from the collected data are demonstrated in Figure 2 below. These results indicate that there is a positive correlation between the age of teachers and their inclination to teach the differences between German, Austrian, and Swiss standard German in teaching L2 German. Figure 2 furthermore displays the frequency of representation of pluricentrism in the teaching of German by teachers concerning their age, which we categorized into groups shown in Figure 2 (Fig. 2). It was found that the relationship between the age and length of practice of the surveyed teachers is directly proportional, and therefore, we used the age of respondents as the relevant indicator. We found that with the increasing age of the teacher, the frequency of teaching about pluricentrism increases. Our subjective assumption was that younger teachers would pay more attention to this issue and show greater interest. The most numerous group of teachers teaching the mentioned language specifics in teaching German was the age category from 51 to 60 years (71.7%).

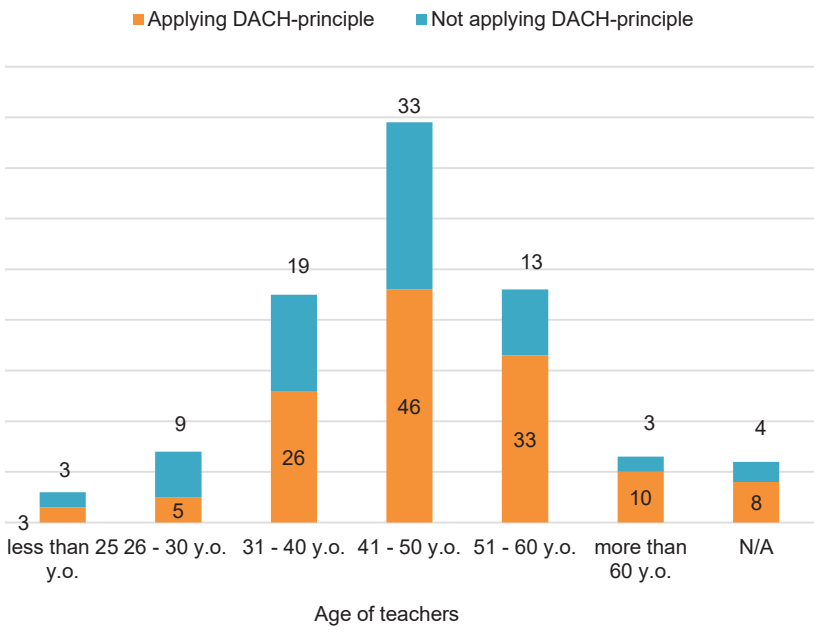


Figure 2. Age distribution of teachers teaching differences between German, Austrian, and Swiss Standard German

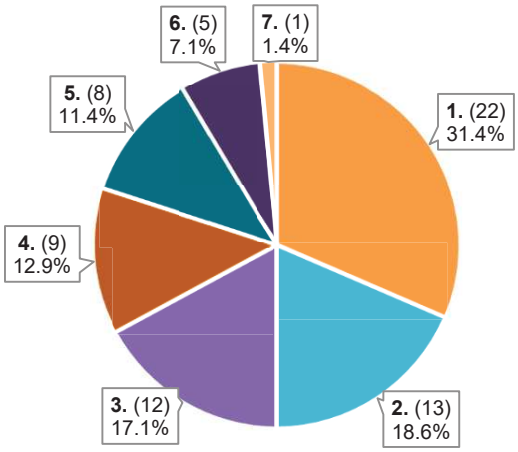
The second variable that was examined was the type of school. The data in Table 1 below represent the type of school, the number of teachers as well as the percentage share based on their response to the question of whether they teach the differences between German, Austrian, and Swiss standard German in teaching L2 German (or in classes focused on developing different language skills).

Table 1. Representation of teachers applying the DACH principle in teaching L2 German at different types of school in Slovakia.

Type of School	Teachers applying the DACH principle			
	Yes		No	
	Total	%	Total	%
Primary school	29	46.0	34	54.0
Secondary school	37	62.7	22	37.3
Grammar school	30	63.8	17	36.2
University	25	78.1	7	21.9
Language school	10	90.9	1	9.1
Total	**131**		**81**	

In the variable of school type, a higher than expected representation of pluricentrism in vocational schools, grammar schools, universities, and language schools, was found. The least number of teachers applying the pluricentrism approach is to be found in primary schools. However, the most significant representation of teachers applying the pluricentric approach is in language schools (90.9%) and then at universities (78,1%). It is only subjectively assumed that teachers at language schools and universities apply pluricentrism in teaching and pay more attention to differences and linguistic variations between national varieties in German than teachers at grammar schools, secondary schools, and primary schools because they prepare their students, who are adult learners, for using German in tourism and work or further study (language schools), or for academic purposes or professional preparation of using German at university level (universities). This situation can further be explained primarily by the higher language proficiency at universities and the fact that various linguistic disciplines are taught at universities in study programs focused on German studies or German language and literature/culture.

In the motivation variable of teachers to teach the pluricentric principle DACH, the focus was on the reasons why teachers and lecturers teach this principle (see Figure 3).



Practical usability by students, readiness for real-life encounters with the diversity of German.

Topic attractiveness from the perspective of students, their curiosity.

Geographical proximity and accessibility to Austria; the influence of Slovak on Austrian standard German and vice versa.

Broadening and enriching the general knowledge of students.

Students' own experiences.

Perception of German as a pluricentric language is a contemporary phenomenon.

ÖAD emphasizes the importance of discussing individual varieties.

Figure 3. Reasons and motivation of teachers to using the pluricentric approach in teaching L2 German in Slovak schools.

The reasons that motivate teachers at schools and lecturers at universities to incorporate the topic of pluricentrism into their teaching of L2 German are mentioned in the legend of Figure 3 above. However, the most frequently cited reason, for about a third of respondents, was the practical application of language peculiarities in real interaction with a non-German-German speaker and the use of language peculiarities typical of Austrian and Swiss German in a real-language environment. This reason was also mentioned by the majority of teachers in primary and secondary schools, and universities. It is worthwhile mentioning that according to some teachers there are also students at all levels of education who show interest and curiosity in learning more about Austrian or Swiss German. This was the second most common reason for teachers applying the pluricentric DACH principle in their teaching. Some teachers use the topic of pluricentrism to make German teaching more attractive. Since every Slovak city (or municipality) is closer to Austria than to Germany, it is assumed that there is a higher likelihood of locals traveling to Austria compared to Germany, simply because of geographical distance. Teachers also consider Slovakia's geographical location in relation to Austria as one of the reasons for teaching German as a pluricentric language in class. Among primary school teachers, the most dominant reason for applying the pluricentric approach is to provide learners with general knowledge about differences in German. On the other hand, teachers from language schools report that pluricentrism is an attractive topic of discussion for pupils and students.

Conclusion

In this contribution, the topic of pluricentrism and the application of the DACH principle in teaching L2 German in Slovakia was addressed. Based on the results, the most notable representation of teachers addressing pluricentrism is found in language schools and universities. The reasons provided by surveyed teachers for applying pluricentrism in their teaching varied, with the most common reason being the practical utility for learners and their preparedness for real-world encounters with the diversity of German.

Based on the acquired data and presented results, it can be said that pluricentrism in teaching L2 German is an integral part in the teaching process of teachers; the significance of the DACH principle and necessity to apply this principle in teaching L2 German in Slovak schools is continuously growing. Documents[1] issued by the Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport of the Slovak Republic set out general educational goals and key competencies towards which education should be directed. They also delineate the framework content of education and serve as the basis for the preparation of the school educational program, which considers the specific conditions and needs of the region. However, it is important to note that the thematic areas as well as the vocabulary outlined in these documents are only recommended, and therefore cannot be considered mandatory. Considering this, we concluded that the pluricentric approach to German is only marginally incorporated into the educational standard for teaching German as a foreign language in primary and secondary schools in Slovakia, or its inclusion in the curriculum is absent. It can be stated that the teaching of L2 German using the pluricentric approach depends almost entirely on teachers and their decisions regarding the extent to which the topic of pluricentrism is integrated into teaching.

Acknowledgements

This work was supported by the University Grant Agency (UGA) under the contract No. III/3/2023.

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Appendix

This appendix includes the original questionnaire in Slovak (Dotazník) with its translation into English (Questionnaire).

Dotazník

1. Koľko máte rokov?

.....

2. Ako dlho učíte nemčinu?

.....

3. Na akej škole učíte? (ak učíte na viacerých školách, označte tú možnosť, kde učíte dlhšie) *
   - ☐ Základná škola
   - ☐ Stredná škola (okrem gymnázia)
   - ☐ Gymnázium
   - ☐ Vysoká škola/Univerzita
   - ☐ Jazyková škola
4. Na ktorej základnej škole učíte?

.....

5. Na ktorej strednej škole učíte?

.....

6. Na ktorom gymnáziu učíte?

.....

7. Na ktorej jazykovej škole učíte?

.....

8. Na ktorej vysokej škole/univerzite učíte?
9. Učíte v rámci vašej pedagogickej činnosti aj predmety zamerané na rozvoj jazykových zručností alebo nemčinu ako cudzí jazyk? *
   - ☐ Áno
   - ☐ Nie
10. Učíte o rozdieloch medzi nemeckou, rakúskou a švajčiarskou spisovnou nemčinou? *
    - ☐ Áno
    - ☐ Nie
11. Učíte o tejto téme z vlastného rozhodnutia alebo je to povinná téma v učebnici, prípadne vo vzdelávacom pláne? *
    - ☐ Z vlastného rozhodnutia
    - ☐ Je to povinné
    - ☐ Oboje
12. Čo vás motivuje učiť o pluricentrizme napriek tomu, že to nie je predpísaná téma. *

13. Aké materiály, prípadne učebnice používate? Ako je v nich téma pluricentrizmu spracovaná? *
14. Myslíte si, že je váš jazykový prejav ovplyvnený rakúskou nemčinou? (napríklad vplyvom dlhšieho pracovného alebo študijného pobytu v Rakúsku, spoluprácou s rakúskymi kolegami, známymi, médiami a pod.) *
    - ☐ Áno
    - ☐ Nie
15. Myslíte si, že je váš jazykový prejav ovplyvnený švajčiarskou nemčinou? (napríklad vplyvom dlhšieho pracovného alebo študijného pobytu vo Švajčiarsku, spoluprácou so švajčiarskymi kolegami, známymi, médiami a pod.) *
    - ☐ Áno
    - ☐ Nie
16. Používate austriacizmy v komunikácii počas vyučovania? (akýkoľvek váš výstup, bežná komunikácia, výklad a pod.) *
    - ☐ Áno
    - ☐ Nie
17. Ktoré? (prosím, napíšte zopár príkladov) *
18. Používate helvetizmy v komunikácii počas vyučovania? (akýkoľvek váš výstup, bežná komunikácia, výklad a pod.) *
    - ☐ Áno
    - ☐ Nie
19. Ktoré? (prosím, napíšte zopár príkladov) *
20. Všimli ste si, či žiaci/študenti používajú počas vyučovania alebo bežnej komunikácie austriacizmy, alebo helvetizmy? *
    - ☐ Áno
    - ☐ Nie
21. Odpovedali ste, že žiaci/študenti používajú počas vyučovania alebo bežnej komunikácie austriacizmy alebo helvetizmy. Prosím, popíšte vašu skúsenosť.

Questionnaire

1. How old are you?

.....

2. How long have you been teaching?

.....

3. Where do you teach? (if you teach at more than one school, choose the option where you have been teaching longer) *
    - ☐ primary school
    - ☐ secondary school (except grammar school)

- ☐ grammar school
- ☐ university/college
- ☐ language school

4. Which primary school do you teach at?

.....

5. Which secondary school do you teach at?

.....

6. Which grammar school do you teach at?

.....

7. Which language school do you teach at?

.....

8. Which university or college do you teach at?
9. Do you teach subjects focused on language skills development or German as a foreign language as part of your teaching activities? *
   - ☐ yes
   - ☐ no
10. Do you teach the differences between Standard German, Austrian German, and Swiss German? *
    - ☐ yes
    - ☐ no
11. Do you teach this topic by your own choice, or is it a compulsory topic in the coursebook or curriculum? *
    - ☐ it is my own decision
    - ☐ it is compulsory
    - ☐ both
12. What motivates you to teach about pluricentrism despite it not being a prescribed topic? *
13. What materials or coursebooks do you use? How is the topic of pluricentrism addressed in them? *
14. Do you think your language usage is influenced by Swiss German? (e.g., due to longer work or study stays in Switzerland, collaboration with Swiss colleagues, acquaintances, media, etc.) *
    - ☐ yes
    - ☐ no
15. Do you think your language usage is influenced by Austrian German? (e.g., due to longer work or study stays in Austria, collaboration with Austrian colleagues, acquaintances, media, etc.) *
    - ☐ yes
    - ☐ no

16. Do you use Austrian German terms in communication during teaching? (your output, regular communication, explanations, etc.) *
    - ☐ yes
    - ☐ no
17. Which ones? (please provide a few examples) *
18. Do you use Swiss German terms in communication during teaching? (your output, regular communication, explanations, etc.) *
    - ☐ yes
    - ☐ no
19. Which ones? (please provide a few examples) *
20. Have you noticed whether students use Austrian German terms or Swiss German terms during lessons or in regular communication? *
    - ☐ yes
    - ☐ no
21. You answered that students use Austrian German terms or Swiss German terms during teaching lessons or in regular communication. Please describe your experience.

Implementing specific teaching strategies using selected picture books to young English language learners

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ABSTRACT

This article showcases specific teaching strategies including book-after-a-book, substitution, dramatic re-enactment, and language experience approach in selected picture books appropriate for young English language learners (ELLs). Selected to match the proficiency level of ELLs, picture books foster interdisciplinarity, contribute to the development of linguistic and social-emotional skills, and can be used within and outside of traditional language classrooms.

Keywords: *English language learner (ELL), level of proficiency, linguistic skills, picture book, skills teaching, strategies social-emotional*

The English Language Learner (ELL)

ELL learners[1] are learners who speak English as an additional language, and they require personalized support to enhance and gradually develop their English language proficiency through specific teaching strategies. This is a growing group of learners in the United States from 2020, and it is expected that by 2025 their number will be growing significantly (National Education Association, 2020). Additionally, it is possible that this phenomenon manifests in the Slovak language environment. There are several supporting programmes and various ways to help these learners linguistically, socially, emotionally, and culturally, for instance parenting programmes, nursing home visitation programmes, and text messaging programmes (Aos et al. 2004; Petrie et al. 2012).

Fulton (2006) suggests several language learning strategies which may improve young ELL's speaking skills such as open-ended questions and the usage of wh-questions which create a solid basis for further discussion. Even though these strategies are primarily suggested for parents, she suggests that they could be acquired by the teachers of ELLs who can freely apply them to their teaching

[1] From 2011, the term ELL (English Language Learner) began replacing ESL (English as a Second Language). The reason was that for some ELLs, English was not the second language.

practice. According to her, these language learning strategies develop the following literacy skills: *detecting sequence*, *identifying details*, *noting cause and effect relationships*, *making judgements*, *determining main ideas*, and *making inferences* (Fulton 2006, p. 4).

Louie and Sierschynski (2015) state that linguistic, social, emotional, and cultural aspects are also presented in wordless picture books because they support higher level thinking and literacy development. Moreover, they emphasize collaboration among learners and the ability "how to think" which is developed thanks to wordless picture books. Gibbons (2015) agrees with these ideas, and she adds that close reading is often very demanding for native speakers, and she would not recommend it as a technique for young learners. On the contrary, wordless picture books could be, in her view, a useful tool for ELLs to help them producing meaningful sentences using narrative grammar based on visual stimulus while she shows consideration for the facts from the field of neuropsychology. Resulting from these facts, I suppose that (wordless) picture books may contribute to the linguistic and social-emotional development of young ELLs due to their picture-word interaction, or the pictures themselves.

This article demonstrates specific teaching strategies used in a set of picture books to support young ELLs including book-after-a-book, substitution, dramatic re-enactment and language experience approach (Lado 2022–2023).

Two approaches to using picture books to support young ELLs

A picture book is a kind of short dynamic literary genre and didactic material associated with text and visual components typical of a simple, understandable plot with easily predictable and repetitive language and a minimal number of characters (Pokrivčáková et al., 2008). It may express a moral message and universal human qualities usually depicted through animals (ibid). As the name *picture books* suggests, illustrations play a significant role in the story.

There are several approaches available for teachers of young ELLs who wish to incorporate picture books into their classrooms. The first approach (word / image interplay) to using picture books combines verbal and visual elements – the written text is central, and the pictures have a motivating function. The second approach is aimed at wordless picture books which significantly support the imagination and fantasy of ELLs. When young learners are looking at pictures, they evoke a certain kind of emotion in them. The learners are able to compare this picture with another or to associate it with their own experiences. They probably find something original in the picture, so they remember not only the picture itself but the whole context in which it was set (Bland, 2010). At the same time, it opens many possibilities for constructive language work and meaning. The fact that the teacher works with the wordless picture book is not an obstacle but rather an advantage which contributes

to learners' activity, deepening their interest and pleasure. If the teacher selects the appropriate picture book that matches the ELL's current English proficiency level, then this teaching aid becomes a valuable tool of high quality.

A picture book that contains less than 20 new words is dedicated to early beginners. It consists of elementary lexis such as numbers, nouns, including singular and plural, and active verbs used on an everyday basis, as well as simple phrases and directions. If the number of new words in picture book is 70, the ELL is considered to be intermediate. They come across similar language structures to the early beginner, however, they are more complex from the syntactic point of view and also in terms of vocabulary. The aim in the first and the second cases is to develop the speaking skills of the ELL.

If the ELLs are skilful enough, they are exposed to picture books with approximately 500 new words and are then considered advanced. These picture books contain more written text and intricate patterns (Lado, 2022–2023). According to Brewster, Ellis, and Girard (1992, p. 159), listening to and working with stories is "a shared social experience". Here, ELLs have the opportunity to share their responses to various situations in the book which foster social-emotional development as confirmed by Horváthová (2022), who suggests combining different teaching aids to promote social and emotional learning through the use of picture books. Furthermore, the phenomenon of interdisciplinarity in picture books may help to link the knowledge and skills of the ELLs (Brewster, Ellis and, Girard, 1992). In other words, a picture book may include various areas of knowledge, for example English and History, English and Biology, English and World Literature, English and geography which helps young ELLs to acquire the linguistic input more effectively. As a result, it is possible to use picture books as an innovative teaching aid in foreign language education within and outside traditional classroom settings. The following teaching strategies are suggested: book-after-a-book, substitution, dramatic re-enactment, and language experience approach.

Suggested teaching strategies using selected picture books

In light of the above stated approaches and the complexity of lexis wanting to promote social-emotional development and interdisciplinarity, the following picture books together with the appropriate teaching strategies were thoroughly selected.

The first teaching strategy, dramatic re-enactment, uses particularly exceptional scenes from a story which are emotionally loaded, and which themselves help to generate original ideas. For this teaching strategy, the following wordless picture book for early beginners was chosen: *The Umbrella* by Ingrid and Dieter Schubert (2011). The Umbrella is a pictorial walk through all seasons in a year. In the classroom, the learners are divided into four groups corresponding to

the four seasons. In order to act out the scenes, the learners are asked to identify the verbs from the picture typical of that particular season. Subsequently, they act them out in their groups and finally in front of their classmates.

Based on the constant activity and joy of the main protagonist, a little dog (see Figure 1), the teacher can suggest adding some musical elements to each season separately. It is important to involve each learner appropriately in a dramatic re-enactment, even though they do not prefer acting. In other words, the teacher should coordinate the activity in such a way that all learners have their specific role and feel comfortable with it, which contributes to the social-emotional development of the learner. Additionally, there are hidden interdisciplinary links in this picture book, namely English and Geography, which may foster learners' interest in the activity and their natural curiosity.

Figure 1. *The Umbrella* – sample pages from the picture book illustrating the activity of the little dog.

For the second teaching strategy, substitution, which is based on the principle of using one "thing" in the place of another, the picture book *The Bear Ate Your Sandwich* by Julia Sarcone-Roach (2015) was chosen. This picture book contains textual and visual components which are appropriate for intermediate ELLs. Specifically, in this picture book, the ELLs may observe, write down and then verbalise some parallels between the forest and "the forest" so the learners gradually find out if it is possible to exchange these nouns. The forest represents a place that is in nature, and it is covered by trees. "The forest" indicates a place out of nature, it is a metaphor for a crowded city, which seemingly offers more possibilities for fun. In spite of the bear's adventurous encounters and funny moments in the "forest", it is happy to return back to home. Naming the parallels between these two kinds of forest, the learners could be encouraged to think about exciting situations in their lives which usually happen outside the home, and situations which are also adventurous and which happen at home. In the first case we refer to the "forest" which may be a volatile experience and in the second case it is the forest which represents something stable because it refers to the bear's real

home where it feels safe. Similarly, as in the previous picture book, interdisciplinary links between English and Geography can be developed, giving ELLs a map to imagine where the bear was moving.

Figure 2. *The Bear Ate Your Sandwich* – sample pages from the picture book illustrating the "forest" and the forest.

The third teaching strategy, book-after-a book, allows ELLs to create a poem from the selected picture book, *Papa, Please, Get the Moon for Me* by Eric Carle (1991). This book contains textual and visual components also appropriate for intermediate ELLs. As a part of the lesson, the ELLs choose, in groups, a few subject matters from the picture book. The letters of all subject matters are written in such a way that each letter is on a new line, and the learners' task is to add some words starting with this letter. Added words should be somehow related to the story whereas the tone of this acrostic poem is surprising. The teacher may ask the ELLs to place the letters according to the meaning of the subject matter, e.g. if the learners introduced the word "moon", the letters would be arranged in the form of the moon. Moreover, the letters can be connected by a line to emphasize the relationship between the word and its visual representation.

The moon is usually associated with night and darkness which may symbolise a mystery for ELLs because there is always something new to reveal and explore. Similarly, the girl / daughter in the picture book found out that it is possible to touch the moon – in other words, to achieve her desire. As a result, the story may shape learner's personality socially and emotionally, because the relationship between the father and the daughter is very warm and built on mutual trust. It expresses that seemingly unreachable aims are possible to fulfil by possessing qualities such as perseverance, patience, and willingness. Beside this, the teacher may add a few catchy facts about the moon from a scientific point of view, promoting the idea of interdisciplinarity.

Figure 3. *Papa, Please, Get the Moon for Me* – sample pages from the picture book illustrating the act of giving and receiving.

The fourth teaching strategy is the language experience approach (LEA). The aim of the LEA is to share an unusual experience among learners, similar to the one mentioned in the picture book. The learners can introduce their own experience or the experience of somebody else, they can modify this experience to make fun with it or they can come up with an imaginative story full of unexpected twists and tricky situations to solve, which requires a rich imagination, fantasy, a bit of humour and the ingenuity of the learners. The selected picture book *The Stinky Cheese Man & Other Fairly Stupid Tales* by Jon Scieszka and Lane Smith (1992), which is appropriate for advanced ELLs, is considered to be postmodern because it mocks the plot, characters, and the book format, as seen for example in this quote: "Once upon a time, there was a little old woman and a little old man who lived together in a little old house. They were lonely, so the little old lady decided to make a man out of stinky cheese" (ibid, p. 1). Finding interdisciplinary links would be more challenging for the ELLs so the teacher should be a strong facilitator in this process and help them. In other words, the teacher should definitely check if ELLs are familiar with traditional stories from the world literature such as *The Little Red Riding Hood*, *The Gingerbread Man*, *The Princess and the Pea*, *The Ugly Duckling*, *Cinderella, Rumpelstiltskin*, *The Tortoise and the Hare*, because only in this way they reveal the power of parody used in this picture book.

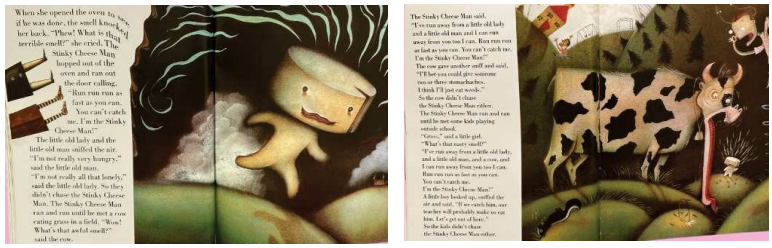

Figure 4. *The Stinky Cheese man & Other Fairly Stupid Tales* – sample pages from the picture book illustrating postmodern features.

Conclusion

This contribution demonstrates practically the use of four teaching strategies, book-after-a-book, substitution, dramatic re-enactment and language experience approach for four selected picture books. These strategies and books are used for young English language learners (ELL), respecting their level of proficiency, fostering interdisciplinarity, enhancing linguistic skills and developing social-emotional skills. Furthermore, picture books can also be used outside the classroom. Our suggestions in teaching practice were based on the close interconnection between the teaching strategy itself and the main idea of the picture book. I would recommend choosing a picture book to work with according to the above-mentioned criteria, and possibly expanding a range of other teaching strategies being inspired by Lado (2022–2023). This issue requires constant consideration in terms of possible suggestions for teaching practice and also their practical implementation to find their pedagogical relevance, and the reactions of ELLs with different levels of language proficiency.

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Introducing the intervention programme as a tool to support foreign language skills in the secondary school setting

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ABSTRACT

The present study showcases a selected number of research results obtained from a complex longitudinal research project about reading comprehension in foreign language learning, carried out in Slovakia at two different types of secondary schools, vocational and grammar schools. The article focuses on a specific selection of results, thus highlighting the importance of intervention programmes in foreign language reading comprehension. The research question investigated the level of linguistic competence, specifically the knowledge of syntactical and morphological structures and lexis in foreign language of students in these schools. The research covered three more tests of foreign language reading comprehension, pragmatic competence in foreign language, and social competence. The target group comprised 297 students of secondary vocational and secondary grammar schools in different regions of Slovakia. For the narrow focus of this article, the results of the linguistic competence test were selected to underline the need for teachers to pay attention to the development of linguistic skills of their students. The results showed significantly lower test results of students at secondary vocational schools compared to higher test results of students at the secondary grammar schools. The project research was focused on a selected number of foreign languages, namely, English, German, Spanish, French and Slovak as the second language of bilingual Hungarian speakers in Slovakia. The present study investigates the preventive form of intervention as a supporting tool of foreign language development.

Keywords: *foreign language instruction, intervention programme, linguistic competence, secondary grammar schools, secondary vocational schools.*

Introduction

Intervention is a form of stimulation and development of the cognitive and non-cognitive (social and affective) dimensions of personality; it is a form of action taken when unwanted or nonstandard behaviour occurs to improve the challenging behaviour, contributing to a positive difference. One can also define intervention as a specific strategy used to meet specific goals (Astleitner, Kriegseisen & Riffert, 2009; Mintrop, 2016; Gadušová et al., 2020). The aim of the complex longitudinal

research project is to apply intervention in secondary school settings (both vocational and grammar schools). The present study emphasises the importance of intervention in these school settings and discuss the intervention programme, which had intentionally been designed for the development of reading comprehension in a foreign language. Together with reading comprehension, lexical knowledge and grammatical knowledge represent essential abilities and skills in language learning. It is therefore necessary to apply a change if an insufficient level of linguistic competence is performed by learners. This is usually represented by the knowledge of syntax, lexis and morphological structures are achieved. The aim of this paper is discuss the current situation in foreign language reading of students at secondary vocational schools compared to students at secondary grammar schools in terms of linguistic competence, i.e., knowledge of syntactical and morphological structures, and lexis). For the purpose of the longitudinal research project mentioned earlier, five research questions were formulated. However, this article only showcases a selected part of that larger research project, which was carried out over a four-year period. Thus, the study presented in this article examines only one of the research questions and discusses the results obtained from the test of linguistic abilities (available upon request) of 17–18 years old students at the respective secondary schools in different regions of Slovakia. The project team from the University of Constantine the Philosopher in Nitra, Slovakia, designed the intervention programme used in this study and included reflective approach, self-regulating strategies, elements of social learning, and experiential learning (Gadušová et al. 2020; Stranovská & Ficzere, 2020). To design a well operated intervention programme, the research team examined the linguistic abilities of the selected group of participants.

Theoretical background to factors in reading intervention

Intervention is a form of stimulation and development of the cognitive and non-cognitive dimensions of personality to make a positive difference (Stranovská & Ficzere, 2020; Hvozdíková, 2023), usually addressing behaviours which are perceived as disturbing or negative. Regarding school settings, specifically selected intervention programmes lower the extent of negative forms of behaviour between classmates, resulting in a more collaborative climate prior to correct identification (Mintrop, 2016). Intervention is a very effective support for an educator or an assistant when a problem is correctly identified. Intervention in the school setting is mostly designed as a counterpart or an alternative to the standardised instruction, teaching style, or a well-known method. Intervention can also reveal a surprising element in instruction because through the use of this method eccentric teaching techniques can be applied that contribute to an increased interest in language learning and emphasise the uniqueness of learners, hence leading to

unexpected and positive learner experiences (Wilson et al., 2003). In addition, the procedure and design of an intervention is conducted by active participation and collaboration of a team of specialists, psychologists, educators, and the intervention instructor who leads the intervention workshop (Astleitner, 2020; McBride, 2016).

Although such intervention is most often applied as a *corrective* process, the focus here is on *preventive* intervention. In contrast to the preventive intervention, the purpose of corrective intervention is to modify, adjust, and into certain degree change the learning process of learners. The purpose of preventive intervention is thus to support, stimulate, and strengthen mechanisms and processes of learning (Stranovská & Ficzere, 2020; Gadušová et al., 2020). Moreover, this type of intervention helps to strengthen higher forms of learning: inferential thinking, creativity, critical thinking, digressive thinking. Three basic levels of preventive intervention are recognised: 1) universal intervention, which is applied to standard types of individuals designed for the universal needs of students. This level is used when the intention is to strengthen the selected form of behaviour or a specifically identified attribute of the group of students; 2) selected intervention; 3) indicated intervention (Domitrovich, C. E. et al., 2008). The latter two are typically applied to a specific group of individuals when the first type, the universal type, has not been successful or when the group of students has not responded as anticipated (McBride, 2016).

Regarding the success of intervention programmes, achieving the aims is conditioned by two aspects. The first is the quality of the intervention programme and the second aspect is conditioned by different factors that may have an impact on the environment where participants are present. According to Chen et al. (2003), in order to achieve specifically selected aims, the intervention includes common mechanisms, strategies or innovations and has a heterogeneous character. In foreign language education it is essential to pay much more attention to those constituents that have a direct impact on the linguistic performance of the students. Although some research (e.g., Astleitner et al., 2009; Mintrop, 2016) show a great interest in the diversity of methods and strategies used in intervention programmes or an interest in unifying methodology and educational aims, only a few studies emphasise the importance of adapting the procedures of intervention programmes to the selected individuals, who are eventually the subjects of the intervention (Kinshuk, 2016). To plan a successful intervention, firstly, the aims of the intervention programme need to be identified, and, secondly, the reasons for applying this programme to the selected individual students or groups of students need to be defined (Mrazek & Haggerty, 1994; Hoagwood & Johnson, 2003). It is essential to specify the details and procedures related tightly to the development of the abilities and competencies of the selected group.

Psycholinguistic research has already presented a great contribution of lexical knowledge in language performance (Laufer & Goldstein, 2004; Hadley, 2018; Gonzales-Fernandez & Schmitt, 2019; Read & Dang, 2022). Although other instructional approaches may be acceptable in the intervention programme, the research team here suggests an alternative form of instruction as presented in the intervention programme. This alternative form is not described here but is available upon request from the author.

As outlined earlier, a number of factors may have an impact on learners, negatively affecting the performance level of their linguistic abilities (McBride, 2016). For the purpose of the present study two groups of factors are discussed: external and intrapersonal. External factors are the most frequent. For instance insufficient knowledge of grammar and vocabulary is one of the external factors contributing to a negative outcome in intervention programmes. If students are not exposed to the target language, or if the conditions in school are not adapted for the students' needs, the knowledge of lexis and grammar may result in low academic achievements. Often it is related to the language of instruction, which may be very different from the mother tongue of the students. Another factor is insufficient linguistic competence. Among the many elements of linguistic competence there are some that receive particular attention: vocabulary knowledge and grammatical knowledge, phonological and orthographic control, and awareness (Kramsch, 2003). The level of achieved linguistic competence is often related to teaching style, course-books, social dynamics in the group, size of group, social exclusion, stigmatisation, discrimination tendencies, and school climate.

The second group of factors are intrapersonal factors. The most common factors related to this group are for instance the personality of students, developmental disorders, special needs of students, short working memory, low extent of critical thinking, high need for structure, anxiety behaviour, and also unwillingness to communicate in a foreign language. All these factors may result in lowering the level of students' linguistic competence (Hvozdíková, 2023).

Other non-specified factors include, e.g., the factor of family background, gender, age, geographical factors, school size, group size, frequent change of teachers, bullying, and school climate. For the purpose of the study only the factor of linguistic competence represented by knowledge of syntax, lexis, and language means (called the factor of linguistic abilities) was measured by the test.

Methodology

Secondary school students (n=297) aged 16-18 years from twelve public secondary schools of two types in different regions of Slovakia, both vocational and grammar, were selected to undertake the tests of linguistic abilities over a period of ten months between September 2020 and June 2021. Third-year students at both

school types attending daily classes with English proficiency level B2–C1 (according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages - CEFR) were examined. Informed consent was obtained from all participants. The tests were anonymous and the gender of the participants was not selected as one of the predictors.

The data was collected by a test of linguistic abilities, which was statistically verified and is available upon request (Lalinská, 2020). In order to design the specifications of the intervention, it was important to examine and identify the students' level of linguistic abilities. The test covers their knowledge of the language on several levels of language: lexical, syntactical, morphological, and pragmatic. For the narrow focus of this article, only one research question was formulated: What are the linguistic abilities of the selected number of students learning English as a foreign language in the secondary schools setting?

Discussion of results

The following are the results received from (n=297) tests administered at the two types of secondary schools. The minimum of achieved scores from all the schools was 8 and the maximum was 50 (maximum score). The mean value was 28.47, which represents a moderately higher value than the average. Standard deviation of all the respondents was 12.040, representing a higher degree of dispersion of the achieved points (Table 1).

Table 1. Descriptive statistics of the overall results of the test achievements.

Descriptive Statistics					
	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. d.
Linguistic abilities	297	8	50	28.47	12.040
Valid n	297				

Intentionally, the following two tables (Table 2 and Table 3) were selected to compare the scores of the two different groups of the students; S1 (*n=21*) in Table 2 represented the scores of the students from the selected grammar school, S2 (*n=17*) in Table 3 represented the scores of the students from the selected vocational schools. Of 11 groups the following two were selected to serve the score comparison of the knowledge of lexis, syntax, pragmatics, and morphology.

Table 2. Linguistic abilities of the students of the grammar school (S1).

Identifier		**Statistics**	**St. Error**
S1/Gr	Mean	36.84	1.433
	Median	39.00	
	Variance	51.307	
	Std. Deviation	7.163	
	Minimum	20	
	Maximum	45	
	Range	25	

Table 3. Linguistic abilities of the students of the vocational school (S2).

Identifier		**Statistics**	**St. Error**
S2/Gr	Mean	16.83	1.778
	Median	14.00	
	Variance	75.884	
	Std. Deviation	8.711	
	Minimum	8	
	Maximum	38	
	Range	30	

The graphical representation of the students' achievements in the factor of linguistic abilities represented by the test of grammatical structures, lexical units. The gross score displayed the achievements of all the examined groups. The total number of participants (*n*=297) achieved a mean score of 28.47 and the value of deviation was 12.04 (Figure 1).

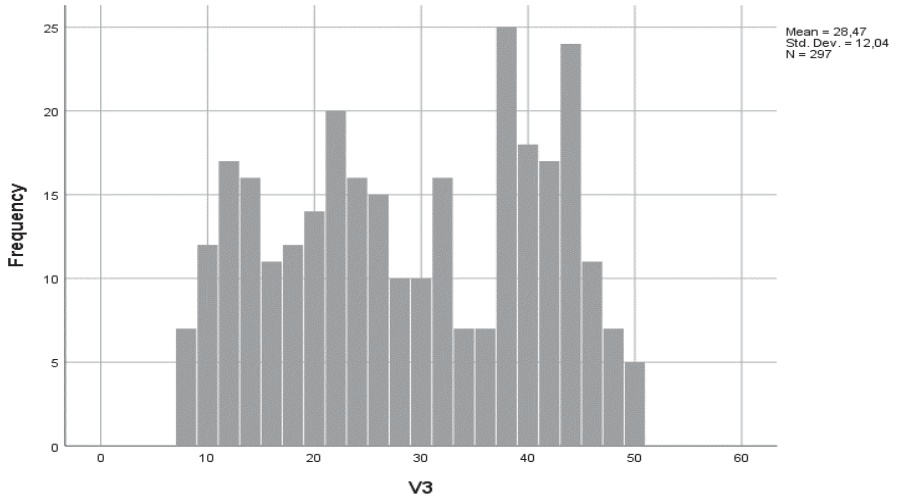

Figure 1. Graphical representation of the test scores of all the tested students (n=297).

Notably, the students at the selected secondary vocational schools achieved much lower results. Thus, efforts toward foreign language instruction at vocational schools seems to be less effective when compared to grammar schools. In these terms, it is suggested to apply preventive form of intervention as a beneficial forms of enhancement of linguistic abilities in this school setting. These results furthermore presented several gaps in the knowledge of these students. The students at vocational secondary schools lack the knowledge of lexis, sentence structures, language functions, and morphology. Even though the test was based on the CEFR descriptors for the proficiency level B1-B2, the achievements were generally insufficient at the vocational secondary school type. Most probably, the linguistic competence of the students at the vocational schools had not been sufficiently developed yet. On general bases, their level of willingness to communicate is low and their exposure to the foreign language is low. The complexity of the variety of factors influencing their achieved scores remains unclear.

Conclusion

The present study introduced the preventive form of intervention in the secondary school setting as a form of innovative and novel approach to supporting foreign language development. The selected research results have highlighted the importance of including intervention as an appropriate approach in the development of language skills. Based on showcasing the examples of low-test achievements in the area of linguistic competence of students at vocational

secondary schools, the need to re-introduce and apply intervention programmes into the teaching process at secondary schools exists. The knowledge obtained from this research was the result of a four-year research project examining the predictors of foreign language reading comprehension of which linguistic competence is a significant category. These results call for the diversification and adaptation of teaching methods and strategies, and a change in teaching styles and language instruction. Further research in examining the teaching and learning environment and the factors affecting language learning, may shed light on more effective teaching strategies.

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“Gefum íslensku séns” – Giving Icelandic a chance

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ABSTRACT

This article reports on the initiative “Gefum íslensku séns – íslenskuvænt samfélag” (Give Icelandic a chance – Icelandic friendly community), which is a project that was initiated in the small town of Ísafjörður in the Westfjords region of Iceland, to support both the use and the learning of Icelandic as a second language (L2) in its multi-diverse community. The aim of the project is to raise awareness about those, who learn L2 Icelandic, and those, who speak the language fluently or as their first language (L1), to help increase its use instead of switching into English, which is often the case. This is particularly important in the process of inclusion of speakers with foreign background into the L1 society, which is experiencing a relatively fast shift from a more homogeneous to a more heterogeneous society. This paper therefore discusses the background of that shift towards a multi-diverse society on the one hand, and provides a brief excurse and argumentation for establishing the initiative. As such, this article will provide insights into innovative language teaching by actively involving local citizens. Several examples of this initiative will be provided, ranging from international students attending the L2 summer course offered by the University Centre of the Westfjords to citizens using Icelandic with its non-native speakers.

Keywords: *community-based language learning, Iceland, Icelandic as a second language, inclusion*

Introduction

The aim of this article is twofold, to report on the community language project *Gefum íslensku séns – íslenskuvænt samfélag* (Give Icelandic a chance – Icelandic friendly community)[1], which was initiated in the remote town of Ísafjörður located in the Westfjords, in the north-western region of Iceland, and to introduce a community-based initiative supporting the acquisition of L2 Icelandic in Iceland. The town of Ísafjörður is part of the Ísafjarðarbær municipality with a population of about 4.000 people. A relatively large part of this population (20%)[2] are citizens of foreign background with a first language (L1) other than Icelandic. This situation is similar in other regions of Iceland as well. Due to the widely spread use of English in

[1] https://gefumislenskusens.is/about/

[2] https://www.hagstofa.is/utgafur/frettasafn/mannfjoldi/mannfjoldinn-1-januar-2024/

the country, people often use English in communication between L1 and L2 speakers of Icelandic (Arnbjörnsdóttir, 2011). The reason is usually the ease of use and the relative convenience in reaching mutual understanding faster than the “traditional way”, i.e., showing patience with L2 speakers when using simpler Icelandic even with grammar and pronunciation errors, and providing additional explanations to reach mutual understanding, which all together may take longer time and stretch the conversation. In situations like these, L2 Icelandic speakers experience difficulties in acquiring the language because the use of Icelandic is kept to the minimum. Moreover, this situation similarly affects the target language exposure as opportunities for practising and receiving feedback from L1 speakers are rare. All things being equal, the tendency of L1 Icelandic speakers is to use English with non-Icelandic speakers, a situation common in the Nordic countries (Peterson & Fägersten, 2023).

In the past two decades, Iceland’s society has undergone exponential growth due to its fast-growing economy. As a result, the influx of foreign labour, especially in tourism, the food industry, fishery, and the health sector, has experienced a steady and fast growth. This situation is unprecedented for Iceland because the growth from year to year has been very significant. The time for linguistic assimilation of “New Icelanders” (older generation of native Icelandic speakers often call non-native Icelandic citizens in this way) into the local society has been shortened due to the instant need to include foreign labour into various sectors of industry. As outlined earlier, the choice of the language of communication has often been the most convenient – English, although this rule cannot be applied everywhere. For practical reasons, using English in communication between native and non-native speakers of Icelandic in Iceland may be effective in the short run. In the long run, however, this may not be so effective because switching back to Icelandic instead of English may be problematic, if not impossible, when English has become the established *lingua franca*.

The project *Gefum íslensku séns – íslenskuvænt samfélag* represents an alternative way to support the use of Icelandic among all people in Iceland. The following section presents its background from historical and pedagogical perspectives.

Background to the project

In the past, the first settlers in Iceland were Norwegian people from bays, Vikings, who arrived in Iceland by boat in about 870 (Eggertsdóttir, 2018) and brought with them a West-Norwegian dialect (Karlsson, 1939–2019) as their language of communication. Fast forward to a thousand years later in 1900 the inhabitants of

Iceland numbered about 78.000[3] and most of them lived in the countryside in different parts of the country. The contact with others was mostly with Denmark and Danes because Iceland was part of the Danish Crown at that time. With the American occupation of Iceland during World War II, a military base was built, which had a significant economic impact on the country and its population (Thorhallsson et al., 2018). At that time, English was used as the "new language" because Danish had already been established as the second language due to Iceland's being part of Denmark. Nonetheless, this new situation brought about a change in the popular use of English. As such, the English language skills of the general population have improved. In 1994, the population of Iceland was about 265.000 and the proportion of citizens of foreign background was only 1.8%.[4] Currently, the general population feels very comfortable using English in everyday life and considers it as a *lingua franca* (Þórarinsdóttir, 2011; Naylor, 2017). Compared to the population of Iceland thirty years later, in 2024, the number of inhabitants is about 400.000 and the proportion of citizens of foreign background is about 19%. This represents a significant growth in citizens of foreign background in thirty years, which is a 17.2% increase between 1994 (1.8%) and 2024 (19%). Based on this, it can be said that the so called "New Icelanders" represent a new wave of settlers coming from different parts of the world either for a shorter or longer period and for various purposes, work, or study. This new group of migrant people brings with them different languages, thus contributing even more to the diversity of the population. However, the problem with using Icelandic in communication with others remains.

Many people of foreign origin coming to live in Iceland may already have some basic knowledge of English and can use this language in communication about official and private matters. Some people in this group, however, do not possess any knowledge of English but are in a way forced to learn it in Iceland, as the tendency is to select English above Icelandic in general communication with citizens of foreign background. Another factor for L1 Icelandic speakers using English in communication with L2 Icelandic learners and speakers maybe that L1 Icelandic speakers are not used to foreign accents (Kristinsson, 2020). In the past, not many people in the world could speak Icelandic and the locals often felt unique in this regard, especially due to the small size of population and therefore the low likelihood that other people would learn or even speak it. This factor of linguistic identify may cause the preference of L1 Icelandic speakers for using English. Due to this attitude of L1 speakers towards using Icelandic language in communication with people of foreign origin, and the general view of L1 speakers that Icelandic

[3] https://hagstofa.is/talnaefni/ibuar/mannfjoldi/yfirlit/

[4] https://www.stjornarradid.is/media/fjarmalaraduneyti-media/media/ppt-kynningar/erlendir-rikisborgarar-og-efnahagslifid.pdf

language may be too complicated for others to learn, switching to English has become very common.

A similar project to the one described in this article also originated in Iceland but in a different geographical location – the capital area of Reykjavík. This Project is called *Íslenskuþorpið* (The Icelandic Village) and uses a "language contract" with local businesses to raise awareness of the importance of using Icelandic in communication with locals, especially L2 Icelandic learners (Theodorsdóttir & Friðriksdóttir, 2013). Also, this community-based approach is used to make L2 Icelandic learners aware of those businesses where Icelandic can be used in communication outside of the language courses, thus allowing for increased language exposure and practice.

The other three predecessors of the project described here, and on which this project builds on, are the inclusion of the local community into the summer courses of Icelandic as a foreign language without any official name for this initiative, the project *Íslenskuvænn staður* (Icelandic-friendly place), and the project *Íslenskuvænt samfélag – við erum öll almannakennarar* (Icelandic-friendly place – we can all be teachers). The first initiative commenced in 2007 and was part of the summer courses of Icelandic as a foreign language organised by the University Centre of the West Fjords[5]. Here, the local community of Ísafjarðarbær became an extension of the language courses, enabling learners to practice their Icelandic language skills with local people, who were also aware of this initiative. The second initiative developed into a project in 2021 with the name *Íslenskuvænn staður* (Icelandic-friendly place). Here, many local businesses committed themselves to using mainly Icelandic in communication with learners from this summer course. Based on this somehow natural development, the third initiative expanded to another slightly larger project and in 2022 was given the name *Íslenskuvænt samfélag – við erum öll almannakennarar* (Icelandic-friendly place – we can all be teachers). Here, the focus was not only on the local community trying to speak Icelandic with L2 Icelandic learners and speakers, but also making the public aware of the fact that all Icelandic speakers can somehow become teachers of Icelandic, only by using Icelandic in communication and in this way supporting the natural acquisition of the language. The following year, 2023, this project has grown into a yet larger project and a challenge with the name *Gefum íslensku séns – íslenskuvænt samfélag*. Here, the aim is to raise awareness of L1 speakers about the importance of speaking Icelandic to all non-native Icelandic speakers and in this way increase the language exposure and practice, hopefully leading to a more natural use of Icelandic in communication in the general society. This project has

[5] https://www.uw.is/en/study/icelandic-courses

an official logo, which is used to visually attract the attention of the local and general community in Iceland (Figure 1).

Figure 1. A logo of the project *Gefum íslensku séns – íslenskuvænt samfélag*.

Approach and implementation of the project

This initiative builds on the community-based language initiative approach[6], which emphasizes participation of different in language communities in diverse local settings (Clifford, 2019). The initiators of the project appeal to various businesses and institutions in the area and ask them to use Icelandic when communicating with people of foreign origin who are learning the language. This part is largely connected with the summer courses of Icelandic that take place annually at the University Centre of the Westfjords. In this way, the local community represents an extension of the classroom where L2 Icelandic learners can practise the target language. The places (various businesses and public institutions) that officially decide to participate make a commitment to use Icelandic in spoken form with L2 Icelandic learners; these places furthermore promise to use any method necessary to support a conversation in Icelandic. The project initiators arrange for posters to be placed on visible spaces of businesses to designate "Icelandic-friendly places".

The pedagogy used in this approach used resembles the one used in the project *Íslenskuþorpið*, which originated in the capital city of Reykjavík (Theodorsdóttir & Friðriksdóttir, 2013). Similar to that project, the use of a "language contract" with local businesses and a special information poster (Figure 2) designating participating businesses was adopted. Inspired by the pedagogical approach in that project, the first two steps were adopted: 1) classroom, where the teacher prepares learners for participation in the community; and 2) learners explore the local community and prepare themselves for the use of Icelandic with people in local businesses (Theodórsdóttir & Friðriksdóttir, 2013). However, two

[6] https://servicelearning.duke.edu/community-based-language-initiative

new steps were developed: 3) participation of all residents Icelandic skills as “teachers of Icelandic”, and in this way contributing to increased language exposure and practice opportunities; and 4) the use of “simple” Icelandic in official settings such as museum visits.

Figure 2. Special posters providing information about Icelandic-friendly places where Icelandic is mainly used in communication.

The four pedagogical steps described above help keep the whole community of L1 and L2 speakers involved. Several activities take place throughout the year to enhance the use of Icelandic in the community. The most popular is the *Speed-Icelandic* event, which follows the same principal as speed dating except the main goal here is to practice Icelandic. This event especially targets the L1 Icelandic speakers, who are encouraged to find a way to express themselves in Icelandic so that even a beginner learner of L2 Icelandic can understand them. This often represents a challenge, but experience shows it is a rewarding one. To retain the casual nature of the event, it is organised in collaboration with a local brewery. Other initiatives include, e.g., organising visits to local businesses, theatre, literary readings, and museum visits, where “simple Icelandic” is used to support the understanding of the language by beginners or intermediate L2 Icelandic learners.

Conclusion

Such an initiative provides a nudge to accept and include L2 speakers' roles in the local society. In doing so, the help for linguistic integration should come from the community itself, which may contribute to a more natural increase in practice opportunities and language exposure. For the reasons mentioned earlier, the goal of the project is both to give the chance to L2 speakers to use Icelandic in communication in Iceland, and to increase awareness that language acquisition may take place outside the language courses, namely in the local community. The initiative described in this article reported the second initiative in Iceland that supports the learning of L2 Icelandic using real language in local communities (Theodorsdóttir & Friðriksdóttir, 2013; Clifford, 2019). By encouraging L1 Icelandic speakers to actively engage in short and simple conversations with L2 Icelandic speakers, a more natural language acquisition can be supported. The innovative nature of this project is to bring people together using the local language and, in this way, help learn about each other's languages and cultures. Projects like these can have an inclusive nature and can support cultural awareness in multi-diverse societies all around the world.

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Action-oriented scenarios: A paradigm shift in language education

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ABSTRACT

This paper presents the Action-oriented Approach (AoA), which responds to current societal needs by preparing learners to act as informed social agents who strategically employ their diverse linguistic and cultural resources to achieve collaborative goals. Rooted in scenario-based learning, the AoA prioritizes learner agency, mediation, and plurilingualism in a dynamic and holistic view of language and language users that recognize the complex nature of language learning and the collaborative communicative processes involved. Action-oriented scenarios contextualize a series of sub-tasks in a logical progression with realistic conditions and constraints in the pursuit of a goal which is not solely language-focused, Scenarios enhance learners' language awareness, as well as their agency and ability to use languages effectively. Furthermore, the AoA underscores the social and mediated nature of language, promoting collaborative, reflective, and autonomous learning. The authors first explore the emergence of the AoA and its theorization. They then present in detail two action-oriented scenarios from a research study conducted in Italy, depicting the various steps and constraints involved in the creation of a culminating artefact, together with the voices of some of the teachers involved in the study. The authors conclude with implications and recommendations for educators to take into account when implementing action-oriented scenarios in the language classroom.

Keywords: *action-oriented approach, agency, mediation, plurilingualism, scenario-based learning*

Introduction

The realm of language education has been evolving rapidly in light of the growing diversity in educational settings and changing societal landscapes, necessitating a shift away from Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) and its strong form (Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2011), Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) (Nunan, 1989), which have been the prevalent paradigms since the 1980s. With its focus on learners' plurilingual agency and empowerment and its alignment with complexity theories and sociocultural theory, the Action-oriented Approach (AoA) (Council of Europe, 2001, 2020), as currently theorized (Piccardo & North, 2019),

offers such a shift. CLT generally focuses on meaning and interaction through information-gap and roleplay activities, while TBLT is concerned with the accomplishment of tasks with a communicative outcome. The AoA goes beyond using languages only for communication to focusing on making meaning as "social agents" by using all available linguistic and semiotic resources, moving from interaction to (co)action and from multilingualism to a plurilingual and pluricultural view, which highlights the flow, permeability, and porosity of languages both at the individual and societal levels. The aim of this shift is engagement in dynamic and collective action in scenario-based learning that transcends the boundaries of linguistic and cultural differences.

As described below, action-oriented scenarios embed tasks in a real-life oriented context with realistic conditions and constraints, thus fostering learners' sense of initiative, awareness, and pragmatic and functional use of the language. AoA goes beyond CLT and TBLT, with a complete shift from a focus on an idealized "native-speaker" model to a focus on the individual and social process of co-constructing meaning in dynamic and plurilingual *languaging (*Raimondi, 2014; Swain, 2006), requiring mediation. The shift reflects a move away from a linear to a holistic approach where language learning is embedded in the completion of meaningful, collaborative scenarios that foster learners' agency and language awareness.

Sánchez Cuadrado (2021) aptly exemplifies how action-oriented scenarios differ from classic tasks, when he transforms a type of task that is commonly found in different variations in many textbooks:

In groups, pick a celebrity and prepare to tell the class the most important facts about him/her so that your classmates can guess who you are talking about into the following scenario:

The town hall wants to name the new park in the town after a celebrity. In groups, pick a celebrity and prepare a proposal to take part in the public poll. Remember you have to do some research and justify your choice.

This latter scenario responds to the requirements of the AoA insofar as it provides an authentic context (the town hall wants to name the new park in the town), requires a tangible personalizable product (a proposal) to meet a goal (taking part in the public poll) that will need individual/collaborative research (about the celebrity) and co-construction (of the justification). It is clear that this whole endeavour requires actions such as negotiating, reporting back findings, and decision-making, which inevitably involve mediation of texts, communication and concepts (Council of Europe, 2020).

Although the term Action-oriented Approach was introduced in the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) (Council of Europe, 2001) accompanied by a definition of an (action-oriented) task (p. 157), the approach was

not spelt out or theorized until recently (Piccardo & North, 2019). Furthermore, there was a general tendency to see the CEFR as a tool for assessment and to focus on its levels and descriptors only (Byram & Parmenter, 2012; Coste, 2007; North, 2020); thus the AoA has not been adopted in language teaching practice. For example, a survey carried out in 2020 among 127 language teachers in Spain (78% from university language centres or the Escuelas Oficiales de Idiomas) found that although 43% of those surveyed claimed familiarity with the term, there appeared to be, in reality, little or no knowledge of what the AoA involved (Levy & Figueras, 2022), with the authors concluding that "[t]he implementation of the action-oriented approach suggests a different sort of teacher, a different sort of learner and a different sort of classroom, but the starting point has to be the teacher" (2022, p. 74). This confirms the issue with the AoA: since the term has circulated for quite a while, people may feel they know the approach without any real familiarity with it. In this respect, the AoA offers a promising paradigm change, but one that has yet to be implemented on any wide scale.

In the following paragraphs, we present the theory detailing this approach, followed by two examples of action-oriented scenarios from a research project. We conclude with a discussion of the implications of the AoA for educational policymakers and practitioners.

Theoretical background to action-oriented approach (AoA)

In language education, researchers have observed a discrepancy between teaching practices still in use and educational research and theory (e.g., Hall, 2016; Kumaravadivelu, 2003; Wahlgren & Aarkrog, 2021). Meanwhile, others have highlighted the importance of encouraging the use of language in meaningful and collaborative tasks (e.g., Ellis, 2003, 2018; Ellis et al., 2020; Nunan, 2004; van Den Branden et al., 2009; van Den Branden & van Gorp, 2021). In particular, TBLT has brought to the fore the role that meaningful tasks can play in the organization of curricula and their ability to foster students' collaboration; however, the main aim of tasks in TBLT remains that of fostering the communicative ability of learners, with a strong focus on meaning in information exchanges and (assessed) communicative outcomes (Acar, 2019).

An increasingly interconnected world, in which individuals are called on to act together across geographic, cultural, and linguistic barriers, calls for a pedagogy that goes beyond simple communication to embrace different forms of action, which inevitably require individuals to think strategically, and exercise agency and responsibility, along with the ability to work with others in the pursuit of a clearly defined, shared goal. Thus, over the last two decades, there has been growing reflection around how to respond via an educational approach to the holistic, dynamic and complex nature of the learning process. Over the same period of time,

the AoA has slowly taken shape through a complementary process of theorization and bottom-up practice (Bourguignon, 2006, 2010; Piccardo & North, 2019; Puren, 2009; Van Lier, 2007). As a result of this process, the AoA has a distinct focus on learners' agency and their ability and willingness to act in the social context – which is, by nature, authentic with conditions and constraints – and to mobilize all their resources (cognitive, emotional, linguistic and cultural) in mediating and co-constructing meaning in iterative reflective processes able to generate meaningful and transferable language use.

A key impulse to innovation, encouraging language educators to embrace the AoA has come from the revised and extended version of the CEFR, the CEFR Companion Volume (CEFRCV) (Council of Europe, 2020), which has foregrounded mediation in language education and sparked reflection across educational theory and practice (e.g., North et al. 2022; Piccardo, in press; Stathopoulou et al., 2023). As mentioned, mediation is central to the languaging process and to acting as a social agent, as it is crucial to understanding, meaning-making and collaborating. Social agents mediate to convey and construct meaning while accomplishing tasks, and this can happen within and across languages. Learners, seen as social agents, act within their environment, and experiment with all their linguistic and cultural resources. They do not view languages as neatly separate entities, but rather perceive language as an activity, precisely as "languaging", i.e., an individual and social process of making meaning. In the languaging process, language users mediate and negotiate linguistic and cultural spaces while shaping and developing their linguistic repertoires and trajectories. Going beyond a focus on merely using languages to communicate with others, as in CLT or TBLT, the AoA is rooted in a deeper process of mediating across and within languages and/or registers, for others and with others, to facilitate communication, give access to knowledge, or make sense of texts, discourse, and concepts (Piccardo, 2022).

This holistic, ecological and dynamic process is at the core of the AoA and also of plurilingualism, a concept distinct from multilingualism, that stresses interdependence and fluidity of languages and views language learners and users as having dynamic and evolving linguistic repertoires. The AoA adopts a plurilingual vision, which makes space for learners' agency, thus creating the potential for new affordances to emerge. The AoA enables individuals to perceive and exploit linguistic and cultural affordances that they would not normally notice. In turn, exploration makes those affordances increasingly visible, expanding the ability to perceive and explore further in a positively-reinforcing dynamic cycle.

To operationalize the AoA, the curriculum needs to be organized around scenarios, such as, for example, the ones described below, adopting a backward design that starts from an analysis of learners' needs and considers context-appropriate linguistic, communicative and cultural goals.

Action-oriented scenarios: Practical examples

Scenarios can be viewed as "blueprints for projects" (Piccardo & North, 2019, p. 272) and emphasize the social and mediated nature of language that encourages collaborative, reflective and self-regulated learning. An action-oriented scenario involves multiple steps, constraints, and the creation of a culminating artefact. Together, these elements foster collaboration, afford learner agency, and activate diverse linguistic resources and competences. In action-oriented scenarios, learners can draw on multiple linguistic and cultural resources and, in turn, further develop their repertoires.

Table 1 shows the description of the plurilingual, action-oriented scenario, "Our Community Cookbook", available on the website of the research project *Linguistic and Cultural Diversity Reinvented* (https://www.lincdireproject.org/) (Piccardo et al., 2022). This scenario is at the CEFR A2 level but can be adapted for use with different proficiency levels by drawing on different CEFRCV descriptors. The scenario is also flexible for use with multi-level classes, enabling learners with different linguistic abilities to actively develop their respective competences.

Table 1. "Our Community Cookbook" scenario description and steps.

Scenario description	**Scenario steps**
Some parents in your school community have complained that their children are too picky with their food. They're looking for interesting and tasty recipes to try out and have asked your class for help compiling a new community cookbook. You and your classmates have decided to contribute recipes from different cultures and countries around the world. For this task, each student will create one entry in the cookbook based on their family's favourite recipe. When the cookbook is completed, you will put it all together and take a copy home to your family.	Step 1: Introducing the task
	Step 2: Language in recipes
	Step 3: A cultural dish
	Step 4: Editing your recipe
	Step 5: Our class cookbook
	Step 6: Can do quiz

As seen in the description in Table 1, a scenario provides a realistic frame in which action can take place, with a context (the school community), a goal (understanding and producing texts related to food), an expected product (a cookbook), and the need to do some individual research (on recipes and culinary traditions across cultures), while co-constructing meaning (working together to finalize and present the cookbook). This embeds every phase of learning in real life, with specific conditions and constraints, and the learners' action is driven by reality

rather than purely by learning linguistic forms. In turn, the steps in the scenario also require learners to exercise agency and develop their linguistic and cultural awareness.

By inviting learners to bring in and analyze a family recipe, in step 3 of this scenario, they are required to mediate information across their home languages and cultural origins. Teachers who used this scenario in Italy observed that the collection of family recipes enabled not only engagement with international languages and cultures, due to the presence of learners from countries other than Italy, but also a recognition of regional diversity, bringing Italian dialects like Neapolitan and Calabrian into the classroom and elevating their sociolinguistic status. Teachers explained how, during the scenario, students came to see their diverse origins as a resource they could contribute to the class. Teachers shared how the creation of the culminating artifact – the community cookbook – increased learner motivation as it was authentic and collaborative: students shared real recipes with their classmates and took an e-book back home to their families. Students also had autonomy in deciding how to create their cookbook, while responding to the constraints of the scenario (the need to provide parents with new recipes). Teachers noted the particularly inclusive nature of this collaborative artefact creation, mentioning how students with lower language skills took on active roles throughout the scenario as well. This reflects the motivating and collaborative nature of the AoA, where all learners are engaged in real-life situations and have a shared communicative goal that involves reception, production, interaction, and mediation. The final step of the scenario invites learners to reflect on their language use, in a holistic self- (and/or peer) assessment framework that draws on the key principles of action orientation, including mediation and plurilingualism.

These principles are reflected in another action-oriented scenario, *Launching a Language Blog*, which is designed for the B1 CEFR level. As seen in Table 2 below, this scenario orients action-based learning around a final collaborative product (a blog) by inviting learners to co-construct information (through an interview) and report on what they learned (in a blog post). The template for this scenario (see Appendix) draws on CEFR descriptors of mediation and plurilingual competence, including "Can create a positive atmosphere by the way he/she greets and welcomes people and asks them a series of questions that demonstrate interest," and "Can use what he/she has understood in one language to understand the topic and main message of a text in another language (e.g. reading blog posts that include multiple languages/multiple varieties)." Language teachers can of course modify these can-do descriptors according to the needs of their classes.

Teachers who used this scenario in a Spanish language class commented on how it cultivated authenticity through collaboration: *"preparar una entrevista para*

presentarle a los compañeros de tu clase es una cosa, pero es muy diferente si tienes que presentarla de verdad y hacer preguntas reales para conocer algo, aprender algo del trabajo de los demás" (preparing an interview to present it to your classmates is one thing, but it is a very different thing to have to really conduct it and ask real questions to learn something from the work of others). One of the teachers also noted the activation of plurilingual and pluricultural competences that occurred during the development of the blog posts: "*cuando hay que traducir, que presentar la cultura de un elemento, no sé, de la historia cultural de Alemania y después tienes que presentarlo a los italianos, pero es a través del español. Ha sido una unión de herramientas lingüísticas diferentes y seguramente interesante, y es un trabajo que no se hace normalmente*" (when you have to present a feature of culture, like the history of Germany, but you have to present it to Italians through Spanish, there is an interesting union of different linguistic resources that does not usually happen).

Table 2. Launching a Language Blog scenario description and steps.

Scenario description	**Scenario steps**
Your principal has noticed that there are fewer and fewer students signing up for language courses at your school and in your community. Next week, your language class will be launching a new blog to help promote a language throughout the school and beyond. The blog's homepage will include a statement outlining the purpose of the blog and a list of the benefits of learning an additional language. In the blog, you will also showcase what you've been doing in class (using pictures, sound clips, comments, etc.) and make your blog as appealing as possible to prospective students. This can include features such as past events, details of upcoming events, a list of target-language songs and artists, and bios of popular athletes/actors. To promote the blog, you will carry out a live interview in front of the class during which a student host will ask you about this exciting new project. The audience will have a chance to ask you questions and try out the blog before its official launch!	Step 1: Introducing the task
	Step 2: Populating the blog
	Step 3: Preparing for the interview
	Step 4: Writing and editing a blog response
	Step 5: Conducting the interview and launching the blog
	Step 6: Can do quiz

The two scenarios described above are among thirty that were implemented in language classrooms (of French, English, Spanish, and German) in a research project conducted in the Italian regions of Campania, Lazio, and Lombardy which

involved a total of 253 participating teachers in two iterations. These scenarios, originally developed as part of the LINCDIRE project, helped facilitate a cross-Atlantic partnership between the University of Toronto and the Italian Ministry of Education to support language teachers with their transition to online distance education between 2020 to 2022 (Piccardo & Langé, 2023).

The post-implementation research survey data, gathered from participating teachers (70 from Lombardy in iteration 1 and 149 from Lombardy, Campania and Lazio in iteration 2), suggested that action-oriented scenarios favourably influenced task authenticity and collaboration among students. A French teacher, for instance, observed that these scenarios helped transform their lessons in ways that "*made the learning process more engaging and interesting*." The students, she reported, were not merely following rules or completing exercises; instead, they were "*actively constructing something tangible*" that would benefit both themselves and others. In her class, students enthusiastically shared the artefacts created with classmates: "*Because after finishing the product* (...) *we hung the posters in the corridor for everyone to look at. So, it was something real. And students had a target again, to share what they had produced with peers... a real objective, a real task*." Another teacher appreciated the practicality of the scenario template and descriptors, emphasizing how it heightened awareness for both teachers and students: "(...) *I really appreciated the structure* (...) *we had the opportunity to reflect on each descriptor and to be more aware of what I as a teacher was doing but also the students*."

Implications and recommendations

The changing global society implies that policymakers and practitioners need to shift from simply communicating in another language (i.e., traditional communicative tasks) to acting collaboratively through language (i.e., project-based learning scenarios). In scenarios, learners, viewed as "social agents", are given the autonomy to design, strategize, and implement, with the teacher playing a supportive role and providing scaffolding. The AoA empowers learners to actively shape their learning and deploy a range of resources for accomplishing an end goal while developing their language competences (Piccardo & North, 2019).

The implications of adopting the AoA can be seen from the two scenarios introduced earlier, which reveal how this approach encompasses and moves beyond CLT and TBLT to inspire innovation at the level of educational policy and practice. A scenario is rooted in social action, requiring users to work collaboratively, not just within the confines of their classroom, but also across different languages and cultures. In the "Our Community Cookbook" scenario, users interact with members of their household, for instance, in their home language, or with other speakers of that language in their school community, to

contribute to a shared artefact. In the scenario Launching a Language Blog, learners engage in a process of mediation (of communication, texts, and concepts within and across languages) by collaboratively deciding how to structure and populate a blog. This process fosters a dimension that goes beyond the classroom, enhancing the users' social and collaborative skills while overcoming the monolingual mindset which excludes languages other than the target language from the class. Second, communicative language competence is not merely defined through learning isolated skills (listening, reading, speaking, writing) or decontextualized speech acts (e.g., asking for information) but is rather actualized by working collaboratively to carry out the scenario. This requires users to engage in authentic communication in real-life situations, while also developing the necessary linguistic objectives for the context or theme of the target action. Third, the approach incorporates a sociocultural, citizenship-informed dimension that encourages users/learners to live harmoniously and act strategically in linguistically and culturally diverse societies. The AoA facilitates the development of learners' stances as socially democratic citizens, promoting respect for the diversity of others' languages and cultures, and therefore preparing them for increased heterogeneity.

For teachers to bring this approach to life, learning scenarios need to be carefully crafted. The scenarios should encompass a high level of linguistic, pragmatic, and mediation skills, and provide an adequate level of complexity and autonomy. They should also include a collective self- or peer evaluation component upon completion of the final product, emphasizing a dimension of shared responsibility and collective decision-making.

Curriculum developers can consider how curricula can be mainly or fully organized around scenarios, which provide the necessary authenticity of scope, context and resources to engage and motivate learners in and beyond the class. The rhizomatic development that has characterized the AoA since its inception is continuing with substantial resources that have been recently made available to aid practitioners and curriculum developers in integrating the AoA into different educational settings. The CEFRCV mentioned above provides a user-friendly framework, with descriptors that can inspire and scaffold AoA-based teaching. Other resources (e.g., Hunter et al., 2019; Piccardo & Langé, 2023) unpack key elements of the AoA, focusing on the feasibility of developing action-oriented scenarios in the language classroom or laying out an entire AoA-based curriculum (Lebrec et al., 2024).

For educational researchers – and all educational stakeholders – it is important to recognize how the AoA is a paradigm shift that aligns with complex dynamic system theory and integrates authentic, plurilingual and pluricultural realities. This is significant not only for bridging the gap between theory and practice, but also for making real advancements in the field that can leverage the

blurring of linguistic and cultural barriers afforded by technology, migration, and mobility, as well as respond to the urgent and ongoing need to build inclusive societies for diverse individuals and communities.

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Appendix

LINCDIRE Action-oriented Scenario Template

SECTION 1

Note that the term Scenario refers to the action-oriented story/context whilst the term Task refers to the culminating task of the scenario.

Part 1: Scenario Description

1) Title: Launching a Language Blog
2) Overview: Your principal has noticed that there are fewer and fewer students signing up for language courses at your school and in your community. Next week, your language class will be launching a new blog to help promote languages throughout the school and beyond. The blog's homepage will include a statement outlining the purpose of the blog and a list of the benefits of learning an additional language. In the blog, you will also showcase what you've been doing in class (using pictures, sound clips, comments, etc.) and make your blog as appealing as possible to prospective students. This can include features such as past events, details of upcoming events, a list of target language songs and artists, bios of popular athletes/actors. To promote the blog, carry out a live interview in front of the class during which a student host will ask you about this exciting new project. The audience will have a chance to ask you questions and try out the blog before its official launch!
3) Target learners: middle-school/high-school/post-secondary language learners
4) Languages ● **Main target language:** any ● **Other language(s) involved:** languages spoken at home, and other languages in students' plurilingual repertoires
5) CEFR Level: B1
6) Main learning goal(s) (by the end of the scenario, students will be able to…): ● express personal preferences with reasons or explanations ● exchange information on topics ● conduct a conversation

7) Communicative language activities expressed through Can Do statements (i.e., the "What"):

- Can maintain a conversation or discussion about school activities and language learning but may sometimes be difficult to follow when trying to say exactly what he/she would like to (B1_OI02)
- Can briefly give reasons and explanations for opinions, plans and actions (B1_OP06)
- Can follow clearly-articulated speech directed at him/her in everyday conversation, though will sometimes have to ask for repetition (B1_OI01)
- Can make his/her opinions and reactions understood regarding solutions to problems or practical questions of where to go, what to do, or how to organise an event (e.g. an outing) (B1_OI06)
- Can write accounts of experiences, describing feelings and reactions in simple connected text (B1_WP02)
- Can write a description of an event, a recent trip – real or imagined (B1_WP03)

8) Communicative competences expressed through Can Do statements (i.e., the "How"):

1. **Linguistic (grammar/vocabulary/phonology):**

- Can use language to get by, with sufficient vocabulary to express him/herself with some hesitation and circumlocutions on topics such as media, technology, school life and past/future *events* but lexical limitations cause repetition and even difficulty with formulation at times (B1_LN01)

2. **Pragmatic and sociolinguistic (functional/discourse, register/contextual appropriacy):**

- Can form longer sentences and link them together using a limited number of cohesive devices (B1_PR01)
- Can briefly give reasons and explanations for opinions (B1_PR03)

3. **Sociocultural (proximity convention, directness/indirectness):**

- Can understand customs, attitudes, values and beliefs prevalent in the community concerned (B1_SC01)
- Can act according to conventions regarding posture, eye contact, and distance from others (B1_SC02)

9) Plurilingual/Pluricultural dimension:

In this task, students are encouraged to promote multiple languages as well as multiple varieties of the target language through their blog post. They could also explore language ideologies by surveying classmates about their perceptions of the target language and why/how they developed.

Students make use of their first/additional languages for inter-linguistic and intercultural comparison and developing language awareness.

- Can use what he/she has understood in one language to understand the topic and main message of a text in another language (e.g. reading blog posts that include multiple languages/multiple varieties) (B1_PL02)
- Can discuss in simple terms the way in which things that may look "strange" to him/her in another sociocultural context may well be "normal" for the other people concerned (B1_PC02)
- Can explain features of his/her own culture to members of another culture or explain features of the other culture to members of his/her own culture (B1_PC04)

10) Mediation:

Students respond to blog entries of others and participate in an interview responding to questions about the blog.

- Can create a positive atmosphere by the way he/she greets and welcomes people and asks them a series of questions that demonstrate interest (B1_MC01)
- Can collaborate in simple, shared tasks and work towards a common goal in a group by asking and answering straightforward questions (B1_MC02)

11) Language learning strategies:

- Can identify similarities and differences between aspects of the language being learned and their own language
- Can reflect on the listening, reading and writing process, can check copied writing for accuracy

12) Prior knowledge required:

It would be helpful if students were familiar with a blog platform or had access to simple user instructions for a blog

13) Time for scenario completion (steps + culminating task):

Calculate approximately the total time you will need for the entire scenario, including the culminating task.

Distinguish clearly between the time for a) preparatory works/steps, and b) the culminating task, which will be carried out in one go.

Step 1 (Introducing the task): 1 hour

Step 2 (Populating the blog): 4–6 hours (some done for homework)

Step 3 (Prepare for interview): 1.5 hours

Step 4 (Writing and editing a blog response): 0.5 hours

Culminating Task (Conducting interview and launching blog): 1 hour

Total: 8–10 hours

14) Resources:

- computer, laptop, mobile device with internet access
- access to blog platform e.g., Wordpress
- instructions for blog platform
- camera

15) Potential stumbling blocks:

- Blog writing may be new to some students so this will need appropriate orientation/scaffolding which can take additional time
- Students may feel uncomfortable sharing information about themselves that will be posted online. In this case, students may wish to use a pseudonym to maintain anonymity.

English as a foreign language reading comprehension of pupils with dyslexia and dysgraphia

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ABSTRACT

The focus in this article is on foreign language reading English as a foreign language (EFL) comprehension of pupils with dyslexia and dysgraphia. The theoretical framework describes the specifics of dyslexia and dysgraphia. In doing so, the article discusses the cognitive process of attention on the one hand, and the importance of various teaching methods and strategies for developing reading comprehension skills in a foreign language (English) on the other. The article furthermore provides insights from a pilot study aimed at monitoring the work of teachers with pupils with dyslexia and dysgraphia at primary and secondary school level in the process of developing reading comprehension. Overall, n=47 teachers participated in this pilot study. Within the objective of this study, the following four main areas were monitored: the teacher's strategies for identifying dyslexia and dysgraphia; the teacher's perception of pupils' reading preferences'; the attractiveness of reading comprehension exercises; and the degree of adaptation of teaching methods. This pilot study was conducted in the regions of Nitra and Liptov in two types of Slovak schools: primary and secondary schools, using a questionnaire as the research method. The need for further education of teachers focusing on the individual needs of pupils with dyslexia and dysgraphia was identified, as well as the selection and use of various methods. Further findings support an interactive approach to teaching as well as the need for adapting teaching materials and strategies to better suit this specific group of pupils.

Keywords: *dysgraphia, dyslexia, foreign language, pupils, reading comprehension, teachers' strategies*

Introduction

Understanding written texts as a skill in a foreign language has long been of research interest in various scientific fields. Yet, this specific research area is not part of the general foreign language education field but a part of special education because this does not only involve the examination of cognitive processes in the context of (in)comprehension, but also the examination of the individual needs of pupils who, indeed, have special educational needs (SENs) to facilitate their academic success, socialization, and emotional development. When examining reading proficiency, experts should be aware of those critical differences in how pupils with

SENs, especially those with specific learning disabilities, perceive and interact with written texts. Understanding these differences is not only essential for providing individual support to these pupils, but also for advancing our collective knowledge of effective teaching strategies that can benefit all pupils. Research (Paul & Elder, 2006; Lemprou, 2011; Valhava, 2019; Gersten, et. al. 2017; Shaywitz, 2020; Fletcher, 2020; Swanson, 2020) shows that pupils with SENs, particularly those with dyslexia and dysgraphia, face unique challenges in developing reading comprehension skills such as attention problems, decoding difficulties, vocabulary deficits, prior knowledge limitations, memory processing and memory constraints. Dysgraphia is characterized by pupils' writing skills and fine motor skills problems; it can affect the ability to effectively produce written responses to reading materials (Shaywitz, 2020). Dyslexia, however, affects reading fluency and decoding skills, thus making it difficult to process the text accurately and efficiently (Lemprou, 2011). Challenges faced by pupils with SENs, such as low self-esteem, frustration, and disengagement, have profound implications for their cognitive processes. As a result, the use of simplified language, visual aids, or alternative communication methods should be enforced to ensure effective understanding and interaction (Fletcher, 2020).

Attention, as the most basic cognitive function, is significantly influenced in the context of pupils with SENs. Attention is essential for focusing on tasks and information, and serves as a filter allowing only selected elements from tasks and information to enter pupils' consciousness. Valhava (2019) argues that when pupils encounter challenges associated with SENs, their ability to effectively engage with academic content, participate in critical thinking and problem-solving, as well as social interaction, is compromised due to these attentional issues (Swanson, 2020). Therefore, it is important to address these attentional issues to effectively support pupils with SENs, as attention serves as a fundamental cognitive process for learning and engagement. This is in line with Liptáková and Klimovič (2015) who consider attention control as a *"key indicator of understanding in the reading process, defining it as conscious orientation towards a given object, as well as regulation of external and internal influences in achieving a set goal"* (Stranovská & Ficzere, 2020, p. 9). This statement supports the fact that attention also serves as a gateway to other cognitive processes such as focusing, filtering, and processing information, thereby serving as a prerequisite for various higher-order cognitive functions such as memory, learning, problem-solving, and decision-making (Kormos, 2008). Initiating research about reading interventions with attention sets the foundation for more effective resolution of other cognitive challenges, especially in the context of pupils with SENs.

From a psycholinguistic perspective, we can understand the challenges faced by those with dyslexia and dysgraphia as arising from both underlying cognitive

processes and language processes, both of which are involved in language processing, occurring primarily in regions associated with language functions such as Broca's area and Wernicke's area in the left hemisphere of the brain (Lindgren, 2015; Smith, 2021; Johnson et al., 2022). In the case of dysgraphia, attentional challenges may arise from difficulties with motor planning and coordination necessary for producing written language. Dysgraphic individuals may therefore experience frustration and cognitive overload when attempting to form letters or words, leading, e.g., to attention lapses during writing tasks (Jimenez, 2019). It may be useful for teachers to adopt a personalized approach, adjusting the pace and structure of instruction to meet individual pupils' needs. These approaches may include providing additional explanations, extra time, multisensory techniques, breaking down complex concepts, frequent practice, and providing constructive feedback (Gersten et al., 2017). Creating a peaceful and friendly learning environment can truly enhance the teaching process. In shaping this environment, the teacher's personality plays a significant role. The teacher's personality encompasses various traits, including empathy, patience, enthusiasm, and adaptability, which deeply influence interactions with pupils (Liakopoulou, 2011). Empathetic teachers understand and respond to pupils' emotional needs, creating a supportive and caring atmosphere where pupils feel valued and understood. Gersten (2017, p. 42) argues that "*patience enables teachers to guide pupils through challenges, fostering perseverance and growth.*" Enthusiasm for their subject sparks pupils' interest and curiosity, making learning engaging and enjoyable. Moreover, adaptable teachers can flexibly adjust their teaching methods and strategies to accommodate their pupils' diverse needs. Lyon and Shaywitz (2003) describe several training strategies that can be effective in improving reading comprehension in children with dyslexia and dysgraphia. For example, in dyslexia, the implementation of multisensory techniques, such as the Orton-Gillingham approach, which combines visual, auditory, and kinesthetic learning (Lyon & Shaywitz, 2003), has been shown to promise improvement in decoding and fluency skills. Similarly, for pupils with dysgraphia, digital tools offering text-to-speech translation features can reduce handwriting-related issues, thus allowing them to focus on comprehension. Structured literacy approaches, such as the Wilson Reading System or the Barton Reading and Spelling System, systematically teach decoding skills, benefiting pupils with dyslexia (Lyon & Shaywitz, 2003). Coiro and Dobler (2017) describe those different visual supportive tools, such as various graphic organizers, that help visually organize information to improve comprehension. Assistant technology tools, such as text-to-speech translation software and audiobooks, ensure accessibility for pupils with dyslexia and dysgraphia (Coiro & Dobler, 2017). Multimodal instruction caters to various learning preferences, and gradual instruction provides the step-by-step building of

confidence and independence in reading comprehension (Lerner, 2013). These comprehensive approaches consider the diverse needs of pupils with dyslexia and dysgraphia, supporting their academic success, overall well-being, and self-efficacy.

Based on the theoretical introduction above, the pilot study presented here focuses on monitoring teachers' work in developing foreign language reading comprehension among pupils with dyslexia and dysgraphia at primary and secondary schools. The research is based on monitoring strategies of how teachers identify pupils with dyslexia and dysgraphia, what strategies the teachers use to assist these pupils in understanding the reading text, and whether the teachers modify the materials presented in course books. The aim here is to analyze the specific methods used by teachers in developing reading comprehension skills among pupils with dyslexia and dysgraphia. By identifying potential shortcomings and gaps in current practices, this study will provide recommendations for modern and effective approaches and strategies that are tailored to the needs of pupils with SENs developing reading skills in English as a foreign language.

Methodological background to the pilot study

Research objectives

The selected specifics of the work of teachers are determined in the partial objectives as follows:

1. To examine how teachers identify dyslexia and dysgraphia.
2. To examine the teacher's perception of the reading preferences of pupils with dyslexia and dysgraphia.
3. To examine the extent to which exercises for dyslexics and dysgraphics are engaging.
4. To examine to what extent teachers adapt teaching methods.

These individual areas will be explored from the teacher's perspective.

Research questions

Considering the aim of the pilot study, the following research questions were defined:

1. What strategies do teachers employ to identify dyslexia and dysgraphia?
2. How do teachers perceive the reading preferences of pupils with dyslexia and dysgraphia?
3. To what extent are exercises for dyslexics and dysgraphics engaging?
4. How much do teachers adapt their teaching methods?

Respondents and research implementation

This pilot study was conducted in January 2023 in the regions of Nitra and Liptov in two types of Slovak schools: primary and secondary schools. n=47 teachers participated in the pilot study by responding to a survey (n=28 primary school teachers and n=19 secondary school teachers). It is important to note that the teachers were unevenly represented in terms of gender, as female teachers are more prevalent in the Slovak education system. Therefore, 43 were female and 4 male, all were teachers of English as a foreign language in lower-secondary grades (6th, 7th, and 8th) and upper-secondary grades (1st, 2nd, 3rd, and 4th). On average, respondents were 35 to 40 years old, and all had more than six years of teaching experience. However, the opinions of two new teachers with less than two years of experience were also included in the pilot study. The selection of respondents, as well as schools, was purposeful; the research sample consisted of those who voluntarily participated in this pilot study, and at the same time, there was representation of pupils with dyslexia and dysgraphia in the selected schools.

The pilot study was selected based on a master's thesis (Poulíková, 2003), which focused on the perceptions of teachers, pupils, and parents through triangulation. However, the focus in this article is on the teachers' perception because the aim is to propose novel strategies for teachers to help develop reading comprehension of pupils with dyslexia and dysgraphia.

Methods

To determine the established goals, we used a surveying research method involving a questionnaire. The questionnaire focused on four thematic areas:

1. Strategies used by teachers to identify dyslexia and dysgraphia.
2. Teacher's perception of pupils' reading preferences with dyslexia and dysgraphia.
3. Level of attractiveness of exercises for dyslexics and dysgraphics.
4. Degree of adaptation of teaching methods.

The questionnaire administered to teachers at secondary schools in Slovakia was adapted from a checklist of reading textbooks developed by Mickley (2015) and consisted of a total of ten questions. It comprised a mix of eight closed and two open-ended questions. The closed questions, including Likert-scale items, allowed respondents to select from predetermined responses. These questions addressed various aspects such as strategies for identifying dyslexia and dysgraphia, teachers' perceptions of pupils' reading preferences with dyslexia and dysgraphia, adapting the attractiveness of exercises, and adapting teaching methods. The questionnaire aimed to collect quantitative data on teaching practices, attitudes, and perceptions, while the two open-ended questions provided opportunities for

detailed qualitative responses. Data collected were subsequently analysed descriptively through frequencies and percentage expressions to globally monitor how teachers identify and perceive pupils with dyslexia and dysgraphia, as well as to examine perceptions of materials and their application in teaching foreign language reading comprehension, and the need for adaptation for pupils with dyslexia and dysgraphia.

Results and discussion

When investigating the strategies for identifying dyslexia and dysgraphia (Figure 1), it was found that the majority of respondents (58%) use strategies such as consulting with other experts, screening strategies, monitoring, and observation. 21.3% of respondents apply all these strategies in their teaching of foreign language reading comprehension to pupils with dyslexia and dysgraphia. 36.2% of teachers partially use the mentioned strategies, while 25.5% of teachers cannot determine which strategies they use to identify dyslexia and dysgraphia, indicating the need for further education in the area of working with dyslexia and dysgraphia for teachers. These findings suggest a lack of experience and knowledge among teachers regarding strategies for correctly identifying pupils with dyslexia and dysgraphia. It appears that there are no established strategies for working with pupils with SEN in schools, or not all teachers are interested in these strategies. This is supported by the statement of one of the beginner teachers: "*In the context of education with a large number of pupils, it is challenging for me to identify dyslexia and dysgraphia. I would like to undergo further education in this area to better respond to the needs of my pupils*".

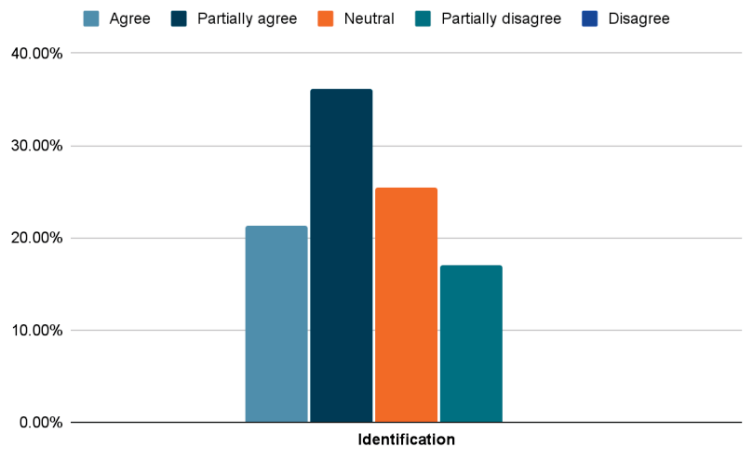

Figure 1. Identification of dyslexia and dysgraphia.

Another variable examined was teachers' perceptions of the reading preferences of pupils with dyslexia and dysgraphia and their engagement in exercises for understanding English as a foreign language reading. We consider these research variables to be essential because they can serve as indicators of the cognitive process of attention, which forms the gateway to comprehension as it belongs to the most basic and simplest cognitive processes in the process of learning a foreign language (Stranovská & Ficzere, 2020; Poulíková, 2023). Figure 2 illustrates that teachers largely agree with the interest and engagement of pupils with dyslexia and dysgraphia in exercises for understanding reading texts. They express that the reading preferences of pupils with dyslexia and dysgraphia mainly involve interactive learning forms and multimedia tools, which facilitate their engagement in the learning process and more effective work with learning materials, as well as understanding them. This is also supported by the statement of one teacher: *I perceive the greatest interest and engagement when using interactive games or presentations, they are most active then.*

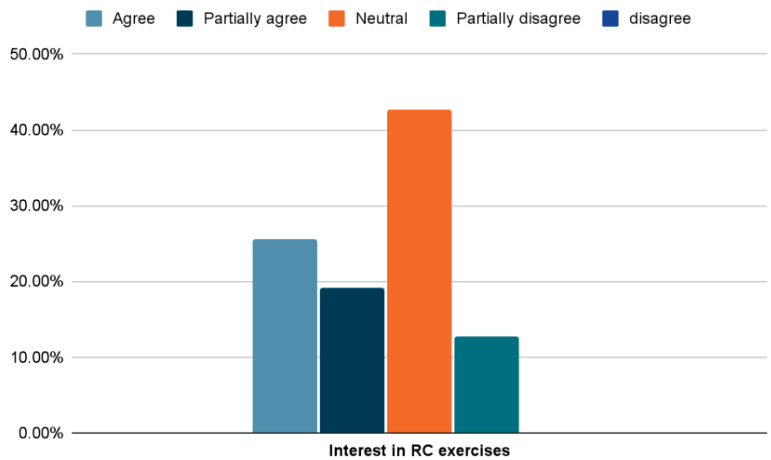

Figure 2. Interest in reading comprehension exercises.

These findings are in line with the theoretical framework (Lyon and Shaywitz, 2003; Coiro & Dobler, 2017; Lerner, 2013), which suggests that the use of complex strategies, including visual tools, technological tools, and multisensory techniques such as the Orton-Gillingham approach, leads to increased levels of attention and perseverance in overcoming reading challenges, helping pupils develop basic skills in text comprehension and progress in the academic environment.

This pilot study also monitored teachers' opinions regarding the attractiveness of exercises for pupils with dyslexia and dysgraphia (Figure 3). The majority of teachers agreed that exercises for reading comprehension in the materials they use are presented together with visual elements to support vocabulary retention and understanding. However, some respondents (21.3%) pointed out insufficient visual support in the textbooks used in teaching foreign language reading comprehension. Those teachers who negatively evaluated the attractiveness of exercises in textbooks for pupils with dyslexia and dysgraphia also stated that they use additional materials to support attention and understanding. Another examined variable was the degree of adaptation of teaching methods. Furthermore, Figure 3 also illustrates the adaptation of teaching materials by teachers. It was found that 68.1% of teachers adjust their teaching materials based on the individual needs of pupils with dyslexia and dysgraphia in the process of developing understanding of foreign language reading texts. Teachers stated that they modify their materials by providing additional visual materials, such as pictorial diagrams or infographics, which help pupils better understand the content of the text. They also utilize multimodal approaches, such as audiobooks or videos, which allow pupils with different learning styles to more effectively receive and process information from the text.

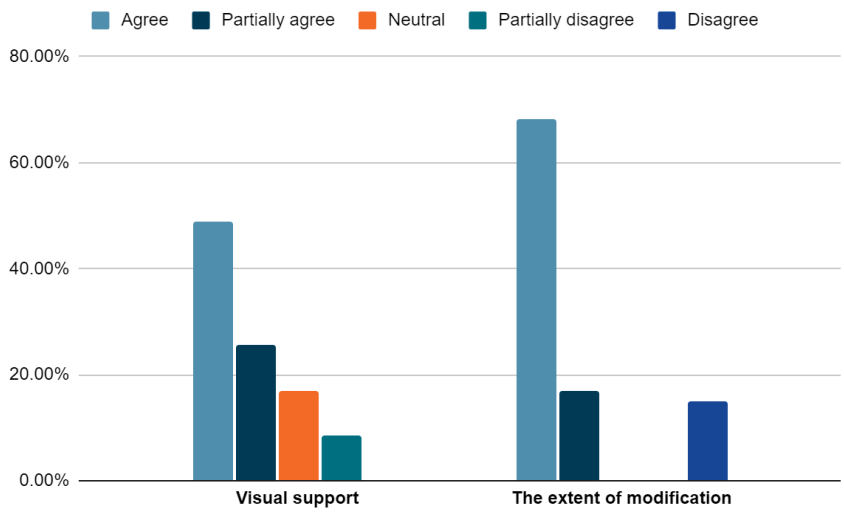

Figure 3. Visual support and extent of modification.

These findings are consistent with the theories of Lyon and Shaywitz (2003), Coiro and Dobler (2017), and Lerner (2013), which suggest that the application of

multisensory teaching methods, such as visual aids, can improve text comprehension for pupils with dyslexia and dysgraphia.

Conclusions

In this pilot study, we focused on monitoring four areas within English as a foreign language reading comprehension among pupils with dyslexia and dysgraphia. The first area monitored the strategies that teachers use to identify dyslexia and dysgraphia. It appears that strategies such as consulting with colleagues, screening procedures, monitoring, and observation are most commonly employed. However, a significant portion of teachers expressed uncertainty when working with pupils with dyslexia and dysgraphia. It may be noted that teachers require adequate support and further training to effectively work with these pupils and to support them both throughout their entire learning process and their progress in reading comprehension. Based on the identified gaps in current practices for detecting dysgraphic and dyslexic pupils, the use of advanced assessment methods such as technology tools and apps designed for dyslexia and dysgraphia screening and assessment can enhance this detection process. One example of a technology-assisted assessment tool for dyslexia and dysgraphia is *Lexion*, which provides interactive activities and assessments to evaluate reading fluency, comprehension, spelling, and writing skills. Leveraging such technology and interdisciplinary collaboration might ultimately lead to effective identification of dysgraphia and dyslexia.

The second variable was teachers' perception of reading preferences and engagement of pupils with dyslexia and dysgraphia in exercises for understanding foreign language text (English). Findings indicate that teachers perceive the greatest interest from pupils with dyslexia and dysgraphia in the application of interactive learning forms and multimedia tools. Therefore, to enhance engagement and reading preferences of dyslexic and dysgraphic pupils in foreign language text comprehension exercises, teachers may implement multimedia tools, such as interactive games or presentations. These findings are in line with theoretical backgrounds that highlight the effectiveness of comprehensive strategies, including visual and technological tools, in improving attention and perseverance in overcoming reading challenges for these pupils (Coiro & Dobler, 2017; Lerner, 2013).

In the third area of this pilot study, the visual appeal of exercises in dyslexic and dysgraphic pupils' textbooks was assessed. Most reading comprehension exercises were visually appealing, aiding understanding for these students. This suggests efforts toward inclusivity, i.e., making exercises visually more appealing may help include pupils with SENs without designing special exercises for them separately. However, some teachers found visual support lacking in their teaching,

signalling a need for better materials and supplementary resources. Therefore, for classrooms equipped with modern apparatus, virtual reality can be effectively used as an innovative teaching strategy to enhance learning experiences for students, including those with dyslexia and dysgraphia. In other cases, incorporating activities that engage multiple senses, such as using flashcards with images and words, incorporating music or rhythm into lessons, or acting out scenes from literature can provide exciting experiences, developing comprehension and maintaining attention. These approaches emphasize the importance of flexibility in teaching strategies and materials, ultimately promoting an inclusive learning environment that meets the diverse needs of dyslexic and dysgraphic pupils.

In terms of the extent to which teaching methods are adapted for dyslexic and dysgraphic pupils, the willingness and ability of teachers to adapt to the individual needs of their pupils was observed. This can be interpreted as a personalized approach of teachers to teaching and supporting inclusive pedagogy. This means that teachers adjust teaching methods according to the individual needs of pupils with dyslexia and dysgraphia. They use methods such as additional visual materials – pictorial diagrams or infographics, which help pupils better understand the text they read in exercises. Our pilot study supports the findings of research by Kendeou et al. (2013), which showed the value of exercises for understanding written text in helping pupils with specific learning disabilities improve their reading abilities. The research showed that explicit training in comprehension skills, such as summarization and prediction, significantly contributes to the progress of pupils with specific learning disabilities. The authors of this article agree with these findings and state that the presented pilot study emphasizes the need for greater support in teacher training to prepare these teachers for the varied needs of pupils with dyslexia and dysgraphia they may encounter during their pedagogical practice.

Acknowledgement

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Methods of immersion at the Nordkurs Summer Course in Icelandic Language and Culture for Nordic Students

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ABSTRACT

The main aim of this article is to describe elements of immersion in the "Nordkurs Summer Course in Icelandic Language and Culture for Nordic Students" held annually at the University of Iceland by the Árni Magnússon Institute for Icelandic Studies. Students come from various Nordic universities in Denmark, Greenland, the Faroe Islands, Finland, Norway, and Sweden, where they study in a Nordic language and must master at least one of the Scandinavian languages (Danish, Norwegian, Swedish). In our case study, we aim to demonstrate how we actively use specific methods of immersion on different levels to create a learning space that encourages the use of the target language Icelandic as a second language (L2) in the course. These methods are also used to ensure inter-Nordic communication among the students, using the mutual intelligibility between Scandinavian languages, rather than relying on English. We will discuss specific teaching methods and assignment formats, as well as the general course structure, and through this highlight the importance of using immersion in language learning courses.

Keywords: *Icelandic language, inter-Nordic communication, language immersion*

Introduction

The main goal of Nordkurs courses across the Nordic region is to help strengthen the cultural and linguistic bonds between the Nordic countries, as well as offer specific subjects on the languages, cultures, and literature of these countries for each course. In line with that, at the Nordkurs Summer Course in Icelandic Language and Culture held in Reykjavík annually for four weeks, we aim not only to teach Icelandic language and culture, but also to encourage the usage of inter-Scandinavian communication among the students. Thus, the instruction languages of our course are Norwegian and Danish, while the students interact in Danish, Norwegian, and Swedish. In many cases, this is the first time the students are exposed to the other Scandinavian languages in a formal context. For some students from within the Nordic region, the Scandinavian languages are second

languages, for example, Swedish for Finnish students. In other cases, the students originally come from outside of the Nordic region and have thus learned a Scandinavian language as their third or fourth language at a later stage of their lives, for instance having studied Scandinavian studies at university level. Even though receiving instruction in another Scandinavian language might pose a challenge to both first-language (L1) users and second-language (L2) users of Scandinavian, we are consistent in our method of language exposure from the very beginning of the course. This is because our experience, as well as research (Brink, 2016), have shown that being consistently exposed to another Scandinavian language shows significant results, even after a short time. This is achieved through an open and positive attitude towards a meta-language discussion in classes, as well as a safe learning space where questions about understanding are welcome at any time. We, the authors of this article who are also the teachers of this course, are ready and willing to refer to the other Scandinavian languages wherever necessary and illustrative. Throughout the duration of the course, the instructional language progressively transitions to Icelandic, following the advancement of the students' proficiency. These immersive methods, used in both the context of Icelandic as well as in regard to inter-Scandinavian communication, are inspired by the concepts and ideas of language immersion implemented in bilingual and multilingual learning contexts, mentioned for example in Bergroth (2021), Björklund et al. (2022) and Laihi (2017). This article is based on a retrospective study of the authors' several years of experience teaching and developing this course.

Description and structure of the course

Traditionally, around 30 students annually register for this course via the Nordkurs agency. The students are divided into two different groups according to prior knowledge of Icelandic following a placement test at the beginning of the course, while taking into consideration students' own wishes. The placement test consists of a number of grammatical exercises, reading comprehension, and a written assignment. The aim of the test is to assess if the students have any prior knowledge of L2 Icelandic. Also, the students have the option to express where they wish to be placed, i.e. either in the complete beginners' group or in the slightly more advanced one. These wishes are then taken into consideration in the final decision made by the teachers. However, on the first days of the course, all students are taught together by both teachers. This is done to offer a general introduction to Icelandic and to ensure that all the students become acquainted with each other and the teachers. Simultaneously, we ensure that the students are exposed to two Scandinavian languages of instruction and gradually adjust to the multilingual environment. After the introductory days, the language classes are taught in the two respective groups, before they re-join in the last week of the course. During the

middle of the course, the two groups meet regularly for common lectures on Icelandic culture held in a Scandinavian language, visits to various museums and institutions, and weekend trips around the country. The course consists of sixty hours dedicated to language teaching and ten hours to classes about Icelandic geology, history, society, literature, art, and culture. All classes are conducted in Scandinavian languages except for one class on geology, which is currently conducted in English due to the availability of different guest lecturers. Moreover, students attend visits to museums and two daytrips to explore Iceland from a different perspective. Upon the successful completion of the four-week course, the students are awarded a certificate and 10 ECTS credits at Bachelor's level.

Description of immersive course assignments

This section provides insights into methods that we, the teachers of the course, found useful in supporting the immersive nature of this L2 Icelandic language course. In our qualitative case study, we use an introspective technique (McKay, 2009) of verbal and written reports from students and students' diaries. In this section, we describe the four main teaching approaches that have proven especially successful: diary, *Íslenskuþorpið* (The Icelandic village), interviews with locals, and the Translation Seminar. This offers the students varied ways to deeply immerse themselves into the target language – Icelandic.

Throughout the whole duration of the course, students are tasked with maintaining a diary written in Icelandic. Starting on the first day of the course, the students are thrown into the deep end, and although unable to write much more than some elementary sentences, because of their rapid progression in proficiency—since Icelandic is closely related to their Nordic languages not least when it comes to basic vocabulary and syntactical structure—they are soon able to describe their daily activities in more varied and descriptive language using Icelandic. Maintaining a diary affords students the daily opportunity to apply their newly acquired knowledge. Furthermore, amidst the intensive schedule of the course, it offers a valuable moment for reflection on the day's events. Given the intensive structure of the course, new grammar concepts are introduced almost daily, and the diaries are a way to use this newly acquired and progressively more complex grammar creatively. Every Monday during the course, the students hand in last week's diary entries and the teachers correct the texts with specific letter codes on a list that give hints about what should be changed instead of simply correcting the text without comments. Illustratively, the letter code *Mf* stands for "Málfræði, fall" (Grammar, case), which means that the marked word should be in another grammatical case, and the letter code *S* stands for "Stafsetning" (Spelling), denoting primarily incorrect orthography. Thus, students acquire a metalinguistic awareness of Icelandic grammar by employing their own written texts as material

for analysis and reflection. The students then get their letter-coded diary entries back the following day, so they can review and analyse their linguistic productions. Towards the end of the course, a specific workshop is held for correcting diary entries, wherein the students can get help from the teachers, and at the very end of the course, the entire course diary is handed in. The final grade of the course is based on the students' skills as well as their ability to work with the correction of the texts.

Another assignment is called *Íslenskuþorpið* (Brynjólfsdóttir, 2011). In its slightly adapted form, taking the students' Nordic language proficiency into account, the assignment alternates between the classroom and real-life situations, where students practise and train vocabulary and grammar for a specific topic (e.g. ordering something at a café) until they "let go" of the classroom and begin to use Icelandic out in the wild, so to speak. In the first round of the assignment, students go to the given place and observe language usage, they note down a list of words and whole phrases or fragments of them. Following this, they analyse what they have seen and note down grammatical information for each word and phrase in a table. Back in class, the students prepare a short interaction in Icelandic (i.e. café ordering or asking about something in a bookstore), and hereafter, the task is to go and have that conversation and record it in an audio file. Subsequently, the entire short interaction is transcribed to orthography, and the students hand in the analysis, the audio file, and the transcription followed by a short description of their experience with using Icelandic like this for the first time (which can be written in any Nordic language of their choice). Feedback from students about the *Íslenskuþorpið* assignment indicates that they are often a little nervous before the assignment, which, like the diary, throws them directly into the deep end, having to use Icelandic in natural conversation outside the classroom, but despite this, it gives them more self-confidence and increased courage to have gone out of their comfort zone. Additionally, many students report that they realise how time-consuming it can be to transcribe spoken language, let alone a language they are just starting to learn. However, it is noteworthy that this aspect of the assignment proves to be quite educational for them.

As a logical continuation to the short interaction in *Íslenskuþorpið*, in the third week of the course, the students proceed to conduct interviews with Icelandic speakers. Similar to *Íslenskuþorpið*, they record these interviews and transcribe them into orthography. Despite the initially daunting nature of this task, given that many students are newcomers to L2 Icelandic, it serves as a valuable immersion experience in both language and culture. In contrast to the brief exchanges in *Íslenskuþorpið*, these interviews involve more extended and substantial conversations with interviewees who are typically unknown to the students

beforehand. Transcribing this interview furthermore trains the students' listening comprehension and analytical skills.

Íslenskuþorpið and the interview with Icelandic-speaking individuals offer students experience in conversation, which is on one hand well prepared and on the other very unexpected. The combination of security (prepared in advance café order or interview questions) and the unknown (the questions the cashier asks or the answers the interviewee gives) both provides and requires courage from them, as well as a good deal of improvisational skills. After having accomplished these two challenging tasks, the students are left with more confidence in their conversational skills in Icelandic. As a natural culmination of the third week of the course, yet another aspect of oral language skill is put to the test and that is a presentation in class. Each and every student gets to freely choose a topic they wish to talk about in Icelandic in class for their group. The topic is free in order to make them feel most comfortable while presenting for the first time, as well as because choosing a subject one is passionate about will make it both easier and more interesting for students to prepare for it. The presentation requires a visual aspect, for example, a PowerPoint presentation, in order to make it easier for other students to follow and understand the presentation. The presentation slides can both contain pictures and short phrases and words that the student will have had to look up for the occasion and that the rest of the class most likely are not familiar with. A big emphasis is placed on the presentation indeed being oral, that is to say, not read out aloud. The expectations in regard to grammar are set lower, and the priority is given to being able to express oneself in spontaneous speech and making oneself understood. While the student who presents gets to share their interest in Icelandic in front of the class, the fellow students participate actively both in understanding the presentation and in preparing follow-up questions. After every presentation, there is time for questions from the other students and a discussion about the topic. It is a great practice for students to create questions on their own and for the student presenting to answer questions independently. This creates a very lively student-to-student discussion, and this peer panel represents an excellent platform for practising, as everyone feels on the same level and in similar shoes. Here the students feel supported and in a safe place to practise, engaging with each other in Icelandic. The grade for this oral assignment consists both of the presentation itself and of the active participation in question-asking and discussions.

After having completed challenges of being out in real-life situations, conversing in Icelandic with the locals and participating in a peer panel in Icelandic, the start of the fourth week is all about allowing students to gain even more insight into the progress they have made and making it possible for them to touch ground with each other. As the fourth is also the final week of the course, it starts with a

mutual activity where both groups meet again and work together in what we call the Translation Seminar. Here the students are presented with a number of contemporary poems by Icelandic poets that they are supposed to translate into their first languages. The students are encouraged to translate the poems into their dialects, in case they speak one, and in the case of students who have other than one of the Nordic languages as their first language to translate the poems into their L1. During this workshop, the students who translate into the same language would group and work together and, in the end, everyone presents and reads aloud their translations. This opens up a mutual discussion about solutions to the translations, similarities and differences between Nordic languages and other languages that might be represented in the group. The poems have been hand-picked for the occasion, both in terms of the difficulty level, but also in terms of topics that students could possibly relate to. Authors who use simple, everyday language and who have minimalist writing styles as, e.g. the Icelandic authors Dagur Hjartarson and Ingunn Snædal, or authors who deal with the current topics of climate crisis, e.g. Haukur Ingvarsson, are represented in the selection. For example, poems that include Icelandic cultural references that students are to decode and transfer to their own cultural reality are included, e.g. Dagur Hjartarson's "líðan" (feeling) and "líðan II" (feeling II) (Hjartarson, 2012, 7, 34), which thematise parts of the Iceland's capital city of Reykjavík called Breiðholt and Vesturbær, the "ghetto" and "the rich villa neighbourhood", respectively. Some of the poems also make reference to the reality of Nordic students. For instance, they mention the Swedish company IKEA (Hjartarson, 2012, 21) and include lines in Danish (Ingvarsson, 2018, p. 19), in order to make the poems more relatable and to pose a challenge in finding the corresponding solutions and the appropriate language solution. The Translation Seminar serves several purposes. Firstly, it gives the students a sense of accomplishment and pride in being able to translate poetry from Icelandic by their fourth week of language studies. Secondly, it celebrates all the Nordic languages with their many dialectal variations, as well as other languages. Thirdly, it provides students with translation training and makes them aware of various aspects of translating of which they are supposed to be aware, e.g. the difference between a more literally or freely translated text, various linguistic registers, translating cultural references, and being aware of false friends between the closely related Nordic languages. Fourthly, it offers a glimpse into Icelandic contemporary poetry and hopefully, inspires students to embark on reading poetry and fiction in Icelandic.

Examination of oral, listening, and written skills

The fourth and final week of the course is also when the final exams take place. The exams consist of an oral exam and a written exam. The oral exam is conducted as a

panel discussion. The students are divided into groups of four to five, with the representatives from both the beginners' and the advanced group in each. This is done so that the slightly more advanced students can assist the students who are studying the language for the first time on this course. A couple of days prior to the oral exam, the groups receive a topic for discussion, based on topics that have been covered throughout the course. Students prepare in groups to discuss their topic and they demonstrate this discussion in the exam in front of the rest of the class. Similarly to the oral presentation assignment, the students in the audience participate in question-asking when the group completes their discussion. The written exam consists of listening practice, grammar exercises, a reading exercise and a written assignment in Icelandic, in which students can choose from several topics. Finally, the last part of the written exam is an assignment in culture, based on the lectures in culture that students receive every day throughout the course after language classes. Students get to choose the topic from the few offered and this assignment is written in their preferred Nordic language.

Conclusion

As demonstrated above, the Nordkurs Summer Course in Icelandic Language and Culture for Nordic Students is based on four main methods that greatly support language immersion during the intensive four-week course. These methods are diary, *Íslenskuþorpið*, interviews with locals, and the Translation Seminar. The methods entail exposing students to the target language in various real-life situations as much as possible. This pertains to both L2 Icelandic acquisition and to inter-Scandinavian communication, aligning with the principles and concepts of Nordkurs and the research of Bergroth (2021), Björklund et al. (2022) and Laihi (2017). This is achieved through the languages of instruction, i.e. Icelandic and various Scandinavian languages, as well as through the array of assignments given throughout the course. The students are exposed to a wide variety of immersion techniques through creative application of grammar in constant written practice, oral Icelandic practice in both natural environments with local speakers, as well as more planned discussions and practice in the classroom with peers. At the end of the intensive and educational course, the students have acquired so much Icelandic that they are most often already able to communicate colloquially with the course teachers in Icelandic. Nordkurs provides an exceptional opportunity for students to learn a Nordic language in the country where it is spoken, and the students return to their respective home countries and institutions enriched with skills in a new Nordic language as well as being better equipped for communication across the linguistic and cultural borders of the Nordic countries. Each year, the course plan is revised and developed according to feedback from students and experience from previous years. In order to improve the learning experience in

Nordkurs even further, the authors of this article, who are also the teachers, are currently working on developing teaching material for L2 Icelandic aimed at Scandinavian speakers, that will hopefully improve teaching L2 Icelandic in the Nordic countries.

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The role of the think-aloud technique in the process of pedagogical intervention supporting reading comprehension in German as a foreign language

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ABSTRACT

The article deals with the think-aloud technique in the process of pedagogical intervention of reading comprehension in German as a foreign language. It is an investigation of the (mis)comprehension of German language texts under the influence of pedagogical intervention, which was examined through the think-aloud technique. The think-aloud technique in developing comprehension of a foreign language text allows both learners and teachers to assess the level of comprehension of a foreign language text and to adjust strategies for working with the text in order to increase reading comprehension success. This technique requires learners to express or verbalize their thoughts while performing tasks, which are recorded and then analysed by the teacher. Such a technique provides a basis for exploring thought processes underlying learners' performance of complex tasks. Using the think-aloud technique within pedagogical intervention, the researchers were interested in what information the learners had acquired from the texts and which information and words, i.e. word classes were familiar and new to them, because in order to deduce meaning of the text, i.e. sentences, it is also necessary to understand the meaning and function of words, i.e., word classes in the sentences.

Keywords: *foreign language learning, learner-centred approach, pedagogical intervention, reading comprehension, think-aloud technique*

Introduction

Reading comprehension in a foreign language is an increasingly researched issue, because contemporary society requires readers to perceive and comprehend texts in several foreign languages, as well as to concentrate on various types of text and multiple stimuli or information in a text simultaneously. The contemporary reader is often overloaded with information, leading to cognitive frustration, low motivation to read and a consequent reluctance to take in and process information from the text. Reading comprehension in a foreign language is considered to be a particularly challenging and specific process, because it requires a higher cognitive load from the learner, which is related to the recognition of linguistic specificities within each

foreign language and the mother tongue. Although current research focuses on changes in reading comprehension, as well as identifying effective reading comprehension strategies and methods to increase comprehension (e.g., Amril et al., 2019; Kazazoglu, 2020; Lalinská et al., 2020; Dewi et al., 2022; Saro et al., 2022; Gadušová et al., 2023; Stranovská et al., 2023), learners have difficulties with comprehension as well as with working with a text in a foreign language (e.g., processing information from the text, distinguishing key facts in the text, etc.).

Although international research has focused on developing a model of the successful reader (Dewi et al., 2022; Habók, 2022), few have focused on identifying the causes of (mis)understanding through the think-aloud technique and pedagogical intervention in the reading comprehension process. The absence of pedagogical intervention in the reading comprehension process may be one of the main reasons for the failure to comprehend a foreign language text. This is an in-depth approach to the text as a social-psychological model structure against the background of specific and individual language expressions associated with individual communicative spheres (e.g., everyday life, institutional, professional, medial and school spheres). To process the meaning of a text, the learners should use a variety of cognitive strategies and learning techniques as well as their linguistic abilities that enable them to retain information from the text read from long-term memory. Monitoring these processes is difficult for the researcher; in this respect, the think-aloud technique is used when investigating cognitive processes (Oster, 2001). From this perspective, the paper deals with the comprehension of foreign language text in the process of pedagogical intervention through the think-aloud technique in order to find out how learners perceive, accept and understand the different meanings of word classes (both primary and secondary meanings) in different kinds of texts. Therefore, this paper focuses on two aspects, namely pedagogical intervention in reading and the think-aloud technique.

The innovative aspect of intervention discussed in the present article is pedagogical intervention in the form of the “Reading comprehension intervention programme for German language”, which is a programme focusing on two areas: 1) working with the text, and 2) developing predictors that support cognitive and metacognitive processes. The former takes place in three phases of reading, i.e., before, while and after reading the text; it is about whether the learner has understood the already read text. In this context, pedagogical intervention is not only aimed at supporting the real development of reading comprehension, but also at motivation to work with the text and at the development of the affective level when working with tasks before, whilst and after reading. The latter stimulates cognitive and metacognitive thinking processes using a variety of activities and procedures (more details in Hockicková et al., 2020; Stranovská & Ficzere, 2020; Stranovská et al., 2023). In doing so, the aim is to identify difficulties in

understanding German texts using the think-aloud technique while working with pedagogical intervention. The authors of this article focused their investigation on two levels: Level 1 – text type, level 2 – word class. At the text type level, they monitored literary and consumer text types. At the word class level, they monitored the basic word classes such as verbs, nouns, adjectives, adverbs, particles, interjections, conjunctions, prepositions and modal words. Through the expression of thoughts regarding comprehension of each word classes in the texts, they monitored the effect of the intervention on comprehension.

Given the aim of the research, two research questions were defined: 1) Which word classes cause difficulties for learners in comprehending read German texts; and 2) what kind of text (consumer, literary) is more comprehensible for learners with regard to understanding word classes?

Theoretical background to pedagogical intervention in reading comprehension

Pedagogical intervention can be characterized as the teacher's impact on the learner through intervention techniques and strategies within the pedagogical process or intervention programme implemented in the school setting (Stranovská & Ficzere, 2020). It is an eclectic combination of several types of learning such as experimental, cooperative, social, autonomous learning, application of diverse methods of teacher work, modelling of teaching situations so that learners are active – becoming projectants of their own cognition. It is important for learners to be able to structure their own knowledge, which can be helpful by working with different activating methods and motivational elements to engage learners (Lalinská et al., 2020; de Miguel Santos, 2021). In this context, we can talk about pedagogical intervention.

The concept of intervention is not new; it began to appear in the second half of the last century in the form of various types of programmes, training and drills. The intense interest in intervention programmes aimed at increasing professional and personal-social competences on the part of psychologists, educators, social workers, and managers, continues to the present time. This interest helps to generate both the need to further research contributing to the development of new types of intervention programmes, and the need to research these new intervention programmes scientifically at the same time as monitoring the application of results into practice.

By designing the texts within pedagogical intervention in reading comprehension for German as a foreign language, the authors of the article have tried to ensure the programme's universality for secondary school learners at A2 level to meet the following criteria according to Gadušová et al. (2020):

1) taking into account the language level when selecting texts and planning activities;
2) taking gender into account (the texts are not just for boys or just for girls, they are aimed at both genders);
3) taking into account the developmental specificities of the learner group (17–19 years old);
4) taking into account the field of study (an attempt was made to select texts for as wide a sample of grammar school and vocational school learners as possible);
5) taking into account the pragmatic level in the texts and the activities before, whilst and after reading the texts (use of vocabulary and grammatical structures from the texts, interests and hobbies of the learners).

The pedagogical intervention includes 10 intervention units (lessons), in which different cognitive processes (attention, concentration, working memory, perception, cognitive structuring, inferential thinking, divergent thinking, tolerance of ambiguity, thought flexibility and critical thinking) as well as work with the text, are gradually developed. The duration of one intervention unit is 45 minutes. Within the intervention units, the learners work mainly with linear texts – texts with a coherent continuous structure and with continuity of text units. These are factual texts (public or personal) and narrative texts (poems, novels) (a sample of a unit can be found in the Appendix).

Pedagogical intervention in reading comprehension and its effect can be observed through the think-aloud technique. The role of the think-aloud technique in the process of developing comprehension of a second foreign language text is seen as useful, because it encourages the learners to reflect on the acquired knowledge, linguistic phenomena, also on the interpretations of the information given in the text, and at the same time, to integrate it with their existing knowledge and experience. This technique is also used to reflect on the meaning of the text and to explain, justify, compare, classify, relate, generalise and apply the information in the text (Dörnyei, 2007).

The think-aloud technique is based on metacognitive processes that describe the learners' ability to think about their own thinking. This metacognitive awareness is a key component of learning, because it allows learners to assess their level of comprehension and adapt their reading strategies to achieve success. By getting learners to reflect on the process of thinking aloud as they read, teachers encourage them to become aware of the difference between reading words and understanding text (Oster, 2001).

This technique requires learners to express or verbalize their thoughts as they perform tasks, which can be recorded for research purposes and then

subsequently analysed. Such a technique provides a basis for investigating the various mental processes such as attention, concentration, working memory, perception, inferential thinking, divergent thinking and critical thinking that underlie the solution of complex tasks and contribute significantly to learners' learning (Dörnyei, 2007; Someren et al., 1994). When applying the think-aloud technique, learners need to be told to focus on solving the tasks and to continue speaking while performing these activities in parallel (Ericsson, 2002).

During the application of this technique, the following steps should be followed according to Davey (1983):

- to build predictions and hypotheses according to the title of the text,
- to compose images in the learners' minds according to the information in the text,
- to link prior knowledge with new information from the text,
- to describe ambiguities and uncertainties arising from the text.

Through verbalized thoughts, teachers can learn about learners' thinking patterns and know how they perceived and processed the information, then identify their reading strengths and weaknesses, plan appropriate instruction for reading lessons and support and guidance to improve their comprehension (Baumann et al., 1993; Kovalčíková, 2017; Oster, 2001; Raihan, 2011).

The intention of the presented research is to monitor the comprehension of German texts while working with pedagogical intervention through the think-aloud technique. Furthermore, the aim of this research is to find which words, i.e. word classes from the read texts are unfamiliar to the learners and which of them make it difficult for the learners to understand the German texts being read.

Methods

Research sample

The research was carried out with secondary school learners in the Nitra region in Slovakia who are obliged to learn German as a second foreign language at A2 level according to the CEFR (2020), as part of their schooling in the academic year 2022/2023. The research sample consisted of 10 respondents (7 girls and 3 boys). Their average age was 17 years and they were learning German in two parallel classes, thus representing two parallel experimental groups, experimental group 1 (EG1) and experimental group 2 (EG2). The learners came from two different classes (II. A and II. B). The research was conducted in each class of 5 learners; in class A there were 3 girls and 2 boys and in class B there were 4 girls and 1 boy. The research sample was selected according to a deliberate and available access (Gavora et al., 2010), while the foreign language, German as a foreign language, and the type of secondary level school, grammar school, were considered to be essential features

of the selection due to the researchers' specialisation. Official consent for conducting the research was obtained from the respective schools.

Research implementation and analysis

In this research, the think-aloud technique was used within the implementation of 10 intervention units of pedagogical intervention, which enabled the researchers to understand the learners' thinking processes during reading comprehension. The researchers worked with the think-aloud technique in two phases of reading comprehension, namely before reading the text and after reading the text. In the first phase, before reading the text, questions were asked that were generally related to the read text. The learners were shown only the title of the text they were reading later and were asked to comment on the possible topics and information of the text. In the next phase, after reading the text, questions were also asked that were related to the information contained in the read texts (Were your assumptions confirmed?; What information did you learn from the read text?; Which information was new to you?).

While applying the think-aloud technique, the researchers worked with learners individually. They prepared questions that were related to the texts and activities. In applying this technique, they focused on the processes of how learners process the information obtained from the texts, and in carrying out certain activities, learners expressed their ideas, thoughts and opinions that were related to the texts they had read. The questions asked were as follows:

- before reading the text:
  - What are your ideas/assumptions about what the text might be about?
  - What information do you think you will learn from the text?
- after reading the text:
  - Were your assumptions confirmed?
  - What information did you learn from the read text?
  - Which information was new to you?

During this activity, in addition to expressing their thoughts and opinions, the learners were also given the opportunity to express which words or expressions they did not understand, which allowed the researchers to find the occurrence of unfamiliar word classes in the German texts.

Results and discussion

From the data obtained, Figure 1 was created, which illustrates the occurrence of word classes causing learners difficulties in understanding the texts in EG1 within the intervention programme. In the German (literary) texts read (no. 9 and 10 – *Papierhelden §1, §2, §3* (Paper heroes §1, §2, §3)) the following word classes caused difficulties for the learners:

- 1 noun: Ärger (anger),
- 4 adjectives: unerträglich (unbearable), unzufrieden (dissatisfied), schrecklich (terrible), fertig (finished),
- 3 verbs: schütteln (to nod), grinsen (to grin), abschließen (to lock, to close),
- 9 adverbs: auf einmal (suddenly), hoffentlich (perhaps, sofort (immediately), plötzlich (suddenly, unexpectedly), frech (brazenly), genau (exactly), natürlich (of course), fast (almost), leider (unfortunately),
- 3 particles: eigentlich (actually), nicht genug (not enough, not completely), vor allem (above all),
- 2 interjections: Oje (iha, oh), Quatsch (nonsense, stupidity).

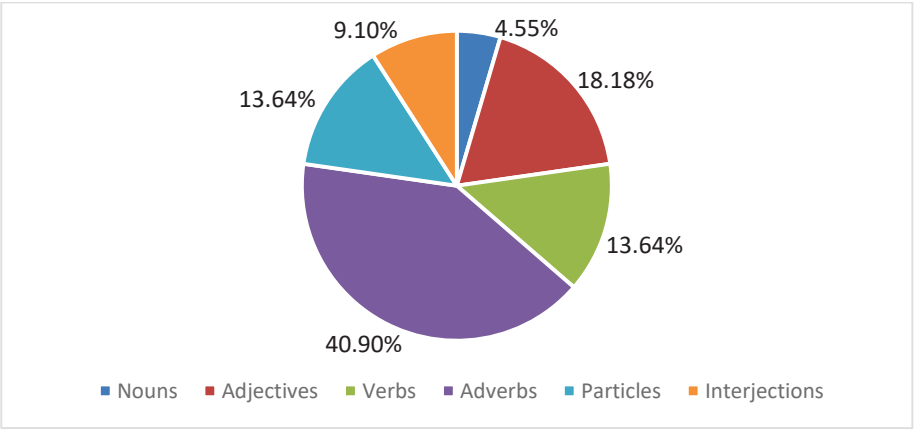

Figure 1. Word classes that caused difficulties for learners in understanding German texts in the first class.

The researchers found that learners understand the content of literary texts by focusing on basic word classes such as verbs, nouns and adjectives. They can also identify particles and interjections in the text and process their meaning. Deficits in understanding adverbs were most evident when working with literary text, causing learners struggle to understand their meaning in the literary text. „*I don't understand the word "plötzlich" in the sentence: ‚Plötzlich fällt Robin etwas ein'* (Suddenly Robin remembers something)". „*Could you explain the meaning of the word "sofort" in the sentence, please: ‚Oma weiß sofort Bescheid: Das Training ist nicht gut gelaufen'* (Grandma knows immediately: the training didn't go well)".

It is important to mention that even basic adverbs such as "genau" (exactly) and "natürlich" (of course), which belong to the basics of the German language,

cause difficulties for the learners. They did not understand these words and they could only deduce the meanings with the teacher's help.

The next Figure 2 illustrates other word classes, whose meanings were less familiar to EG2 learners in the intervention programme. In this case, these were consumer German texts such as *Fernsehprogramm für Mittwoch* (TV programme for Wednesday), *Urlaub* (Vacation), *Dinge, die du nur verstehst, wenn du Österreicher bist* (Things you only understand if you are Austrian), *Dinge, die du nur verstehst, wenn du aus Deutschland kommst* (Things you only understand if you are from Germany), *Dinge, die du nur verstehst, wenn du Schweizer bist* (Things you only understand if you are Swiss), *Stress* (Stress) and *Ferienjob* (Vacation job). In the German texts mentioned above, the following word classes which caused difficulties for the learners were noticed:

- 1 noun: Erfahrung (experience),
- 10 adjectives: weltberühmt (world-famous), unmöglich (impossible), fußballverrückt (crazy about football), wenig (little), wichtig (important), pünktlich (accurate, punctual), wertvoll (valuable, precious), echt (genuine), überpünktlich (too accurate), langfristig (long-term),
- 1 verb: unterstützen (to support),
- 1 conjunction: nicht nur-sondern auch (not only but also...),
- 16 adverbs: überhaupt (at all), einzigartig (uniquely), ebenfalls (also, equally, similarly), übrigens (by the way), kaum (hardly), vor allem (above all), sicher (certainly, surely), wirklich (truly, really), deutlich (clearly), natürlich (of course), sofort (immediately), wahrscheinlich (probably), höchstens (most likely), vielleicht (perhaps), direkt (directly), plötzlich (suddenly, unexpectedly),
- 5 particles: eigentlich (actually), einfach (simply), nun (well), sogar (even), vor allem (above all);
- 1 modal word: angeblich (allegedly).

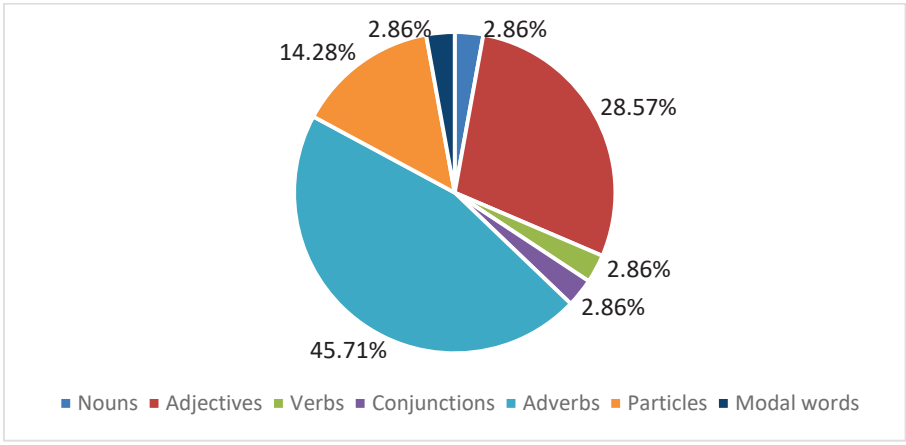

Figure 2. Word classes that caused difficulties for learners in understanding German texts in the second class.

The researchers found that learners understand basic word classes such as nouns, verbs, conjunctions and modal words when working with consumer texts. Comprehension difficulties appear in basic word classes such as adjectives and adverbs. "I understand this paragraph quite well, except for the word 'fußballverrückt'". „I think that the word 'langfristig' in the sentence: *Beliebte (oft auch langfristige) Jobs für Studenten und Schüler sind Babysitten, Zeitungen austragen oder Nachhilfe geben* (Popular (often long-term) jobs for students and pupils include babysitting, delivering newspapers or providing tutoring) is probably synonymous with the word 'beliebte'".

Concluding remarks

Using the think-aloud technique, the researchers obtained learners' verbalized thoughts, specifically statements about learners' understanding of word classes in each type of text they read out load. Through these verbalized thoughts, it was possible to observe and clearly note what difficulties the learners had in understanding when reading the German text during the intervention approach. Additionally, it was possible to understand the parts of the text the learners did not find difficult. Moreover, this approach allowed the researchers to examine how the learners perceived, processed and integrated the information from the text with their existing knowledge and experience (Oster, 2001).

On the other hand, these findings also revealed what the strengths and weaknesses of learners were with regard to the two types of the text, i.e., literary and consumer text and the word classes. The researchers consider the connection between mental processes and word classes as essential, because in order to

deduce meaning of the texts, i.e., sentences, it is important to understand not only the meanings, but also the functions of the words, i.e., word classes in the sentences.

The results showed that nouns, interjections, particles, modal words, verbs, and conjunctions, which occurred in both consumer and literary texts, were appropriate to the A2 language level and their meanings were familiar to a greater extent to the learners. The researchers assume that learners frequently encounter these word classes in everyday situations as well as in everyday communication in German language classes, they use them more frequently, not only in reading, but also in practicing other language skills.

Comprehension difficulties were mainly caused by adverbs, in both groups (EG1 and EG2) of learners. It should be noted that the learners were only able to deduce the meaning of these expressions with the help of their teachers. This means that language teachers should focus on the meanings and uses of these expressions, and try to convey the meaning of these words to the learners in lessons so that they have the opportunity to apply such words in various practical situations outside of the classroom.

It is noteworthy that the literary texts seem to be more comprehensible for the learners to a greater extent when compared to the consumer texts, especially in the basic word classes, namely adjectives. The findings imply that in literary texts at the A2 level, learners usually encounter dialogues, descriptions or features from everyday life that are familiar to them, which helps them to understand the meaning of common and frequent words or word classes in the context of reading comprehension.

The results of the research support the view that pedagogical intervention as defined earlier is relevant and perhaps necessary in the context of second foreign language teaching, because it helps to stimulate and develop learners' cognitive (e.g., to deduce implicit information from the text) and metacognitive (e.g., to observe own thinking) processes, the use of which is essential in the application of the think-aloud technique as well as in working with the text. Overall, it was concluded that with the use of the think-aloud technique in the pedagogical intervention programme, the teacher can plan appropriate instructions for reading lessons and provide support and guidance to learners in order to improve the comprehension of the texts they read in classes.

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Appendix

Methodological sheet of the intervention unit for the development of reading comprehension.

Focus	**Development of attention, concentration and memory processes**
Duration	45 min.
Topic of the text	Leisure activities
Title of the text	Urlaub (Free time)
Type of the text	User text/public text, advertisement
Material	Worksheet, pictures
	B. The main part
Activity <u>before</u> reading	**Urlaubsaktivitäten (Holiday activities)**
Objective:	to activate prior knowledge, to review vocabulary on the topics of sport and holiday
Social form:	learners work in pairs
Tools/Aids:	worksheet
Duration:	5–7 min.
Instruction:	The teacher prepared pictures showing different activities. The teacher hands out the pictures and printed activities and tells the learners to work in pairs. The learners match the pictures with the sporting activities. „*Work in pairs and match the activities with pictures*." The teacher checks the correct answers (1. sich sonnen – E, 2. schwimmen – D, 3. wandern – A, 4. sich entspannen – F, 5. tauchen – C, 6. Ski fahren – B).
Activity <u>after</u> reading	**Maßgerechter Urlaub (A customized vacation)**
Objective:	to review vocabulary, to develop concentration and memory
Social form:	learners work in groups
Tools/Aids:	worksheet
Duration:	15 min.
Instruction:	The learners write a short text about a holiday in Slovakia for a celebrity of their choice. The learners write 10 sentences and answer the supporting questions: What destination do you suggest?

	What kind of accommodation do you suggest? What length of a holiday do you suggest? For how many people? What kind of programme are you suggesting (sport, art, wellness, etc.)? When the activity is finished, the learners will read their suggestions.
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Tailoring two Slovak as a foreign language university courses to meet the learning needs of students with a diverse first-language background

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ABSTRACT

The objective of this paper is twofold: to examine the needs of foreign university students with a diverse language background, mainly Ukrainian, Russian, but also in some other languages, who are learning Slovak as a foreign language (L2) for acquiring necessary language skills enabling them to communicate in the target language within the local context in Slovakia, and to discuss how the teacher can meet those needs. This case study is based on the teacher's retrospective observations and five years of practice and uses a multi-pronged approach to address this aim. Preliminary results suggest that using English as means of communication in the course is not helpful as many students do not possess sufficient understanding of it and it may confuse the students when explaining Slovak grammar in English, the direct method using Slovak language along with the audiolingual method are useful methods for students to acquire communicative competence in the target language, and that applying a dynamic approach in teaching is useful. Moreover, there is a need to develop an up-to-date textbook based on a model-based language teaching method, which promotes the development of real language use, and which provides useful vocabulary and frequently used figures of speech in a logical and clear structure, while putting grammatical and other phenomena into the learning context.

Keywords: *international university students, retrospective approach, Slovak as a foreign language, teacher practice*

Introduction

This article discusses Slovak as a foreign language teaching at two consequent L2 Slovak university *courses Slovak Language for Foreigners 1* and *2* (SLfF 1 and SLfF 2) for international students annually offered at the Constantine the Philosopher University in Nitra, Slovakia. In the overall context of Slovak universities today, cultural and linguistic variety is a phenomenon that characterises both the university environment and the general society. Not so long ago, Slovak, Hungarian,

and English were the main languages of communication at the universities here, depending, however, on the university type and the geographic location of in the country. Due to recent happenings on the European geopolitical scene, new migration patterns have emerged that greatly affected this language environment in Slovakia. There has been an increased demand for studying at universities in Slovakia, especially from students coming from Ukraine and Russia. This new momentum has equally led to a significant increase in the number of newly enrolled international students at public universities. For reasons of comparison, the overview chart below (Table 1) demonstrates the number of these students enrolled at Bachelor's and Master's levels in Slovakia, while the figures in brackets indicate the number of doctoral students in the different academic years.

Table 1. Information on the number of foreign students at public universities in Slovakia.

Citizenship / Year	**2003**	**2020**	**2022**	**2023**
Foreigners of Ukrainian citizenship	108 (7)	4666 (71)	9847 (96)	10072 (104)
Foreigners of Russian citizenship	27 (-)	523 (18)	898 (22)	1171 (26)
All international students	1499 (113)	10839 (304)	16590 (384)	17216 (433)

(Statistical Yearbook – Universities)[1]

Considering the increase in foreign students, especially in the most recent years, the data from 2003 is provided to contrastively demonstrate the major growth in numbers over the years between 2020 and 2023. This data shows an increase of more than 100% in the proportion of students with Ukrainian and Russian citizenship. All together, this represents an overall increase of 159% in the total number of foreign students enrolled in Slovak public universities over the same period. This increase is significant considering students from Russia and Ukraine and may be due to a combination of several factors but the main one being the similarities in languages (Ukrainian, Russian, and Slovak belong to the family of

[1] https://www.cvtisr.sk/cvti-sr-vedecka-kniznica/informacie-oskolstve/statistiky/statisticka-rocenka-publikacia/statisticka-rocenka-vysokeskoly.html?page_id=9596.

Slavic languages). Moreover, international students studying at public universities in Slovakia are governed by the same principles as domestic students, ergo largely free of fees. This benefit is therefore important in terms of international student motivation for selecting public universities in Slovakia. There is also a practical consideration for students from Russia and Ukraine: the geo-political situation that started to notably evolve in February 2022 has naturally led students from respective coountries to seek educational opportunities abroad. A similar increase in students has occurred at the Constantine the Philosopher University in Nitra – there are currently 746 students (about 6% of all our university students) who are of a foreign origin (mostly Ukranian and Russian), and their numbers grew by 100% in comparison to the previous academic year (i. e. 2022/2023).

Basic knowledge of the Slovak language is an important factor in the academic success of international students in Slovakia, as the majority of study programmes are available in Slovak. As the influx of international students continues, Slovak universities are looking for solutions to provide language training for both prospective and newly enrolled international students. This article therefore addresses the challenges in L2 Slovak preparation for the constantly growing number of Ukrainian and Russian students at Slovak universities and proposes efficient strategies to help this varied group of these students, especially those from Ukraine and Russia, to achieve language proficiency in L2 Slovak by attending L2 Slovak university language courses.

The SLfF 1 and SLfF 2 courses develop students' both written and oral communication skills across various topics relevant to them, such as navigating the university campus, life in the city, travelling, weather, healthcare centres, public administration, and attending cultural or sporting events. Intercultural communication is also emphasised, which involves understanding both the language skills and cultural context relevant to the students' native environments and the Slovak context (see Šuša, 2013). Using illustrations such as a display of communication examples, explaining conversational contexts, looking for analogies, and repeating frequent phrases or procedures, may help the learner develop a so called instinct for the new language, which will enable them to use linguistic resources appropriate to the context (e.g., Neuner & Hunfeld 1992, pp. 35–36). In doing so, this article examines traditional methods of L2 teaching along with modern approaches to language teaching that are already integrated in the two courses SLfF 1 and SLfF 2.

Thanks to online technology and the availability of varied less formal sources of information for L2 Slovak learning, teachers often have a wealth of materials at their disposal. They are communicated to the learners via an online teaching portal (www.edu.ukf.sk), which is managed by the lecturer herself. These materials represent the Slovak language in its real-world use and in its own varieties, and are

formally, stylistically, and thematically up-to-date. In this paper, the setting of the two respective university courses is described, as are the strategies used for L2 Slovak acquisition. The observations of one L2 Slovak teacher are then discussed, followed by possible suggestions.

Background to the case study

The main learner group is composed of 25–30 students of foreign origin studying in Slovakia, specifically, about 50–60% are Ukrainians, 20% are Russians, and the remaining students are mostly speakers of non-Slavic languages. The age range of students is between 17 and 50 years old. Since the academic year 2019/2020, the Faculty of Central European Studies of the Constantine the Philosopher University in Nitra has offered the continuation courses SLfF 1 and SLfF 2, spanning two semesters. These two courses are for beginner and intermediate learners, are optional, and are intended for all full-time international students who can choose them from the offer of optional courses and receive 3 ETCS. Even though the courses are currently included in the curricula of only two specific study programmes (Regional Tourism and Central European Area Studies), international students from other study programmes have also shown interest in participating in these two courses. They are attended not only by first-year students of the wide range of study programmes offered by the university but also by other older students who wish to broaden their theoretical and practical knowledge of Slovak in their own interests. Several of these students often mention that they prefer group language courses to independent language study because of the lack of self-motivation for independent study and the absence of feedback.

There are full-time foreign students at beginner and intermediate levels, as well as exchange students whose mobility lasts anywhere from four weeks up to two semesters. The learners are students of all faculties of the university, however, outside the fields of study oriented either to the study of Slovak or to translation and interpreting from or into Slovak; thus, they are not professional users of the target language (Slovak). The time allotted to the course in the winter term (SLfF 1) is 90 minutes per week with a frequency of 13 meetings per semester. The same applies to the summer term when SLfF 2 course is offered to mainly advanced students, who are, however, often joined by exchange students who come to study at our university for the summer term only. The main aim of the courses is primarily to develop language skills but also (inter)cultural competence, i.e. these two courses prepare learners for communication about their everyday needs in Slovak using interaction, improvisation, and cooperative learning. As the teacher considers the actual needs of the specific student groups, the studying materials are regularly revised to tailor the content of the course with a dynamic approach (Creemers & Kyriakides, 2011).

Methodology

This case study is based on a qualitative analysis of the teacher's retrospective direct observations of their own L2 Slovak university courses; the teacher has been teaching the courses SLfF 1 and SLfF 2 at the Constantine the Philosopher University in Nitra for about 5 years. Besides some government and institutional records provided, the information has been collected by unstructured observations, in-person surveys and short interviews conducted by the teacher. The general course setting was documented as well as language and other background data of the course participants, who represent the typical group of learners of the course. In the following section, the results from these observations presented.

Teacher's observations and discussion of results

Language acquisition of foreign students based on the teacher's observations

At the first mutual interaction between students and the teacher, language screening is typically carried out via a simple oral and written task (a so-called short interview). This kind of screening shows that the initial students' knowledge of Slovak in the courses SLfF 1 and SLfF 2 differs. Considering their individual needs, e.g., vocabulary mastery with regards to the theme of their studies, language proficiency levels, etc., it is therefore necessary to adapt the overall course design, most often by creating a separate group(s) of students at the begining of the course respecting their own wishes regarding their placement. However, this solution is not ideal, as only 13 sessions in total are reserved for the entire course within the academic semester. In the separate group for complete beginners created mainly for usually 2–4 students whose native language has a very different structure, i.e., a language not one of the predominantly inflected languages such as Slovak, Russian, Ukrainian, Polish, German, or another inflected language family, but are speakers of Romance languages or other languages such as Algerian Arabic, Bhutanese, and Mongolese. Despite their interest and strong personal motivation, due to the absence of a common language of communication which would otherwise be English but in this case is Slovak, which is used as part of the direct method in language teaching, some students responded positively only to visual teaching aids, which was very limiting. These students were excluded from the group course, and the lessons were organised separately with them in the form of meetings. This arrangement had a negative impact on the reduced frequency of these individual meetings as the teaching with international students of this linguistic background takes place in a dedicated time frame, mostly during the teacher's consulting hours. The frequency and content of these separate sessions

are adapted to the group (but also to the teacher's availability), which, again, increases the burden on both the lecturer and the learner.

Although many students may already have some knowledge of Slovak when they start the SLfF 1 and SLfF 2 courses, others can only possess basic conversational skills at A1–A2 level according to the common European framework for languages (CEFR) method about learning, teaching, and assessment translated into Slovak (Štátny pedagogický ústav, 2017), all thanks to prior exposure to the target language. This is because their preparatory independent study of the language had been often carried out prior to their arrival to the target language country, Slovakia. Others would have already lived or studied in Slovakia for some time, but they decided to seek the SLfF courses due to their wish to further their communication competence in Slovak. The latter factor is strongly influenced by the ability to communicate in another Slavic language, which poses a challenge to the teacher preparing a course in Slovak for foreigners, with several peculiarities: the "central" position of Slovak among the Slavic languages is in fact a privilege due to its good intelligibility for those who speak another Slavic language. Thus, students who speak another Slavic language have an advantage in their ability to acquire communicative competence in Slovak. However, the regular system of its principles enables its relatively rapid acquisition. Namely, problematic phenomena and exceptions occur quite often in Slovak, which naturally causes misunderstanding when declaring that the principles inherent in Slovak are based on regularity and structurality.

Insights into the Slovak Language for Foreigners Courses 1 and 2

The introduction of the course is usually connected with standard pedagogical-didactic procedures at the beginning of the course, most often with the grammar-translation method applied. In this way, the Slovak language system is gradually built up by acquiring and linking isolated phenomena and rules inherent to Slovak by gradually expanding the conversational subjects. Due to the considerable differences between the Western and Eastern Slavic languages, here great attention is paid to the phonetic aspect of speech, especially the correct length of vowels and accents, which are the most frequent phonic mistakes made by students.

Due to the diversity, which is based on the overall heterogeneous national and ethnic representation of the students, the communicative languages of the course are English and Slovak. In practice, however, the use of English is also an issue – the reason for this is, again, the different level of understanding of the students and their ability to communicate in it on topics related to the principles applied in the language.

When the course continues in its second part (SLfF2), the use of English or any other intermediary language is practically excluded from the teaching process. In fact, the mixing of several languages often leads to confusing situations in which, when the language codes are changed, the students tend to respond to the lecturer's suggestions in their mother tongue, but especially in English (as it has previously been used as an intermediary tool).

Grammatical or other theoretical learning is not seen as a goal, but as a means of understanding (from the student's point of view) the reality of the foreign language. Through simple conversational situations, the teacher supplements the system of the student's mother tongue with interlanguage (i.e., Slovak-Ukrainian, Slovak-Russian, or other) in parallel, which consequently contributes to creating a separate language system rather than adapting pre-existing one(s). Although students remain in contact with their native language through everyday conversation with others of their peers from the same language background (e.g., Ukrainian, Russian), nonetheless, the learners find themselves in a situation where they are surrounded by the target language (Slovak) linguistic and cultural environment, which may consciously or subconsciously influence them. In the SLfF 1 and SLfF 2 courses, the student's vocabulary is expanded through conversation exercises and work with written and spoken texts, and the rules of Slovak are continuously clarified. To adapt the curriculum to the individual needs of the students (especially with regard to the topic, but also to their age), the teacher moves from visualised dialogues through model texts to the creation of their own texts of a monological or dialogical nature, e.g., introducing the daily routine of a person, their weekly schedule, university studies, or future profession. In this way, the teacher encourages the students' conversational potential and creates a friendly class environment through the use of less formal approaches and individually tailored subjects of discussion.

Based on the teacher's experience, the direct method of learning an L2 by simulating situations close to everyday life seems to be one of the most appropriate methods within the university environment. This method is also comprehensive in terms of introducing Slovak culture and customs, which are not only related to the language as such but also to social behaviour and functioning in the country in general, i.a., the issue of tics and exclamations, addressing and using academic and functional titles, the etiquette of e-mail correspondence, but also the regional language peculiarities.

Among the study materials students will find several rigorously designed sources of information on individual phenomena in Slovak, supplemented by examples, sample texts, exercises, tasks, and more. This solution was originally required by the compulsory online and hybrid forms of teaching to be implemented in 2020 and 2021 due to the COVID-19 pandemic situation. However, the electronic

distribution of these resources between the teacher and the students is also convenient today; it allows not only the possibility of tailoring and updating them by the teacher, but above all, time or space flexibility for the students, making the materials available to those who did not attend the meetings in person, etc. The teacher tries to avoid the monotony of exercises and by using the direct method tries to communicate only in the target language (Slovak).

Although students usually have a reasonable conversational level of English, they often do not master the lexis associated with linguodidactic interpretation, which includes terminology. Therefore, the use of English in the context of the course is only appropriate at the beginning of the course when using the grammar-translation method for the purpose of developing students' ordinary vocabulary, and often appears to be less effective when explaining grammar or other language phenomena. Thus, the use of English can sometimes create an unnecessarily stressful situation for the students. Therefore, its use is kept to the minimum and only used in situations necessary to reach mutual understanding. By having students work in pairs or groups, the teacher tries to eliminate uncomfortable situations with not reaching a mutual understanding by creating a friendly atmosphere and allowing students to actively communicate both with the teacher and each other to help reach mutual understanding. Practice has shown that students have a better relationship with each other and tend to help each other even with frontal tasks.

As part of the innovation and updating of the approach to teaching L2 Slovak on the two respective courses, the priority in SLfF 1 and SLfF 2 courses is given to audio-lingual and audiovisual aids, i.e., not only to generally available recordings and videos created primarily for language teaching purposes but also to extracts from popular podcasts, Slovak films and TV series, shows, sports broadcasts, or even to traditional verbal folklore along with their English translations. During regular revision of the material, the teacher selects resources that are reasonably challenging and also appropriate in terms of topicality (cyclical but also unique events: for advanced students, it is the winter ski or ball season, presidential elections, the Olympic Games, etc.). The emphasis is on communication and intercultural learning. The teacher tries to create conditions not only for the development of linguistic and communicative competence in Slovak, but also for the understanding and acceptance of possible mutual cultural differences. Finally, the teacher presents the everyday language in its real form as it is used.

Conclusion

Both courses SLfF 1 and SLfF 2 are attended by students with different nationalities and language backgrounds. There are students whose native language is similar to Slovak, some of them had learned Slovak before coming to Slovakia, while for

others it is their first interaction with Slovak as the target language. For most of the students on the two courses, Slovak acquisition is easier as their native language is similar to Slovak (Ukrainian, Russian, and other Slavic languages). Other students, however, come to the class with no previous experience or knowledge of Slovak (mainly university exchange students). Therefore, it is necessary to tailor the dynamics of the lectures as well as the difficulty of exercises to students' language proficiency levels, utilizing a variety of exercises covering a range of difficulty within the given topics. This ranges from basic tasks like naming colours to more complex ones involving intercultural understanding, like introducing specific Easter traditions in Slovakia. Moreover, dealing with contemporary topics may fuel student's motivation to use the target language rather than discussing outdated topics from the past.

By creating separate groups with similar language backgrounds the students' desire to communicate in the target language will increase as the teaching methods will be more adjusted to these particular groups of students. As specific groups of students seem to acquire L2 Slovak faster (due to frequent linguistic similarities, mostly in grammar and vocabulary, between their native language and the target one), the language of instruction is Slovak from the early stages of the course duration. Practical experience has also shown that these students, who are proficient in another Slavic language, try to use the rules inherent in their native language (e.g., grammatical or stylistic principles and vocabulary), which they attempt to make sound like they are also native to Slovak to varying degrees (most often adapting the primary word stress, vowel quantity, and general diction of the text to the conventions inherent in Slovak). Using English may pose issue due to the students' different level of understanding and their ability to communicate in this language about topics related to the principles of Slovak they are currently learning.

As the students of a wide range of study programmes attend SLfF 1 and SLfF 2 courses (students of natural and IT sciences, humanities and social sciences), there are several thematic subjects to be covered in the courses to help the students improve their communication skills in their field of study. With technology and the good availability of a variety of less formal sources of information, the teacher has at her disposal a wealth of materials that present Slovak in its real-world varieties, and it is important that these materials are formally, stylistically, and thematically up-to-date and are included in the teaching process. In contrast to the previous negative experience of using classical learning resources, which look old-fashioned, uninteresting, and thematically monotonous, these up-to-date materials are more varied and therefore more interesting for students to use. Due to the nature of these classical resources represented mostly by printed materials, e.g., worksheets, textbooks, and rather rigidly structured Slovak manuals on which they relied for self-study, these are not among the students' most favourite forms

of tools for learning. Within the time allotted to the course (90 minutes per week with a frequency of 13 meetings per semester), the students would not have the opportunity to gain real experience of the language as it is naturally used, but of its stylised and often outdated form. The observations show that tailoring the content of the course with a dynamic approach (Creemers & Kyriakides, 2011), where engaging students' curiosity becomes a valuable tool for the teacher, contributes to achieving desired learning outcomes. The teacher would appreciate if more suitable learning aids of different kinds were available that could be adapted to the most popular university studies and programmes among Ukrainian and Russian students to begin with, as they are, according to above stated information, the largest foreign nationalities at Slovak universities.

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Student perception of feedback in an Icelandic as a second language pronunciation course at a university level

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ABSTRACT

This article discusses several challenges connected to the standardization of both teaching and evaluation of a large cohort (n=273) of students of Icelandic as a second language (L2), all attending the university course Pronunciation and Listening I (PLI) at the University of Iceland in the fall of 2023. The cohort was divided into eleven parallel groups which were taught by seven different teachers. The challenges faced by the teachers include the ability to provide feedback to students that is timely, consistent between the parallel groups, and of high quality. During the fall semester of 2023, the first steps were taken towards standardizing the feedback process by creating a simple rubric or evaluation sheet for two recorded listen-and-imitate assignments. The aim was to help teachers provide consistent and useful feedback in a timely manner. Next, students were asked to answer a survey about the feedback they received. A total of n=138 responses (representing 51% of students registered to the course) were collected. The survey results indicate that students engaged with the feedback in various ways. Some read it and committed it to memory whereas others wrote it down. Some used the feedback to practice their pronunciation in general whereas others used it as a "feed-forward" towards improving their performance in subsequent assignments.

Keywords: *feedback, feed-forward, L2 Icelandic, second language teaching, student perception, pronunciation*

Introduction

The University of Iceland offers two separate degree programs in Icelandic as a second language. A one-year practical diploma (60 ECTS) designed for beginners, and a full Bachelor's degree (120/180 ECTS) available to students who have either finished the practical diploma or otherwise acquired an appropriate level of proficiency in Icelandic. To be enrolled in the practical diploma program, students must pass a TOEFL English exam, but not all students are fluent in English. For the Bachelor's program, students must, alongside a TOEFL English exam, pass a special admission exam. Over recent years, the number of students applying for the

Icelandic as a second language programs, particularly the practical diploma, has increased drastically, partly due to the practical diploma now being available through distance learning. Over 640 students applied to the two programs for the fall semester of 2023, making Icelandic as a second language the most popular discipline within the University of Iceland (Umsóknum fjölgar í HÍ milli ára, 2023).

In August 2023, the total number of students registered to the practical diploma was 273. To accommodate the large number of students, they were divided into several parallel groups, the number depending on the nature of the course. Each semester, students in the practical diploma program attend four courses, *Vocabulary and Grammar I* or *II* (*VG*, 10 ECTS), *Pronunciation and Listening I* or *II* (*PL*, 5 ECTS), *Speech and Expression I* or *II* (*SE*, 5 ECTS), and *Self Study in Icelandic I* or *II* (*SSI*, 10 ECTS). In the fall of 2023, students were divided into twelve groups for VGI, whereas for PLI they were divided into eleven groups. The largest number of groups was for SEI, where the students were divided into twenty-one groups. For each course, there were several teachers. In the fall of 2023, twelve teachers taught VG, seven teachers taught PLI, and fourteen teachers taught SEI. The number of parallel groups as well as the number of teachers per course poses some specific problems, particularly when it comes to the standardization of both teaching and assessment. In this article, we will focus on the course Pronunciation and Listening I.

Alongside the large number of students, another challenge that teachers of L2 Icelandic at the University of Iceland face is the great diversity in cultural and linguistic background of students, but students from different linguistic backgrounds will naturally encounter different problems, including when it comes to pronunciation. The 273 students registered in the fall of 2023 came from 50 different countries. The single largest group was from the Philippines, a total of 50 students. 42 students came from the United States, 14 from Great Britain, and 11 from Ghana. The remaining 156 students came from 46 different countries from around the world, but each class of around 20 students had speakers of up to 15 different native languages.[1] Therefore, the approach in teaching of pronunciation must be rather broad, as opposed to if all students came from a single or a handful of linguistic backgrounds.

The approach used in the courses PLI and PLII is the analytic-linguistic approach. Following this approach, students are given explicit instruction in the sound system, but as is generally the case when using the analytic-linguistic approach, this method is supplemented with aspects of the intuitive-imitative approach, particularly in the practice aspect of the lessons, where students listen

[1] These numbers are taken from internal documents provided by the practical diploma's project manager, Gísli Hvanndal Ólafsson.

to and imitate the sound and rhythm of the language (Celce-Murcia, Brinton, and Goodwin, 2010). Previously, the ultimate goal of L2 pronunciation teaching and learning was for the student to achieve native-like fluency. In recent decades, ideas have shifted from the nativeness principle towards the principles of intelligibility or comprehensibility. Here, intelligibility refers to the extent to which a given utterance is understood by a listener, while comprehensibility refers to the listener's perception of how easily they understand the speaker's utterance (Celce-Murcia, Brinton, and Goodwin, 2010; Kennedy & Trofimovich, 2008; Bade, 2023). In Icelandic, segmentals play a greater role in speaker intelligibility than suprasegmentals. Icelandic is, for example, not a tonal language and the placement of stress does not generally differentiate between two or more distinct words. Primary stress is nearly always on the first syllable and secondary stress on every other syllable. Although placing the stress elsewhere might seem odd to a native speaker, it does not have a great influence on intelligibility, unless other changes happen simultaneously (e.g. incorrect vowel or consonant length). Therefore, teaching pronunciation of L2 Icelandic generally focuses on the segmental level: vowel and consonant length, vowel quality, the introduction of consonants that foreign speakers may find more difficult to master (such as unvoiced [r̥], [l̥], [m̥], [n̥] and [ç] and the sounds [θ] and [ð]), as well as some phonological processes, including pre-aspiration, epenthesis (mainly bridging consonant clusters), and diphthongization.

In this article, we discuss two of the assignments that students undertake as part of *PLI*, both of which fall under the umbrella of the listen-and-imitate techniques used in the so-called Direct Method (Celce-Murcia, Brinton, & Goodwin, 2010). It should be noted that although these assignments elicit controlled speech from the students, the students are given assignments that elicit from them more natural speech in the closely related course *Speech and Expression I* (SEI), which students take alongside PLI.[2] These include real-life recordings of them ordering at a café, interviewing native speakers, and various small presentations that they give in class. For all of these, along with the summative oral final exam in SEI, the students' pronunciation is, however, only one of several aspects being assessed. The listen-and-imitate-assignments in PLI are, therefore, the only assignments that solely assess pronunciation. The listen-and-imitate assignments in PLI, along with two listen-and-imitate assignments in PLII, are, therefore, the main venue for teachers to provide each student with detailed feedback on their pronunciation throughout the whole practical diploma program.

[2] On the importance of assessing both controlled and spontaneous speech, see Saito, 2021.

Studies have shown that direct pronunciation instruction is effective, but that the inclusion of feedback has a larger effect than instruction without feedback (Lee, Jang, and Plonsky, 2015; Saito, 2021; Dlaska & Krekeler, 2013). Good and timely feedback has long been considered one of the most important aspects of any learning (Hattie and Timperley, 2007). Without feedback, students have a difficult time evaluating their own learning and therefore have less of an opportunity to improve their performance and achieve their goals. Here, feedback is "seen as a *process* during which students make sense of performance information and take action to improve" (Sadler, Reimann, & Sambell, 2023). The scholarly consensus is that feedback can be considered good if students used it to improve, but, more precisely, the marks of good feedback are, according to Gibbs and Simpson (2004), the following:

1. Feedback is sufficient, given not only in enough detail but also frequently enough.
2. Feedback focuses on the student's performance, their learning, and on actions under their control.
3. Feedback is timely. It is received by students while it still matters to them and in time for them to pay attention to further learning.
4. Feedback is appropriate to the purpose of the assignment.
5. Feedback is appropriate in relation to the student's understanding of what they are supposed to be doing.
6. Feedback is received and attended to.
7. Feedback is acted upon by the student.

Another sign of good feedback is that it gives students information that can help them in future assignments, rather than only commenting on the assignment being graded. This type of feedback has been termed feed-forward (Higgins, Hartley, and Skelton, 2001; Duncan, 2007; Carless 2007).

An ever-growing number of students per teacher in many academic institutions in the last decades has resulted in many teachers being forced to give less feedback, in both amount and detail (Gibbs, 2006). In some cases, feedback has dwindled to such a degree that whatever feedback is given hardly meets any of the criteria of good feedback. It is, therefore, of little or no use to students. As mentioned above, the practical diploma program of Icelandic as a second language has seen a great increase in students over the past few years and will likely see a continued increase in the years to come. The increase in students and teachers per each course poses problems for providing students with sufficient personal feedback which is of good quality and adequate detail and is both timely and consistent between parallel groups.

In the fall semester of 2023, the feedback process for the PLI listen-and-imitate assignments was overhauled with the aim of streamlining and standardizing the

feedback to maximize the learning potential of the feedback, while simultaneously attempting to lessen the workload of the graders. This first step was to create a simple rubric or evaluation sheet for all graders to use, but this new rubric was used for both listen-and-imitate assignments in the fall semester of 2023. The next step was to elicit students' perceptions of the feedback via an online survey. The preliminary results of the survey are the topic of this article. Studies have shown that student perception versus teacher perception of the feedback students receive differs considerably. Generally (Mulliner & Tucker, 2017; Bevan, Badge, Cann, Wilmott, & Scott, 2008), teachers believe that their students do not access or read the feedback they receive, that they do not understand it, and that they do not act on the feedback or refer back to it when completing related assignments. Students, however, indicate to a greater degree that they access, read, understand, act on, and refer back to the feedback. It is not clear why the students' views are so different to those of teachers. It may be that teachers underestimate their students, that students overestimate themselves, or both may apply. As a part of this study, teachers' beliefs were not formally surveyed, but the feeling within the group of teachers has at times been similar to that which has been shown in other studies.

Methodology

The listen-and-imitate assignments

The course PLI has four learning outcomes, two of which are assessed through two recorded listen-and-imitate assignments due in weeks 7 and 13 (of a total of 13 weeks). These learning outcomes are that students should 1) acquire the pronunciation of Icelandic vowels and consonants in speech, and 2) be able to read aloud with standard pronunciation. Together, these two assignments make up 20% of the course grade and they are graded on a scale from 0–10 in increments of 0.5. For each recorded listen-and-imitate assignment, students are given a text where specific letters, representing the sounds being tested, are highlighted in red. Students also have access to recordings of two separate teachers reading the text. The following instructions are given for the assignment (here translated into English): 1) Listen to teacher A and B read the text. Pay attention to the sounds highlighted in red; 2) Read the text and practice your pronunciation; 3) Read the text aloud and record it in an audio file.

The text of the first assignment is 112 words long with 34 vowels (monophthongs and diphthongs) marked in red. Each red-marked letter (or letters) represents one point but, in addition, six points are used to assess students' overall performance. The text of the second assignment is 82 words long with 20 red-marked letters. Here, five points are used to assess overall performance. For the overall performance, the focus is solely on aspects already covered in class. The

assignments are evaluated using the simple rubric mentioned in the introduction. The following description is provided to graders on when to give a full, half, or no point: Zero points are given if the sound is pronounced incorrectly in such a manner as to hinder understanding, if the sound collapses with another Icelandic sound, or deviates considerably from the intended sound. Half a point is given if the sound is not pronounced correctly but this does not hinder understanding. Half a point is also given if the sound length is incorrect as well as if the red-marked sound is pronounced correctly but the pronunciation of surrounding sounds hinders understanding. A full point is given if the sound is pronounced correctly (or nearly correctly), and the surrounding sounds are pronounced so that the speech can be understood. A full point is only given if the sound length is also correct. This grading is consistent with the goals of the intelligibility principle rather than nativeness principle mentioned above (Kennedy and Trofimovich, 2008; Celce-Murcia, Brinton, & Goodwin, 2010).

By using this rubric, a more standardized assessment frame between the parallel groups and the different teachers was achieved. However, although all teachers used the evaluation sheet for grading in the fall of 2023, not all teachers provided this sheet to the students. All teachers gave each student a written summary of the evaluation, giving specific instructions on which types of sounds to focus on improving. These comments varied in detail and number. Furthermore, some teachers included written comments on individual sounds in their feedback, whereas others included a short sound file with the correct pronunciation.

The survey

To assess the usefulness of our feedback, we conducted a survey (see Appendix) among students in February of 2024 where they answered questions about the feedback that they received for the two listen-and-imitate assignments in the fall semester of 2023. We used *Microsoft Forms* to design and conduct the survey online. We asked the students to complete the survey in class so that they could easily access additional information or explanations as they filled out the survey. Additionally, a single notification was sent to all registered students via *Canvas* [the university's learning management system] asking them to fill out the survey. The survey only reached students that had advanced to the 2024 spring semester. The participants do, therefore, not include students who did not pass the PLI course or chose not to continue.

For the first question (Q1), participants were asked to indicate a part of which group they had been in the course *PLI* in the fall of 2023. Secondly, students were first asked whether they were aware of having received feedback for the assignments (Q2) and if so, whether they had listened to or read the feedback (Q3). The next set of questions was which type of feedback they had received (Q4) and

which type of feedback they had found most helpful (Q5). Next, the students were asked to evaluate statements on a five-point Likert scale from “strongly agree” to “strongly disagree”. The five statements were as follows:

Q6: I understood the feedback.

Q7: I used the feedback.

Q9: The feedback helped me achieve the learning outcomes.

Q10: The assignment helped me achieve the learning outcomes.

Q11: I feel like I achieved the learning outcomes of the course.

The survey also included two open-ended questions where students were given an opportunity to elaborate on their answers. For the first of these two questions (Q8), the prompt was the following: If you did use the feedback, how did you do that? For the second open question, participants were invited to comment upon anything else regarding the assignments or the feedback. No background variables such as age, sex, and country of origin were collected. For this article, the following questions will be discussed: Q2, Q3, Q6, Q7, and Q8.

Results from the survey

A total of n=138 answers were elicited. The respondents came from all eleven parallel groups but the number of participants from each group differed considerably, from eight to twenty respondents (median 11, mean 12.5). Of the 138 participants, 13, or 9%, claimed that they had not received feedback on the assignments (Q2, see Table 1). Of the remaining n=125 respondents, only 3 (2%) stated that they had not read or listened to the feedback (Q3, see Table 1). Furthermore, an overwhelming majority of the n=122 remaining respondents (93.5%) agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that they understood the feedback (Q6, see Table 2). Only two respondents (1.6%) disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement.

Table 1. Summary of responses to questions 2 and 3 in the survey.

Selected survey questions	**Answer options**	
	Yes	**No**
Q2 Did you get feedback on the assignments?	91%	9%
Q3 Did you read/listen to the feedback?	98%	2%

To gauge if and how students used the feedback, a single statement measured with a five-point Likert scale was employed (Q7, see Table 2) as well as an open question (Q8). Most students strongly agreed (36.1%) or agreed (49.2%) with the statement, 13.1% were neutral, and only 1.6% disagreed or strongly disagreed. Of

the n=122 students who indicated that they both received and read the feedback, 68 gave a written response to the open question "If you did use the feedback, how did you do that?" When the responses were analyzed, a few main themes emerged. Many noted that they practiced orally, for example, one student wrote that they "practiced the words [they were] not able to pronounce well" and another student stated that they listened and repeated. A third student stated that they "read the feedback thoroughly then improve [their] mistakes and make it better." Furthermore, a couple of students stated that they re-did parts of or the whole exercise as practice.

Table 2. Summary of responses to questions 6 and 7.

Selected survey questions	**Answer options**				
	Strongly agree	**Agree**	**Neutral**	**Disagree**	**Strongly disagree**
Q6 I understood the feedback	48.4%	45.1%	4.9%	0.8%	0.8%
Q7 I used the feedback	36.1%	49.2%	13.1%	0.8%	0.8%

Two students stated that they wrote down or took notes ("I went over my mistakes and took notes", "I would also write it straight after the fulfilled task in canvas") whereas many stated that they committed it to memory ("I tried remembering the advice when I was talking"). Nine respondents said that they had used the feedback for future assignments, including by using the feedback from the first listen-and-imitate assignment to prepare for the second. For example, one student remarked that the feedback helped them prepare for the second assignment ("It helped me prepare for the second assignment") and another wrote that they read the feedback and used it both in their studies and as preparation for the second assignment ("I read the feedback and used it in my study and before other pronunciation assignments"). Finally, one student stated that the feedback had made them more aware of their pronunciation on the second assignment ("I used it when doing the second assignment. I was more aware of my pronunciation.").

Discussion

As part of this study, teachers' beliefs were not formally surveyed, but the feeling within the group of teachers was at times similar to that which was shown in other studies of student and teacher perception, as discussed in introductory chapter.

However, this view was not supported by our survey results which show that students read and engage with their feedback in a number of different ways. Furthermore, the student responses seem to indicate that the provided feedback meets many of the conditions that are the mark of good feedback, according to Gibbs and Simpson (2004), as per the discussion in the introductory chapter. This is true in particular for conditions 3, 6, and 7.

Gibbs and Simpson's condition 6 is that feedback is received and attended to. All respondents received feedback and the results of the survey showed that most of them (88.4%) both knew of the feedback and read it. This condition was therefore met for most students. There is, however, room for improvement. At the end of the survey, all respondents were given the opportunity to write general comments about the assignment or the feedback. One respondent wrote the following: "I believe it's a Canvas issue but I had completely forgotten to check the feedback because it is not 'advertised' like assignments. Now that I've been reminded, I'll go back and review the feedback I forgot to read." This is a valid point, and teachers could do more to let students know about the feedback, for example by going over an example feedback sheet in class and/or having students look at the feedback they received and practice the sounds that were commented on in class.

Condition 7 is that to be effective, feedback should be acted upon by students. Of the n=122 respondents that knew of and read the feedback, 85% agreed or strongly agreed that they used the feedback to improve their pronunciation. This is quite positive but again this percentage could be somewhat improved. It may be a good idea to incorporate working with feedback into classroom activity. For example, students could be asked to read the feedback in class and encouraged to write down weak points in their pronunciation. Another option would be to have the students listen to their own recordings while reading the feedback as well as practice their pronunciation of problem sounds in class.

Condition 3 is that feedback should be timely, and received by students while it still matters to them and in time for them to pay attention to further learning. Scholarship has not agreed upon a specific optimal time range for receiving feedback, but some believe that the earlier the better, because then the assignment is still fresh in the students' minds (Haughney, Wakeman, & Hart, 2020). For the first listen-and-imitate assignment, feedback was provided about five weeks after students turned in the assignment, which was a week before the second listen-and-imitate assignment was due. Therefore, it is possible that the first assignment was not fresh in the students' minds. However, the proximity to the deadline of the second assignment may have resulted in the students' having the feedback in mind when working on that. Had they received feedback earlier, it is possible that they would have forgotten it or been less likely to refer back to it. Although the texts of the first and the second assignment were different, there was an overlap between

the sounds being evaluated. Therefore, the feedback to the first assignment can be viewed as constituting a "feed-forward" for the second assignment. That this was indeed the case is reflected in the students' comments quoted in the results chapter.

Conclusion

The survey under discussion is the second step in an ongoing process undertaken by a group of teachers of PLI in the fall semester of 2023, but the first step was the creation of a rubric or evaluation sheet used for the first time in that same semester. The findings of the survey are encouraging to the teachers as they show that most students know about, read, understand, and utilize the feedback to further their learning. With these results, the teachers have felt encouraged to continue to develop the rubric for the recorded listen-and-imitate assignment. Some of the results of this study have already informed the feedback practice of the two listen-and-imitate assignments in PLII in spring of 2024. Similar evaluation sheets have been created for these assignments and a comment bank has been created, which will both be a time-saver for graders and help give consistent quality feedback between parallel groups. Furthermore, the teachers have decided that all students will now receive the evaluation sheet to help them better understand where they can improve their performance.

Some further lessons can be drawn from the survey. One lesson is that teachers could do more to let the students know about the feedback they receive and even incorporate it into classroom activity. This might increase not only the number of students who know about and read the feedback but also encourage them to use it to improve their learning. Another lesson is that the timing of the feedback is crucial. Although sooner is generally considered better, it is worthy to note that receiving feedback five weeks after turning in the first assignment does not necessarily seem to have negatively affected student's perception of the feedback. It is possible that receiving feedback for the first assignment so late, which in turn meant that it was received closer to the second assignment's deadline, may have resulted in the feedback acting also as a feed-forward, helping students take action to improve. However, this must remain speculation at this point in time but further research into this may be helpful.

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Appendix

Könnun / Survey

A) Fyrirmæli / Instructions

Hugsaðu um upplestrarverkefni 1 (Eyrún og Albert) og 2 (mánuðirnir) sem þú gerðir fyrir áramót í Hljóð og hlustun I. Í upplestrarverkefnunum áttir þú að hlusta á upptöku af kennurum að lesa upp texta og taka þig svo sjálfan/sjálfa/sjálft upp að lesa sama texta.

Think about the upplestrarverkefni 1 (Eyrún og Albert) and 2 (the months) that you did last semester in Pronunciation and Listening I. In the upplestrarverkefni, you were to listen to recordings of teachers reading a text aloud and then record yourself reading the same text.

Vinsamlegast lestu öll fyrirmæli vel. Please read closely all the instructions.
Öll svör eru nafnlaus. All answers are anonymous.

B) Hópar / Groups.

1. **Í hvaða hópi varstu í Hljóði og hlustun I?** / In which group were you enrolled in Pronunciation and Listening I?

( ) 1, ( ) 2, ( ) 3, ( ) 4, ( ) 5, ( ) 6, ( ) 7, ( ) 8, ( ) 9, ( ) 10, ( ) 11, ( ) 12

C) Endurgjöf / Feedback

Svaraðu eftirfarandi spurningum út frá þeim verkefnum og endurgjöf sem þú fékkst frá kennara/aðstoðarkennara fyrir upplestrarverkefni 1 og 2. Endurgjöf má skilgreina sem þær athugasemdir sem nemandi fær á verkefni sín, hvort sem er skrifleg eða munnleg, í eigin persónu eða ekki.

Please answer the following questions keeping in mind the two assignments (upplestrarverkefni 1 and 2) and the feedback that you received from your teacher/assistant teacher for those assignments. Feedback can be defined as those comments that students get on their assignments, whether written or oral, in person or not.

Matskvarðar eru viðmið til að nota við yfirferð verkefna nemanda. Matskvarðar útskýra einkunnagjöf og hjálpa nemendum að skilja af hverju þeir fengu þá einkunn sem þeir fengu og hvernig þeir geti bætt sig.

Rubrics are guidelines for student assessments. Rubrics clarify any grading outcomes, helping students understand why they received their particular grade and how they can improve.

2. **Fékkstu endurgjöf fyrir verkefnin?** / Did you get feedback on the assignments?

( ) **Já** / Yes , ( ) **Nei** / No

3. **Lastu/hlustaðir þú á endurgjöfina?** / Did you read/listen to the feedback?
( ) **Já** / Yes , ( ) **Nei** / No

4. **Hvernig endurgjöf fékkstu? Veldu allt sem á við.** / Which type of feedback did you get? Choose all options that apply.
    - Skriflega (beint í Canvas) / Written (directly into Canvas)
    - Skriflega (í sérskjali) / Written (in a separate file)
    - Kennari fyllti inn í matskvarða / The teacher filled out a rubric
    - Munnlega (upptaka á Canvas) / Oral (recording on Canvas)
    - Munnlega (í tíma) / Oral (in class)

5. **Hvaða endurgjöf fannst þér hjálplegust? Veldu allt sem á við.** / Which type of feedback did you find to be the most helpful? Choose all options that apply.
    - **Skrifleg (beint í Canvas)** / Written (directly into Canvas)
    - **Skrifleg (í sérskjali)** / Written (in a separate file)
    - **Matskvarði sem kennari fyllti út** / The rubric that the teacher filled out
    - **Munnleg (upptaka á Canvas)** / Oral (recording on Canvas)
    - **Munnleg (í tíma)** / Oral (in class)
    - **Mér fannst endurgjöfin ekki hjálpleg** / I did not think the feedback was helpful
6. **Vinsamlegast veldu hversu mikið þú ert sammála eða ósammála eftirfarandi fullyrðingum.** / Please select how much you agree or disagree with the following statements.

Ég skildi endurgjöfina. / I understood the feedback.
( ) Strongly agree, ( ) Agree, ( ) Neutral, ( ) Disagree, ( ) Strongly disagree

7. **Ég notfærði mér endurgjöfina.** / I used the feedback.
( ) Strongly agree, ( ) Agree, ( ) Neutral, ( ) Disagree, ( ) Strongly disagree

8. **Ef þú notfærðir þér endurgjöfina, hvernig gerðirðu það?** / If you did use the feedback, how did you do that?
Svarið þitt: / Your answer:

D) Hæfniviðmið / Learning outcomes

Næst spyrjum við um hæfniviðmið. Hæfniviðmið eru staðhæfingar um það hvað nemandi kann eða á að geta gert að námskeiðinu loknu.

Next there are a few questions about learning outcomes. Learning outcomes are statements about what the student should know or be able to do at the end of the course.

Hæfniviðmiðin fyrir Hljóð og hlustun I voru eftirfarandi:

The learning outcomes for Pronunciation and Listening I were the following:

Markmiðið er að nemendur: / The objectives are that students:

- **tileinki sér framburð sérhljóða og samhljóða í samfelldu tali** / acquire the pronunciation of vowels and consonants in speech
- **tileinki sér grunnreglur um áherslu og tónfall í íslensku** / acquire and apply the basic intonation and stress patterns of Icelandic
- **geti lesið texta upphátt með eðlilegum framburði** / are able to read aloud with standard pronunciation

9. **Endurgjöfin hjálpaði mér að ná hæfniviðmiðunum.** / The feedback helped me achieve the learning outcomes

( ) Strongly agree, ( ) Agree, ( ) Neutral, ( ) Disagree, ( ) Strongly disagree

10. **Verkefnið hjálpaði mér að ná hæfniviðmiðunum**. / The assignment helped me achieve the learning outcomes

( ) Strongly agree, ( ) Agree, ( ) Neutral, ( ) Disagree, ( ) Strongly disagree

11. **Mér finnst ég hafa náð hæfniviðmiðum námskeiðsins.** / I feel like I achieved the learning outcomes of the course.

( ) Strongly agree, ( ) Agree, ( ) Neutral, ( ) Disagree, ( ) Strongly disagree

12. **Er eitthvað sem þú vilt segja um verkefnin eða endurgjöfina? Vilt þú fá öðruvísi endurgjöf? Hvernig?** / Is there anything you would like to add regarding the assignments or the feedback? Would you like a different type of feedback? What kind?

Svarið þitt: / Your answer:

The learning and teaching of grammar in second language instruction

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ABSTRACT

This article argues that insights from second language (L2) research regarding the natural and predictable development of certain linguistic aspects are crucial for L2 teaching. L2 teachers should not hesitate to deviate from the fixed structure of existing textbooks in order to make informed and reasoned didactic choices. Similarly, future authors of L2 textbooks should consider incorporating these findings. By doing so, L2 learners can greatly benefit from this approach, as it incorporates the latest knowledge in the field and enables them to learn something practical and significant for effective real-life communication. Furthermore, this approach fosters a sense of gradual mastery of the target language among L2 learners, which in turn enhances both motivation and satisfaction in achieving learning goals in the L2 context.

Keywords: *adjective inflection, developing second language skills, explicit instruction, grammar, second language research*

Explicit grammar instruction – why and why not?

In this article, I am going to share some thoughts about grammar instruction in second language (L2) teaching and learning. L2 practitioners may often observe that some learners may find L2 grammar extremely difficult to learn or boring. However, L2 practitioners cannot completely avoid the teaching of L2 grammar in their instructions, nor can L2 learners avoid learning the structure of language including some grammar rules, for instance for creating questions, which is necessary in order to be able to participate in a conversation. Similarly, scholars who emphasise the role of vocabulary the most also acknowledge that grammar is important. This famous quotation by Wilkins (1972) reflects this argument: "While without grammar very little can be conveyed, without vocabulary nothing can be conveyed" (pp. 111–112). As already highlighted, this does not mean that grammar is not important, also because of Puchta's (2019) argument: "[t]he point is obvious – in order to communicate and to become more articulate, learners need both [vocabulary and grammar]" (p. 208). Thus, the question is not one of whether grammar is important or not, but what grammar teaching methods are the most effective, and how L2

practitioners may help L2 learners to deal with grammar in a more engaging and motivating way. There is no unanimity neither among scholars, nor among practitioners in this field about the degree of explicit grammar instruction that is effective. Similarly, as learners learn languages in different ways, neither group can agree on the degree of explicit grammar instruction that is needed. For instance, a study of teachers' and students' attitudes towards explicit grammar instruction in the English as a foreign language (EFL) classroom was recently published (Frøisland et al., 2023), where the authors explored the beliefs of 405 learners and 17 teachers in primary and lower-secondary grades in Norway. They found that learners in the primary school, more specifically girls, had more positive beliefs about explicit grammar instruction than learners in the lower-secondary school, more specifically boys. The debate among scholars in the field of L2 language instruction has long been ongoing. An overview of this particular topic is available in research by Nordanger and Tonne (2018).

Some other scholars are, nonetheless, highly sceptical towards explicit grammar instruction and argue that grammar is best learned implicitly, i.e., by inferring what correct grammatical forms and structures are, both from exposure to the language through various forms of input (Krashen, 1985) and from the conversational context. Other scholars, on the other hand, argue that explicit grammar instruction may indeed be instrumental: "[v]i som lærarar må vere merksame på at eksplisitt undervising kan vere nødvendig" (we as teachers must bear in mind that explicit instruction may be indispensable) (Ragnhildstveit, 2021, p. 83). This means that when certain structures occur infrequently through the input, or when the learner's first language lacks grammatical categories that are present in the target language, explicit grammar instruction may help the learners make sense of how the target language works.

When applying explicit grammar teaching, some practical questions may arise. For instance, which grammar rules and exceptions should be focused on, at what stage, in which order and to what extent L2 instructors should teach these rules to their learners. These all are big questions that obviously cannot be answered in this short article. But to highlight the relevance of teaching grammar in L2 courses, I will focus on one single aspect: can the order in which certain grammar rules are taught contribute to a more successful learning? Reasoning about this issue will strengthen the hypothesis that some explicit grammar teaching may contribute both to increased motivation for learning the target language and to increased satisfaction from achieving learning goals in the L2. I will use adjective morphology in Norwegian as an example to demonstrate this.

Norwegian as a second language: development of adjective morphology

Research in the field of L2 acquisition has shown that the development of L2 skills goes through various stages, which to a certain degree are predictable in spite of a great deal of individual variation in learning styles of L2 learners. This is reflected in the following citation:

Selv om det kan være store individuelle variasjoner i innlæringen av et nytt språk, er det gjort studier som peker på at det når det gjelder innlæring av enkelte språktrekk, finnes regelmessige læringsforløp som er de samme fra innlærer til innlærer uavhengig av morsmålsbakgrunn.

(Although there can be significant individual differences in the process of learning a new language, studies that have been carried out, show that there are regular learning paths for certain language features that remain consistent among learners, irrespective of their native language background.)

(Danbolt & Palm, 2021, p. 245)

With regard to learning L2 Norwegian, researchers (Berggreen et al., 2012; Rønning et al., 2020; Sørland, 2020) have come to the following two conclusions about the development of adjective morphology in texts produced by young L2 learners: 1) comparison forms of adjectives are easier to acquire than agreement; and 2) in agreement, plural forms of adjectives are acquired first, earlier than definiteness and gender inflection. Supporting arguments for both conclusions are presented here below.

Comparison forms of adjectives are easier to acquire than agreement

Comparison (i.e., the use of positive, comparative, and superlative degree) forms of adjectives are easier to acquire than agreement (also known as concord):

I norsk har vi to typar bøying for adjektiva: gradbøying og samsvarsbøying. Gradbøyinga har trekka positive-komparativ-superlativ. Formålet med kategorien er å kunne samanlikne. Det er noko vi har bruk for å kunne gjere på alle språk. Kategorien er både vanleg, avgrensa og tydeleg. Dessutan er det få former å halde styr på. Til saman gjer dette at gradbøying ikkje utgjer eit uoverstigeleg problem for innlærarar. Samsvarsbøyinga, derimot, er vanskeleg å overskode.

(In Norwegian, there are two types of inflection for adjectives: comparison and agreement inflection. Comparison involves the positive, the comparative, and the superlative degree. This grammatical category allows for comparing which is a necessary aspect in all languages. The category is common, well-defined, and clear. Additionally, there are only a few forms to keep track of, making comparison

manageable for learners. On the other hand, agreement poses a more challenging concept to comprehend.)
(Rønning et al., 2020, pp. 213–214)

In agreement, plural forms of adjectives are acquired first, earlier than definiteness and gender inflection

When it comes to agreement inflection, plural forms of adjectives are acquired first, earlier than definiteness and gender inflection. Besides, agreement is first acquired in the attributive position, while agreement in the predicative position takes a longer time to acquire:
Erfaringsmessig kommer tallbøyinga på plass først (...)*, mens bestemthet og genusbøying kommer seinere. Dette samsvarer godt med funnene i en stor skandinavisk studie* (...) *av adjektivbøying i dansk, norsk og svensk. Her fant en at tallbøying mestres før genusbøying. Dessuten læres samsvarsbøying tidligst i attributiv stilling* (gult hus)*, predikativ stilling* (huset er gult) *kommer seinere.*
(Based on experience, number inflection is typically learned first (...), while definiteness and gender inflection come later. This aligns well with the findings of a large-scale Scandinavian study (...) on adjective inflection in Danish, Norwegian and Swedish. The study revealed that number inflection is mastered before gender inflection. Additionally, agreement inflection is learned earliest in attributive position (*gult hus*), while its use in predicative position (*huset er gult*) comes later.)
(Berggreen et al., 2012, p. 81)

This developmental pattern – comparison before agreement, and number inflection before definiteness and gender – is definitely not unexpected, given what we know (or assume) about what is easy and what is difficult to learn. In his chapter on the lexical level of L2 texts, Kjartan Sørland states the following:
Adjektivbøying kan tjene som et eksempel på at ikke-funksjonelle størrelser læres seint. Samsvarsbøying av adjektiv (når det gjelder genus og bestemthet) har ikke noe «reelt» innhold, det er bare en type grammatisk markering som viser underordning i frasen, i motsetning til tallbøying av substantiv.
(Adjective inflection can serve as an example of non-functional features being learned late. Agreement inflection of adjectives (when it comes to gender and definiteness) has no “real” content, it is just a type of grammatical marking that shows subordination within the phrase, in contrast to the number inflection of nouns.)
(Bergreen et al., 2012, p. 829)

In accordance with the above, the question the L2 instructors should ask is how these insights from research may – and even should – be used in the L2 classroom. One way of reasoning about this could be that the features that learners

typically have difficulties to acquire are gender inflection and use of definite forms, especially when adjectives are used as the predicative in a sentence. These specific features seem to require most time and attention in the L2 Norwegian learning. Eventually, this kind of reasoning could lead to the argument that such features should be introduced early, heavily focused on, and repeated frequently to secure increased input and therefore relatively sufficient attention. Based on my experience in L2 instruction, however, I will provide a counter argument that opposes this view. Starting instruction with something that many learners find difficult to learn and that is "non-functional" in real-life communication, seems unnecessarily complicated. **Huset er gammel* (The house is old) and **Bilen er nytt* (The car is new) are examples of intentionally ungrammatical sentences due to the lack of agreement between the noun's gender and the adjective's gender. However, despite this grammatical mismatch, they remain completely functional and easily comprehensible. This is because the gender of the adjective does not correspond to anything in the real world; it simply reflects the relationship between the adjective and the noun within the sentence. A sentence such as **Det er varm i Madrid enn i Reykjavík* (*It is warm in Madrid than in Reykjavík) is, by contrast, more problematic regarding the correct understanding. This is because the speaker applies a positive degree form of the adjective *varm* (warm) instead of the comparative form *varmere* (warmer) which would be in accordance with the usual use in the target language. This poses a question about which meaning the speaker intended to actually convey. Such a sentence may become even more confusing if the speaker forgets to use the subjunction *enn* (than) or, even worse, when the speaker uses *som* (as) instead, which, based on my experience as an L2 Norwegian instructor – is a relatively common mistake by L2 Norwegian learners.

The examples above demonstrate that introducing the comparative forms of adjectives, such as *varm–varmere* (warm–warmer), early in the teaching of adjective morphology may be more practical and beneficial than introducing the gender forms and definite forms of adjectives. Introducing the comparative degree of adjectives at an earlier stage of instruction can offer several advantages to learners. Firstly, learners can acquire something both useful and essential from a communicative standpoint. Comparative forms of adjectives are vital as they allow speakers to make comparisons between different things or characteristics. Secondly, learners can experience a sense of accomplishment in mastering communication skills in the target language. This achievement can contribute to increased motivation for learning the language and greater satisfaction in attaining learning goals in the L2. However, many textbooks on L2 Norwegian often present these aspects of adjective morphology in the reverse order. They typically introduce gender and definiteness (both in attributive and predicative positions) in early

chapters, while covering comparative and superlative forms of adjectives much later in the textbooks.

Conclusion

The take-away message from this article could be the following: L2 instructions should make themselves familiar with second language research findings in their respective languages and consider freeing themselves from a fixed structure in an L2 textbook. Future textbook authors should consider taking into account findings from L2 research about natural and predictable learning and development paths. This can be concluded by the following citation:

Det at utviklinga er føreseieleg, har jo også store pedagogiske konsekvensar. Veit læraren noko om kva som er naturleg utvikling, vil det ha mykje å seie for didaktiske val. Ei slik innsikt gjer det mogeleg å leggje opp for ein fornuftig og realistisk progresjon i undervisninga.

(The fact that the development is predictable also has major pedagogic consequences. If the teacher knows something about what natural development is, it will have a lot to say for their didactic choices. Such an insight makes it possible to plan for a sensible and realistic progression in teaching.)

(Sørland, 2020, p. 222)

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Icelandic Online for Children: Developing a web-based interactive course to enhance reading skills in L2 Icelandic for young learners

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ABSTRACT

This article reports on the development of "Icelandic Online – Börn" (Icelandic Online for Children), a web-based course designed for children aged 5–7 years, to support the learning of Icelandic as a second language (L2) via reading. This web-based course has 7 lessons with 332 comprehensive interactive exercises to enhance different language skills, specifically reading. Interactive storytelling, immediate positive feedback, reward system, progress bar, and authentic cultural content belong to its main features. Although designed for L2 learning, it is also suitable for enhancing the native Icelandic (L1) language skills of young learners. Real-world education settings and child language acquisition theories contributed to its content development. Initial pilot testing helped in improving its overall experience before the course's launch. The discussion reports about seven innovative elements used in its design. Further studies need to be conducted to assess the courses' usability and the language learning experience.

Keywords: *child language acquisition, Icelandic Online – Börn, Icelandic as a second language, interactive storytelling approach, reading skills*

Introduction

This article describes the design process of the freely available interactive web-based course for children *Icelandic Online - Börn* (https://born.icelandiconline.com/). The initiative to develop such a web-based course arose from the needs of a continually growing population in Iceland with the immigration influx representing 17,9% in 2023[1]. It is worth mentioning that the number of children with a diverse linguistic and cultural background in primary schools in the capital area alone has increased by approximately 30% between

[1] https://www.statice.is/publications/news-archive/inhabitants/population-in-the-2nd-quarter-2023/#:~:text=Foreign%20citizens%20were%2070%2C540%2C%20or,of%20the%20second%20quarter%202023

2020 and 2023[2]. The intent is thus to assist children aged 5-7 in both target groups in developing their Icelandic skills at early stages. This is because children typically acquire literacy skills during early age (Niklas et al., 2016), whether in their L1 or L2. Finding suitable online resources can, however, be challenging. The research by Kristjánsdóttir (2023) reports that more than 180 Icelandic families living with their children in other countries encounter some challenges when it comes to finding suitable resources for learning L2 Icelandic on the Internet. This finding is reconfirmed by Bédi & Hopkins (2022), who report that despite discovering 336 different online resources for learning L1 and L2 Icelandic for children, these resources are scattered across the Internet, making it difficult for parents to find and select suitable materials for their children according to age and language level.

As outlined by UNESCO, recognizing both the importance of language instruction in early childhood and the access to educational resources contributes to preserving the world's linguistic diversity (Ball, 2011). This is especially important in a country with strong economic growth such as Iceland, which needs immigrant workers to meet demands for labour in fast-growing sectors, while improving the integration of these labour groups and their children into society (Koutsogeorgopoulou, 2023). Language integration for children is crucial as they are starting their education in a new country. In December 2018, the Minister of Education and Culture, in her proposal to the Parliament, stated that "Strengthening and supporting the teaching environment of [the already existing course for adults learning L2 Icelandic] *Icelandic Online*[3] (IOL) is necessary so that it better meets the needs of children and young people" (Alfreðsdóttir, 2018). Currently, IOL is an established and very successful open online course that is freely available to L2 Icelandic adult learners. Its development began in 2000 and it offers six courses for beginners to advanced levels, with an infrastructure that is adaptable to learning other languages such as L2 Faroese and Finland Swedish (Arnbjörnsdóttir et al., 2020).

Icelandic Online for Children builds on the infrastructure of IOL for adult learners, but has its content adapted to better suit the purposes of self-directed study of L2 young learners. The following section gives a brief overview of similar online resources for learning L1 and L2 Icelandic for children, but reports about the differences compared to IOL for Children. The consequent section about methodology describes the approaches used in designing this web-based course, while concluding remarks are discussed in the final section.

[2] https://reykjavik.is/en/news/increased-support-children-foreign-origin
[3] https://icelandiconline.com

A brief overview of online resources for L2 Icelandic for children

Although there are about 19 websites currently listing 336 different types of resources, e.g., PDF documents with stories for reading, links to electronic and audio books, various video resources and online websites, only several of these are interactive in nature with gamification features (Bédi & Hopkins, 2022). Kristjánsdóttir (2023) reports that *Orðagull*[4] (2016) is one of the most popular online applications frequently used by Icelandic families living abroad to support the L2 Icelandic development of children. This application is freely available on mobile devices and is originally designed by speech therapists to support vocabulary acquisition, listening, reading, and speaking skills specifically in L1 Icelandic. The application includes 114 simple interactive exercises with options for turning on and off the accompanying sound, voice for listening to words and sentences, displaying the accompanying text for reading, and the recording of the learner's own voice for self-listening. The main tasks are reading and listening to instructions: 1) to colour in specific images on the displayed page, 2) to check comprehension about performing tasks, and 3) to match correct vocabulary with displayed items. This application includes gamification features by collecting stars to mark the completion of lessons and includes an overview page. Feedback is provided only in some cases by highlighting specific tasks that have been correctly executed. This application was designed based on the L1 speech therapy book for children at preschool and elementary school level previously published by the same authors in 2010, but the authors recommend this application also to L2 learners of other age levels, including adults.

Myndmál[5] (2012) is a website available as a web app (2016) with paid access, and is designed for L1 speech therapy for children at preschool and elementary school levels. Its content assists with vocabulary acquisition, listening and speaking exercises in three categories: 1) a free trial version with voice recordings of images that learners can only listen to; 2) a paid home version, which includes voice recordings of images with accompanying text that learners can read while listening to the voice recordings; and 3) a paid school version, which includes both the text along with the voice recordings describing the images, and the printable lists suitable for reading at schools to help teachers assess reading skills of children. The trial version does not include any gamification features, or feedback options, and it has 24 different vocabulary lists with voice recordings of displayed images. Feedback for completing tasks is not available and there is no information about other versions offering it. The authors of this website recommend it to both

[4] https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=is.rosamosi.ordagullremaster&hl=is
[5] https://www.myndmal.is/sites/forsida.php#whatis

L1 and L2 children at preschool and elementary school level, or even L2 adult beginner learners.

The series of three mobile applications *Georg og félagar*[6] (George and friends) (2014), *Georg og leikirnir*[7] (George and the games) (2015), and *Georg og klukkan*[8] (George and the clock) (2018), is freely available and assists learners with understanding the alphabet and numbers, simple mathematics, and the clock, in this respective order. All three apps include simple games with tasks. The learners collect points for completing each lesson, but other kinds of feedback are not available. These applications were designed for L1 children aged 4–8 years to practise various language and knowledge skills, but are often recommended by other users for L2 learning.

The Directorate of Education[9] offers access to fourteen interactive websites that assist with learning about the clock, the alphabet, basic vocabulary, spelling, reading, and listening to children's books, and ideas for exercises about reading comprehension. The content on these websites consists of vocabulary lists, listening to sounds, electronic books, and simple exercises for practising the basics of Icelandic Sign Language (ÍTM). Some of these interactive websites include a progress bar, gamification features, and overview pages. All of them are designed for children of different age levels, for learning L1 and L2 Icelandic, and for introducing the ÍTM.

The examples here were selected because of their interactive nature; they are relatively short courses with varied pedagogical foci, mainly designed for speech therapy of L1 but some for learning L2 Icelandic. Compared to Icelandic Online for Children, which includes seven lessons with 332 comprehensive interactive exercises with immediate positive feedback, highlighted parts of text for listening, authentic cultural elements, and characters appropriate to the learners' age, a reward system and progress bar, only some of the above mentioned examples are freely available or have been developed with a specific focus for enhancing reading skills in L2 Icelandic for children, or are designed so as to include authentic cultural elements. They are nonetheless good representations of modern online tools with features representing good supplementary resources in L2 online. The following section presents the design process of Icelandic Online for Children.

[6] https://apps.apple.com/us/app/georg-og-félagar/id885638618
[7] https://apps.apple.com/us/app/georg-og-leikirnir/id1042234259
[8] https://apps.apple.com/us/app/georg-og-klukkan/id1337002750
[9] https://mms.is/krakkavefir

Design methodology

The development and design process of Icelandic Online for Children is divided into five stages: preparatory work, scriptwriting and content design, adapting the platform IOL to the learning needs of children, multimedia content, testing, reviewing, and launching the new online tool.

Preparatory work

Following the identification of the target group and the main pedagogical objectives, the research phase began, focusing on relevant material and resources. Various books and language-learning materials intended for the same or similar target groups were examined, including a range of online courses and language apps designed for young English L1 and L2 learners. The team also conducted a brief observational study of reading and writing classes at a nearby preschool and elementary school to become familiar with how Icelandic is taught to children from families of foreign origin. This approach was combined with reviewing the official curriculum for preschools. The Directorate of Education runs a website dedicated to literacy, providing an extensive collection of resources which was subsequently utilised in our course curriculum design, such as a vocabulary list for pre-schoolers (Pálsdóttir, 2017). Both the Icelandic National Curriculum Guide for Preschools (2011) and the proficiency criteria at the end of the 4th grade according to The Icelandic National Curriculum Guide for Compulsory Schools (2012) served as the main guidelines for designing our course curriculum. At the end of this phase, a draft of a course curriculum was outlined, containing seven online courses. An advisory committee, consisting of specialists in the fields of literacy and language education reviewed this outline.

Scriptwriting and content design

A team consisting of two writers commenced writing the content and the storyline. According to the outline, the initial two lessons concentrate on learning the letters and sounds of the alphabet, and basic reading skills of individual words with examples of their pronunciation, including on average 70 interactive tasks. Lessons three to seven are narrative-driven, each centred around different themes and contain 40–48 interactive tasks in reading, writing, listening, and reading comprehension. Each lesson is structured into 8 chapters, thus ensuring a consistent pattern for the learners, creating predictability and rhythm.

The script incorporates cultural elements and landscapes to establish a meaningful and relevant context for the learners. The central characters in the script are age-appropriate, all of them indigenous Icelandic animals: a polar fox, an earthworm, a plover bird, and a reindeer. Lessons two through seven feature stories

crafted around these characters. The script furthermore includes detailed information about the content and functionality of each activity, with detailed descriptions of the resources needed, e.g., visuals, videos, and sound files. The script, visuals, audio files, itineraries, and other documents were saved in a shared online workspace (Google Drive) and made accessible to all team members. An editorial board, consisting of the scriptwriters along with three additional specialists, held regular meetings to review and adapt the script.

Adapting the platform Icelandic Online to the learning needs of children

The IOL platform was adapted to better serve the distinct learning needs of children. The interactive exercise patterns were customised to better align with their requirements, ensuring that all activities were easy to navigate for both children and their parents, who often accompany children on their self-directed learning path. One of the key features developed is a motivational system with gamification features. At regular intervals, learners receive rewards in the form of collectible rewards (fruits) for completing each task, to encourage their continued engagement. A progress bar was included as a visual indicator of the learner's progress. Instructions for each learning activity are provided by a character in the shape of an owl, both in written and audible form. The web-based course includes previews of each lesson and an interactive table of contents for a more convenient overview.

Multimedia content

Using the interactive storytelling approach (Crawford, 2012), considerable effort was dedicated to creating an engaging visual appeal for the website to captivate children's attention. A skilled graphic designer, with expertise in creating illustrations for children, was brought on board to design the main visuals and serve as an art director for the website (Figure 1). A multimedia artist was hired to produce short videos that featured widely in the courses and to conduct audio recordings. Many of the visuals for the learning exercises were assembled and altered to fit the activities by other members of the team. The course creators, colleagues, friends, and family members lent their voices to the main characters of the website.

Testing, reviewing, and launching the new online tool

Throughout the development process, Icelandic Online – Börn was regularly reviewed and pilot tested by children within the target age groups, leading to improvements in the final version. The final proofreading and testing of the program was conducted by language students at the University of Iceland. In the spring of 2022, as the project neared its completion, it underwent a comprehensive review at the Directorate of Education that resulted in minor adjustments. After a few months

of troubleshooting, final repair, and hosting procedures, the website was launched in April 2023.

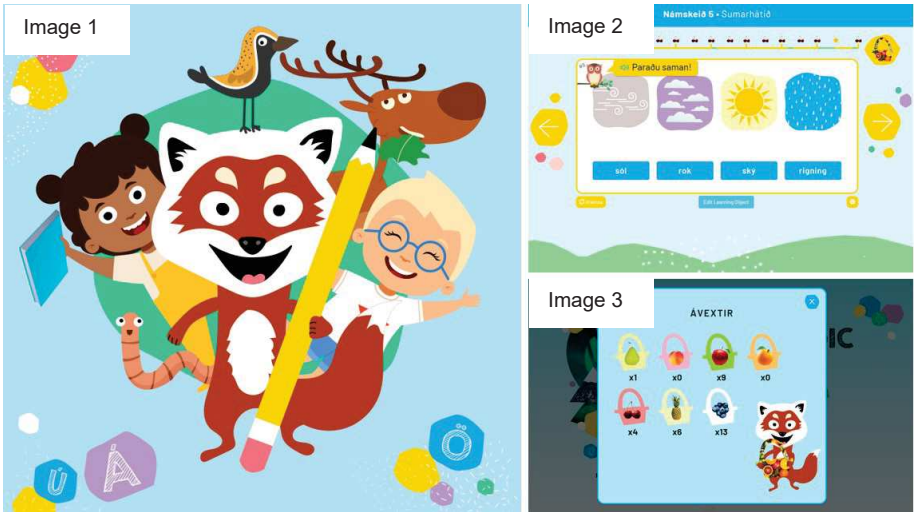

Figure 1. Image 1 demonstrates the main characters of Icelandic Online for Children. Image 2 is an example of a learning activity with a progress bar located above the actual exercise. The owl character in the upper left corner provides both written and audible instructions. Image 3 shows a page displaying all the rewards in the form of fruit (ávextir) that have been collected by the learner for successfully completed tasks.

Conclusion

This article highlights the different approach taken when designing the web-based course Icelandic Online for Children, developed for enhancing L2 Icelandic reading skills. There are seven main innovative elements helping children acquire their reading skills in this web-based course: 1) Crawford's (2012) interactive storytelling approach was applied to create a narrative structure throughout the course, with engaging storylines in each lesson; 2) across seven lessons with different learning topics, 332 comprehensive interactive exercises were distributed to practise various language skills with a special focus on reading; 3) immediate positive feedback and a reward system were implemented to motivate learners to stay engaged and complete the tasks; 4) the content includes authentic features to ensure relevance in teaching the target language; 5) although developed for L2 learners, this web-based course can also be used by L1 learners to enhance their reading and language skills; 6) observational studies in reading classes with L2 children at preschool and elementary school level in real-world setting, combined with established theories in child language acquisition, helped inform about the pedagogical structure of the course content; and 7) initial pilot testing with learners

of similar age provided insights that helped to improve the course's overall usability and learning experience. Due to lack of space, this article only reports on the design process and compares the features of Icelandic Online for Children to those in similar online tools developed mainly for L1 Icelandic speech therapy for children. The design of Icelandic Online for Children is innovative in its nature because it represents a holistic approach to L2 language learning that is immersive, interactive, and informed by real-world and educational research, and can represent a new standard for developing similar web-based language learning tools for children. Further studies, however, need to be conducted to assess learners' perception and their learning experience, and to compare the pedagogical relevance of this tool with other state-of-the-art L2 tools worldwide.

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"The collection is an important contribution to the field of language teaching. It shows the wide variety of tasks and problems that second language teachers deal with in the classroom. The papers present work on topics such as the teaching of pronunciation, on-line classrooms, community-based learning, and the implementation of different teaching strategies."

- Helga Hilmisdóttir

"The compilation 'Novel Techniques and Approaches in Language Teaching' (NoTALaT) contains a diverse collection of short papers from the NoTALaT Conference held in Reykjavík on May 16-17 2024. Each paper in this collection brings unique insights into various aspects of second and foreign language teaching."

- Libor Pavera