



Learning languages virtually at upper secondary level

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Liisa Ilomäki ja Minna Lakkala <u>liisa.ilomaki@helsinki.fi</u> ja <u>minna.lakkala@helsinki.fi</u> Faculty of Educational Sciences, Technology in Education Research Group (TEdu) University of Helsinki

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liisa.ilomaki@helsinki.fi

A teacher in a virtual classroom



 A research and development project, which aims to support both teacher students and inservice teachers in the competence of virtual teaching.

A subproject of "Building sustainable researchbased teacher education and creative skills for teachers" 2017- 2019 in the University of Helsinki.

Funded by Ministry of Education and Culture.

- Partners Technology in Education research Group and Tutorhouse (a private company).

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Opetus- ja

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ministeriet

Virtual classroom:

Online-lessons in a student group, following a class schedule, lead by a teacher, independent homework.



Participation possible from anywhere.

Network connection, a computer, a microphone and a camera needed.

Combines the advantages of face-to-face and online teaching.

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All communication through digital environment and tools



A student's view in the virtual class



Pedagogical practices and virtual teaching: previous research and understanding

- For learning, various characteristics support effective and meaningful learning: e.g., authenticity, collaboration with peers, support for metacognition, engagement and task-related motivation. Also in virtual teaching the pedagogical practices should support these characteristics. (Herrington & Oliver, 2000; Herrington, Reeves & Oliver, 2014; Iiskala, Vauras, Lehtinen & Salonen, 2011; Järvelä, Renninger, 2014; Järvelä, Järvenoja, & Veermans, 2008; Paavola, Lakkala, Muukkonen, Kosonen & Karlgren, 2011; Rajala, Martin & Kumpulainen, 2016).
- Virtuality as one new element in learning and teaching.
- Virtual teaching competence is especially important for language teachers (in Finland)
- Affordances in the learning environment: which activities are supported, which are impossible.

HELSINGIN YLIOPISTO HELSINGFORS UNIVERSITET T Teacher's role in designing the course (Lakkala, Ilomäki, & UNIVERSITY OF HELSINKI

The research questions of the study

- What are upper secondary level students' and teachers' perceptions of virtual language learning?
- 1. What are the specific characteristics of practices in virtual teaching and studying?

Methods and participants

An explorative study; not yet found similar context in research.

A questionnaire to students and teachers concerning virtual studying and teaching; filled after a course, 2018-2019.

Observations of lessons and interviews 2018 (5 teachers). Not yet analysed, in this presentation only preliminary reflections.

77 students; 58 females, 18 males, 1 other

5 teachers, 1 male, 4 females. Age varied between 28 - 61, mean 45.2, teaching experience varied between 3 - 40, mean 21.6. Altogether 14 courses.

Preliminary solution of six factors

1. Organisation of the course, 7 statements, e.g., *I knew well what was intended to do.*

2. Support for study skills, 5 statements, e.g., *I learned to evaluate my study skills.*

3. Challenges, 5 statements, e.g., *The level of challenges in the assignments was good.*

4. Own activity, 5 statements, e.g., *I was more active than in an ordinary classroom*

5. Sense of community, 3 statements, e.g., *The teacher helped us to know each other better*

6. Use of digital technology, 5 statements, e.g., *Digital technology* supported group work

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Students' and teachers' perceptions of the courses



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Students' answers to open questions: Positive or impressive (159)

Way of studying (67 / 42.1%): relaxed (11), flexible (10), easy (9), nice (9), effective (9), peaceful / quiet working conditions (7), positive experience (6), multifaceted (3), functional and natural (3)

Teaching practices (50 / 31.4%): good and encouraging teacher (13), course in general (8), good teaching methods (7), scaffolding and guidance (5), timetable (5), good assignments (4), appropriate level of challenge (3), learning materials (3), course content (2)

Benefits (30 / 18.9%): possibility for studying (15), learning new about the subject (8), learning daring and courage (4), experience of studying (virtually) (3)

Sense of community (10 / 6.3%): interaction (7), group assignments (2), small group (1)

Digital tools (2 / 1.3%): functioning tools (2)



Students' answers to open questions: Challenging or disturbing (87)

Way of studying (25 / 28.7%): own use of time (19), demands for self-regulation (5)

Teaching practices (17 / 19.5%): bad teaching methods (9), time of lessons (8)

Challenges (17 / 19.5%): rapid progress (7), challenging content (6), burdensome lessons (4)

Sense of community (11 / 12.6%): group assignments (6), social distance (4), too close / dense interaction (1)

Digital tools (17 / 19.5%): technical problems (16), use of technology (1)



Would you recommend studying in the virtual class to other students?

Answer	N	%
Yes	46	59.7
Conditionally	22	28.6
No	3	3.9
No clear answer	6	7.8
AII	77	100

Discussion and conclusions

- In general, students were satisfied with the experience of participating in a virtual course and they were ready to recommend it also to others.
- Students were a special group: studying "rare" languages, majority were girls, own initiative needed to find out the possibility of studying virtually and to announce the interest for it, maybe as the only one in the local school. This has certainly affected their own and virtual teachers' experiences.

Discussion and conclusions

- Collaboration and forming of the sense of community need to be supported better - a challenge for virtuality. Based on observations, the lessons are (too) easily teacher-centered.
- Similarly study skills should be promoted more.
- The affordances of virtual learning environments need to be analysed, too, because they promote certain pedagogical practices.
- In this study, teachers' perceptions (final analysis of the data) will certainly enrich the understanding of the challenges of virtual teaching.

Discussion and conclusions

Challenges especially in teaching languages virtually:

- How to bring out "the culture" of the language?
- How to support speaking and pronunciation?
- To be demanding but not too much (a kind of Hamlet-like problem): students should learn but if the challenges, work load etc. are too much, students will not prioritise these "extra" courses and they leave the course.

Success and next steps

- Several small and creative pedagogical practices invented and developed during these two years.
- A virtual "teacher room" is needed for teachers' collaboration and sharing.
- So-called design patterns will be created to help teachers in designing virtual courses. Design patterns give hints to standard problems, like "How to improve the sense of community?" or "How to support students' speaking with phonetic knowledge".



THANK YOU!

Contacts: Liisa Ilomäki (<u>liisa.ilomaki@helsinki.fi</u>), Minna Lakkala (<u>minna.lakkala@helsinki.fi</u>)

A blog about the project (in Finnish): <u>http://blogs.helsinki.fi/digiluokkatutkimus/</u>

HELSINGIN YLIOPISTO HELSINGFORS UNIVERSITET UNIVERSITY OF HELSINKI liisa.ilomaki@helsinki.fi



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