



Marina Pavlovic

Gaining Finnish language skills and Social Services professionals' com- petences in English-language de- gree programme

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Author	Marina Pavlovic
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<p>The upcoming curriculum of Degree Programme in Social Services (DPSS) for autumn 2023 has been renewed. The goal of this thesis is to examine the experiences of DPSS alumni on the content of the previous curriculum, and how the DPSS programme prepares the students for the working life in social services. The thesis emphasizes how sufficient the Finnish language education was perceived in an English-language degree programme and how the graduates' skills suffice for working in social services from the point of view of professionals already working there. The need for this thesis arose from the working life partner with the change of the DPSS curriculum.</p> <p>Previous studies on the importance of the Finnish language in working life in social services and on the adequacy of Finnish language teaching in English-language degrees in social services serve as the background information in this thesis. The thesis data were two different surveys conducted by DPSS. In the surveys altogether 31 professionals working in social services and DPSS alumni took part. Qualitative content analysis is used as a method for examining the survey data. In addition, the differences between the old and new DPSS curriculum are presented.</p> <p>The results show that in most of the working places in social services, Finnish language skills are required and under the employee's responsibility. In early childhood education, in workplaces where languages other than Finnish are spoken, English language skills might suffice. Workplaces find broad knowledge of languages valuable and offer various work tools, such as interpretation services. Answers of the surveys show that several DPSS graduates found the teaching of the Finnish insufficient. The graduates felt that it was possible to gain Finnish language skills in other ways, for example during work placements and subject-matter courses. The recent graduates perceived they had good basic skills to work in social services but the development of the teaching of interaction skills was requested. In particular, there was a request for teaching skills, on how to work in different challenging client situations. More Finnish language courses have now been added to the new DPSS curriculum and the work placements have been given a more language-emphasized perspective.</p> <p>The increase of Finnish language teaching may affect the development of the other social services competences. The success of the reform can be assessed when the students graduate in the reformed DPSS programme. Further research is then needed on, whether the DPSS curriculum meets working life needs in the social sector.</p>	
Keywords	Social services, Finnish language skills, English-degree programme, curriculum, social services professionals' competences

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<p>Englanninkielinen sosiaalialan tutkinto-ohjelma (eng. Degree Programme in Social Services, lyhennettynä DPSS) on uudistamassa opintosuunnitelmaa syksyille 2023. Tämän opinnäytetyön tavoitteena on kartoittaa DPSS-tutkinto-ohjelmasta valmistuneiden kokemuksia aiemman opintosuunnitelman sisällöstä ja millä tavalla tämä tutkinto-ohjelma valmistaa työelämää sosiaalialalla varten. Opinnäytetyö painottaa, miten suomen kielen opetus koettiin riittäväksi englanninkielisessä opetuksessa ja miten vastavalmistuneiden taidot riittävät sosiaalialalla työskentelyyn jo työelämässä olevien näkökulmasta. Tarve tutkielmaan syntyi yhteistyökumppani DPSS-tutkinto-ohjelmalta DPSS-opintosuunnitelman uudistamisen myötä.</p> <p>Taustatietoina tässä tutkimuksessa toimivat aiemmat tutkimukset suomen kielen tärkeydestä työelämässä sosiaalialalla sekä suomen kielen opetuksen riittävydestä englanninkielisessä sosiaalialan tutkinto-ohjelmassa. Opinnäytetyön tutkimuksen aineistona toimii kaksi eri DPSS-tutkinto-ohjelman suorittamaa kyselyä, joihin osallistui yhteensä 31 sosiaalialalla työskentelevää ammattilaista ja DPSS aluminiä. Menetelmänä aineiston tutkimisessa käytetään laadullista sisällönanalyysiä. Lisäksi esitetään erot uudistuneen ja vanhan DPSS opintosuunnitelmien välillä.</p> <p>Tulokset osoittavat, että sosiaalialalla suurimmassa osassa työpaikoissa suomen kielen taito on vaatimuksena ja työntekijän vastuulla. Varhaiskasvatuksessa muun kuin suomenkielisessä työpaikoissa englannin kielitaito saattaa olla riittävä. Työpaikat kokevat laajemmankin kielen osaamisen arvokkaana ja tarjoavat erilaisia työvälineitä, kuten tulkkauspalveluita. Kyselyiden vastauksista käy ilmi, että useat DPSS-tutkinto-ohjelmasta valmistuneet eivät kokeneet suomen kielen opetusta riittävänä. Valmistuneet kokivat tehokkaiksi tavoiksi kasvattaa suomen kielen osaamistaan muulla tavoin, esimerkiksi työharjoitteluissa ja substanssi-kursseilla. Vastavalmistuneilla koettiin olevan hyvät perusvalmiudet työskentelemään sosiaalialalla, mutta vuorovaikutustaitojen opetuksen kehittämistä toivottiin. Erityisesti toivottiin lisää osaamista haastavissa asiakastilanteissa toimimiseen. Uuteen DPSS-opintosuunnitelmaan on lisätty suomen kielen kursseja ja työharjoitteluihin on otettu enemmän kieleen painottava näkökulma.</p> <p>DPSS-opintosuunnitelman uudistamiselle on suomen kielen kannalta ollut tarvetta. Riskinä on, että kun suomen kielen opetuksen määrää kasvatetaan, niin tämä saattaa vaikuttaa muiden sosiaalialan osaamisalueiden kehittymiseen. Uudistuksen onnistumista voidaan arvioida vasta, kun uudistuneessa DPSS-tutkinto-ohjelmassa opiskelleita on valmistunut. Tällöin on tarvetta jatkokutimukselle, vastaako uusi DPSS-opintosuunnitelma työelämän tarpeisiin sosiaalialalla.</p>	
Avainsanat	Sosiaaliala, suomen kielen taito, englanninkielinen tutkinto-ohjelma, opetussuunnitelma, sosionomin kompetenssit

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1 Introduction

Finnish language knowledge in social services is of immense importance. Tarnanen & Pöyhönen (2013, pp. 139-140) state that language skills are the key to equal opportunities in society and enable better opportunities for studying and finding employment in a foreign country. To find employment in social services, adequate Finnish language skills are required.

On the other hand, there is a severe labor shortage in the social and healthcare sector in Finland because Finnish population is aging rapidly. In the next fifteen years, Finland needs 200 000 employees in the social and healthcare sector (Tevameri, 2021, pp. 49-50). This goal is impossible to reach without the help of workforce of immigrant background and international students (Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment of Finland, n.d.).

To improve the situation, the Finnish government has put the requirement that international students in Finland should be tripled up to 15.000 and 75 % of these students should stay in Finland (Valtioneuvosto, p. 21).

Metropolia University of Applied Sciences educates experts in social and health care field and offers Degree Programme in Social Services (abbreviated as DPSS) studies conducted in English language. In DPSS study both, Finnish students and students of foreign backgrounds who speak Finnish as a second language. That means that these students learn and use the Finnish language in a Finnish-speaking environment (Jäppinen, 2010, p.4). It could be assumed that these students would like to find employment in social services in Finland after graduation.

Metropolia University of Applied Sciences has removed requirements for prerequisites in Finnish language knowledge and increased the number of study places. It seems that this has attracted international students. The number of applicants for DPSS studies in the joint application of spring 2023 was 1305. Altogether, Metropolia University of Applied Sciences offers 35 study places for DPSS in autumn 2023 (Aaltonen & Forss, 2023). A high amount of applicants and an increased number of study places contribute to the government's goals and improving the labor shortage in social services.

Students with no previous knowledge in Finnish language will study the Finnish language from the beginning and should within 3.5 years of studies gain adequate language skills for the future working life in social services. The priority in the studies is however learning the content and gaining professional competences for working in social services. Gaining adequate Finnish language skills and professional competences in the scope of DPSS might be very challenging.

I present previous studies on gaining Finnish language skills in an English-language degree programme and the effect of the Finnish language skills on employment in Finland. In addition, I present previous studies about Finnish language teaching in subject-matter courses in social services.

This thesis was done in cooperation with DPSS. In 2022, DPSS conducted two surveys on the working life skills and challenges that employees of foreign background face in their working life in social services in Finland.

The goal of this thesis is to map and summarize the results of these two surveys and look for the answer, what kind of Finnish language skills and professional competences social services professionals need for working life in social services.

The paper begins with information on Metropolia University of Applied Sciences, DPSS, working life partner and the target group. In the next chapters I present previous studies, social services professionals' competences to be gained during the DPSS studies. I compare the differences between the old and new DPSS curriculum and present the survey data, results and analysis of research. The paper ends with discussions and conclusion.

2 About Metropolia University of Applied Sciences and DPSS

Metropolia University of Applied Sciences educates experts in the social and healthcare and is Finland's the largest provider of education in this field (Metropolia, 2020a). Altogether Metropolia University of Applied Sciences has four campuses located in the metropolitan area. Metropolia University of Applied offers studies in the social and healthcare both in Finnish and English language and studies take place at Myllypuro campus in Helsinki.

In the Bachelor's degree programme in Social Services (abbreviated as DPSS) conducted in English at Myllypuro campus, study both Finnish students and students of foreign background.

Bachelor's Degree programme in Social services is the only University of Applied Sciences degree specializing in the social sector (Ammattikorkeakoulujen rehtorineuvosto Arene ry, 2017, p. 7). The aim of the education leading to a bachelor's degree is to provide students with sufficient theoretical and practical skills including language and communication skills, which are needed for performing professional tasks in one's field of expertise (Valtioneuvoston asetus ammattikorkeakouluista 1129/2014, 4 §). Education provided by the University of Applied Sciences should be based on the needs and demands of working life (Ammattikorkeakoululaki, 4 §).

The aim of the Bachelor's degree in Social Services is to provide students with socio-pedagogical competence and knowledge in order to meet the changing needs of society and metropolitan areas (Study guide Metropolia, n.d. b). The scope of the Bachelor's degree program in Social Services is 210 ECTS and the completion time is approximately 3.5 years (Ammattikorkeakoulujen rehtorineuvosto Arene ry, 2017, p. 7).

3 Working life partner and target group

The working life partner of this Bachelor's thesis is the English-language Bachelor's Degree programme in Social Services (DPSS) provided by Metropolia University of Applied Sciences.

The target group of this thesis is the future Finnish as a second language speaking social services professionals who would like to find employment in a Finnish-speaking working environment. In addition, the target group encompasses also those employers in the social sector who would like to hire future Finnish as a second language speaking social services professionals graduating from DPSS.

4 Previous studies

In this chapter previous studies on gaining Finnish language skills in an English-language degree programme, employment in social services, and different ways of learning and teaching the Finnish language are presented before introducing Metropolia University of

Applied Sciences' DPSS curriculum. These studies help to understand the current situation and the need for changes in social services.

4.1 Employment situation in social services

In Finland, the demand for workers in social and healthcare has grown over the years. In 2018, 20 000 vacancies in social and health care remained unfulfilled. In 2019, the number of unfilled vacancies had grown up to 25.000. The Ministry of Finance has estimated that by the year 2035, 48% of the workforce employed in social services will retire (Tevameri, 2021, p.65). Consequently in the next fifteen years, Finland needs 200 000 employees in the social and healthcare sector (Tevameri, 2021, pp. 49-50). This will not happen without work-based immigration and international students (Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment of Finland, n.d.).

In 2015 in Finland, 5,360 international students graduated from the University or the University of Applied Sciences. In 2015, 56% of those who graduated the same year got employed, yet every fifth graduate left Finland. The main reason for graduates leaving Finland was not being able to find employment in their field of expertise or such job they would like to perform (Loukkola, 2020). That means that Finland shall not only increase the number of international students but also put the effort that students stay in Finland.

In the Finnish government programme, the focus of work-based immigration is on the sectors suffering from shortage of labor. To these sectors belongs also social sector. (Ammattibarometri, 2022). In addition, in the year 2021, Finland's government stated in its midterm policy review that the number of international students in Finland shall be tripled up to 15.000. Government strives towards 75% of the students staying and getting employed in Finland. The Finnish State Council has represented the actions to be taken to achieve the government's goals. The strategic objectives are to make Finland attractive and interesting country to move to and improve the immigration experience. In addition, to objectives belongs also creating vitality via international expertise. Through these strategic objectives Finland strives to attract foreign students to move and to stay in Finland. To realize this, the government has designed a cross-administrative programme called Talent Boost (Valtioneuvosto, 2021, pp. 21-22).

As a part of the Talent boost-programme to respond to the Finnish government's policy of tripling the number of international degree students by 2030, Finnish higher education

institutes have promised to increase the number of international students and help with their integration into Finnish society and labor market (Korpela et al., 2022).

4.2 Finnish language learning during studies in English-language degree programme

In social services, studies regarding the possibilities of gaining the Finnish language during the studies in English-language degree programme and later on finding employment in a Finnish-speaking environment have not been made yet.

However, a similar study was made in the field of nursing. It targets at one of the Universities of Applied Sciences in Finland. Mustonen & Tuisku (2019) researched the possibility of gaining Finnish language skills during studying in English-language degree programme in nursing and finding employment after graduation. The research focuses on one of the Finnish Universities of Applied Sciences with no prerequisites in Finnish language knowledge. In this programme study both students of foreign backgrounds and students whose mother tongue is Finnish. Students of foreign background whom Finnish is a second language start learning the Finnish language from the beginning. During nursing studies, the priority is however on learning the content and professional skills.

Despite the study of Mustonen & Tuisku (2019) targets the nursing field, it can give some important indications due to similarities in degree programmes from the point of view of Finnish language studies. The degree programme in nursing mentioned in the study and the upcoming DPSS curriculum of autumn 2023 are both conducted in the English language and the completion time of both degrees is 3.5 years. In both degrees, there are no requirements for previous knowledge in Finnish language. Both of degrees at the University of Applied Sciences are oriented toward working life and include work placements.

Social services and nursing are similar also in terms of job requirements and demands. In both fields, experts in the field work with clients where language acts as the main tool for communication. In both fields, a professional must work client-safely. For this to get realized, a professional must understand the client who is entitled to receive client-safe services. Working in both, social services and nursing also includes documenting which demands very strong written language skills. In both of the mentioned degrees, students whose Finnish is a second language start learning the Finnish language from the beginning. In addition to that, students must learn the content of their study field.

Learning a new language and besides that studying new content seems already very challenging. After 3.5 years of studies, language skills shall suffice for working in expert positions. However, Mustonen & Tuisku (2019) emphasize that on average, it takes 5–7 years to develop the kind of language skills which suffice for working life in Finland. Despite students doing their work placements in Finnish-speaking environments, the focus is on practicing professional nursing skills and training vocabulary. Gaining such Finnish language knowledge in 3.5 years which suffice for working life is unrealistic. Insufficient knowledge of the Finnish language results in having difficulties finding employment in Finland. In working life, employers mostly expect that employee has obtained their professional qualification during their studies. If an employee needs to improve their language skills, the employer expects that this is the employee's responsibility outside their working time (Mustonen & Tuisku, 2019).

4.3 Employment after graduating from an English-language degree programme

Komppa (2015) conducted a study on the recruitment of highly educated immigrants and knowledge of the Finnish language skills required to gain employment in Finland. In the context of this study, a highly educated immigrant is defined as a resident of Finland who is studying in an English-language degree programme or as a person who has completed their higher education outside Finland but reside in Finland. The study was carried out in a form of an online survey. In the survey took part 144 Chamber of Commerce member companies of whom 94 employ immigrants.

The member companies were interviewed about the requirements of the Finnish language in their own companies when employing highly educated people of immigrant backgrounds. The results of the study indicate that most of the companies employing immigrants are not prepared to invest in the Finnish language training for their employees and employ immigrants with already adequate Finnish language skills. The interviewees in the survey had an opinion that Finnish language training shall be organized outside the workplace because employee's adequate language skills are not the employer's responsibility (Komppa, 2015, pp. 173-174, 178-179).

Based on the results of her study, Komppa (2015, p. 182) suggests that in the future Universities of Applied Sciences should invest more in the Finnish language courses. Universities of Applied Sciences could, for example, connect students studying in English and Finnish in parallel degree programmes by offering mutual practical exercises and simulation sessions. However, the responsibility of gaining sufficient language skills

should not be just on the university. Applicants who would like to study in the English language, should be from the beginning aware of the Finnish language skills required for their future working life.

Pyykkö (2017, p. 103) adds that studying in an English-language degree programme does not reduce nor eliminate the need to learn the Finnish language. Especially in expert positions requiring higher education, Finnish language knowledge is of immense importance.

4.4 Learning Finnish language through social services studies

Language knowledge is an important part of professionalism in social services. (Raatikainen et al., 2019), p.39). Learning the language, and content of social services and combining the knowledge of both might be difficult.

In 2020, Finland's Oulu University of Applied Sciences participated in a project called MAIKO which stands for Maahanmuuttajien integrointimalli korkeakouluun (Tervasoff & Silvan, 2020). The goal of the MAIKO project is to promote the completion of a university degree for immigrants. The goal of the project is to create an integration model for immigrants in studies for higher education and to facilitate adherence to studies (OAMK, n.d.).

At Oulu University of Applied Sciences was through MAIKO-project created a study unit in social services. In this study unit, participated Finnish as a second language-speaking students who study a degree in social services in the Finnish language. In the study unit, students learn and practice the professional Finnish language in the social services subject-matter courses.

Very positive experiences were gained from the project. In the study unit, participated Finnish as a second language teachers and social services lecturer teaching the substance-matter courses. The teaching took place in such a way that the social services teacher, for example, explained the social services concepts and the Finnish language teacher practiced these concepts with students in the Finnish language, both orally and in written form (Tervasoff & Silvan, 2020).

In social services, professionals need versatile language skills. Client guidance takes place verbally through interaction, so it requires strong oral Finnish language skills. In

addition, written skills are required for documenting which is an essential part of professionalism in this field. It is important that Finnish language teachers become familiar with the operating environments of the profession. In this way, Finnish language learning and integration can be developed to meet the needs of the education and working life. Tervasoff & Silvan (2020) conclude that such integrated study units are always organized only through the project and should in the future be organized also by the Universities of Applied Sciences.

Metropolia University of Applied Sciences could organize similar teaching, for example, during the second or third year, when the student already has some Finnish language skills and could benefit the most from such integrated lessons.

5 Competences to be gained during DPSS and the importance of Finnish language skills

In this chapter are presented the professional social services competences to be gained during the social services studies. The competences were published in 2016 by the Finnish University of Applied Sciences Network for Education in Social Services.

In order to understand the aim of the Metropolia University of Applied Sciences' DPSS curriculum, an understanding of required social services competences is needed first.

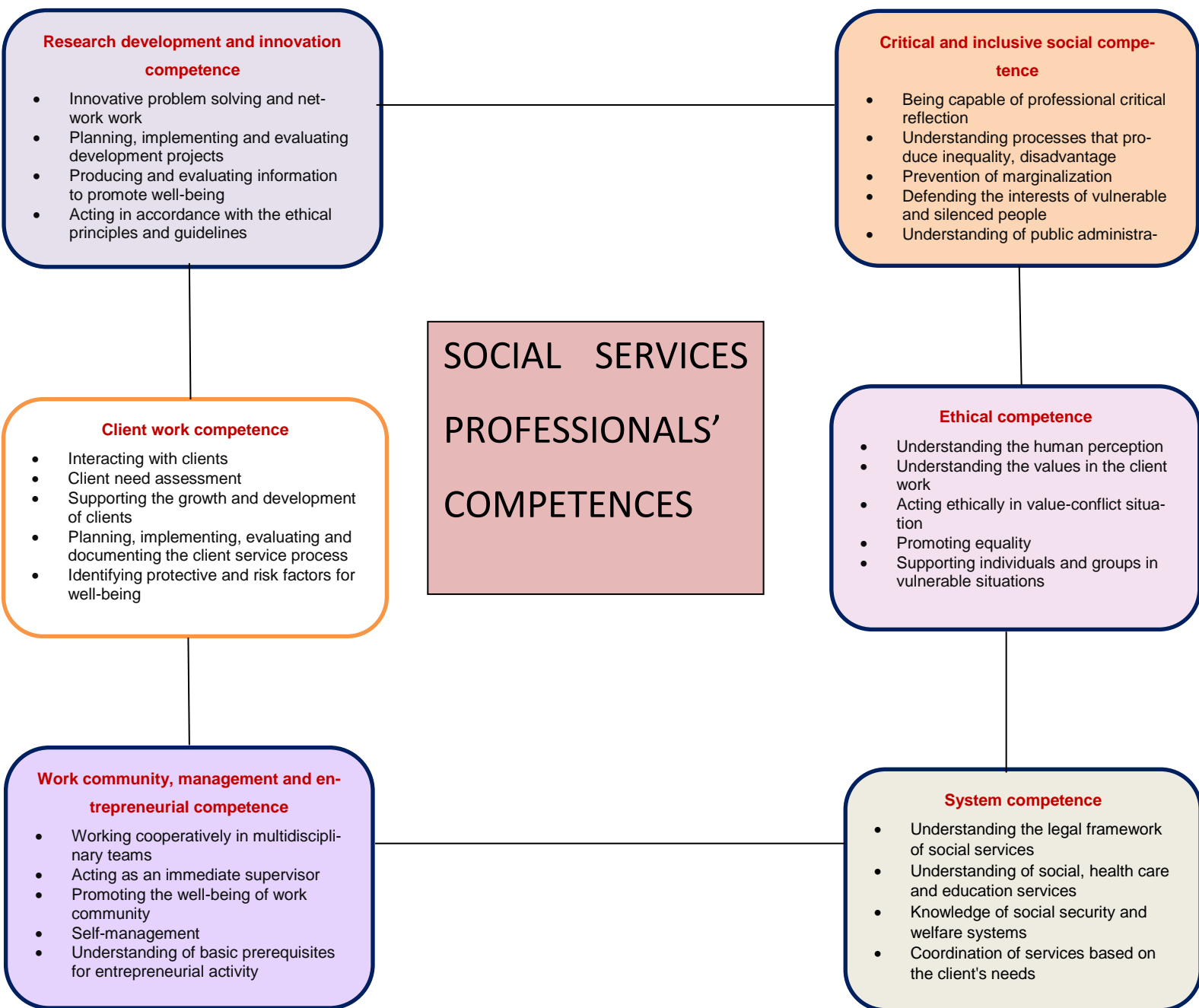


Figure 1. Social Services Professionals' Competences (Suomen ammattikorkeakoulujen sosiaalialan koulutuksen verkosto, 2016).

5.1 Client work competence

The core of the client service competence is creating a confidential and reciprocal interaction and cooperation relationship with a client.

While doing client work, the social services professional has to take into account and strengthen the client's physical, psychological and social well-being, functional capacity and resources, financial survival, and life management (Helminen et al., 2020, p. 8).

A client of the social services is entitled to receive the client-safe and quality service. The service is client-safe when client's physical, mental, social, or financial safety is not compromised and the inconvenience caused by the service is minimized (Kurki, Jylhä and Kekoni, 2021, p. 9). To ensure the client's safety, a social services professional has to understand the clients and be able to receive and give feedback to clients orally in clear and understandable language (Komppa et al., 2014, pp. 9, 32).

Therefore, social services professionals are expected to have strong, both written and oral Finnish language skills. Social services professionals are expected to understand the spoken Finnish language, including dialects and speech of the special groups (Komppa et al., 2014, p.32). To be able to communicate with clients of, e.g. intellectual, sensory, speech, and cognitive disabilities, a social services professional has to be able to use the Finnish language independently (Jäppinen, 2010, p. 12). As other special groups are considered also people of immigrant background, children, and elderly people.

Jäppinen (2010, pp. 11-12) gives a concrete example of required Finnish language skills when working with elderly clients. Working with this target group and their close members includes guidance such as applying for the needed services and filling out the official forms to receive necessary services and help. For performing such work tasks, social services professionals need a command of Finnish language skills at least on the level B2. Working with elderly clients might require even stronger command of Finnish skills. Social services professionals working with the elderly might work, e.g. in home-care where the worker is alone and has to perform tasks independently. Therefore social care professionals can lean only on themselves and their knowledge of the Finnish language. For performing such tasks command of the Finnish language on the level of C1 is required (Jäppinen, 2010, pp. 11-12).

In performing client work, strong written skills are extremely needed for planning, implementation, documentation, and evaluation of the client work processes. Social services professionals should spell correctly, prepare and produce professional texts such as documents, summaries and report client processes (Helminen et al., 2020, p. 8).

Documents and reports written by social services workers are official files and the content written in such files can influence the decisions related to clients (Laaksonen et al., 2011, p. 10). Laki sosiaalihuollon asiakaskirjoista (254/2015, 6 §) defines that the language used in the documents containing information about clients should be clear and understandable. Hence, a social services professional must use comprehensible and relevant language as the reader of the documents is often someone else than the social services professional themselves (Laaksonen et al., 2011, p. 39). For the same reason, a social services professional should also pay attention when using social-field-related terminology. For example, slang or professional slang might not be understandable to the reader and should therefore be avoided (Laaksonen et al., 2011, p. 41).

5.2 System competence

The work of social services professionals in social services is regulated by the legislation. Social services professionals should be familiar with the legal framework and know how to apply the key legislation (Suomen ammattikorkeakoulujen sosiaalialan koulutuksen verkosto, 2016). In social services, legislation defines client's rights to social security and welfare services.

Social services professionals should be able to act as active experts in the social sector and justify the client's interest in both multi-professional and multi-disciplinary cooperation. In addition, social services professionals should know about the social security and welfare service systems in the public, private and third sectors, and be competent in organizing, and producing social and health care, education and training services, as well as their guidance and supervision (Suomen ammattikorkeakoulujen sosiaalialan koulutuksen verkosto, 2016).

A Client has a right to know about existing services and to get the help they need. To find supporting services for a client, guide the client to these services, and shape the entirety of the services in such a way that the services complement each other in the client's everyday life, social services professionals must understand the whole of the service system and the laws (Helminen et al., 2020, p. 9).

All of the Finnish legislation including social welfare acts can be found in an up-to-date online database called Finlex. Acts are found in the Finnish and Swedish languages which are the official languages in Finland.

In case of insufficient Finnish language skills, social services professionals might have to seek English versions of the laws and regulations. However, not all of the laws and regulations have been translated into English language. Such laws are for example, Laki sosiaalihuollon asiakkaan asemasta ja oikeuksista (which could be in English translated as Act on the Status and Rights of Social Welfare Clients) and Laki sosiaalihuollon ammattihenkilöistä (which could be translated to English as Act on the Social Services Professionals). Both of these acts provide significant information on practicing the social services profession in Finland, guidance and supervision of social services professionals, and information on the rights and treatment of social welfare clients. Both of these acts are very relevant when performing the social services profession. These laws are however only a few examples of acts which haven't been translated into English. Hence, social services professionals cannot rely on the English translations of the acts but should be able to find and understand the legal framework in the Finnish language.

5.3 Ethical competence

Ethical competence is the basis of a social services professional. Social services professionals' work is based on social services legislation, human rights, and adopting client-based values. Social services professionals should know how to apply ethical guidelines in their work tasks.

The core ethical values and legal principles that guide the work are respect for the client's human dignity and diversity, supporting the right to self-determination and inclusion, as well as equal treatment of clients and the promotion of social justice.

Social services professional builds a trust-based relationship with the client and promotes their interest in decision-making (Helminen et al., 2020, pp. 7-8). As Laaksonen et al. (2011, p.10) state, the content of documents and reports written by social services professionals can influence decisions related to the clients.

Every client has the right to receive fair service and treatment. Therefore social services professionals must pay attention to the tone of voice used in written reports to avoid miscommunication and misunderstandings. For social services professionals to use a suitable tone of voice and write reports unbiasedly, strong language skills are needed.

It can happen that when working in social services, there arises an ethical conflict. In such client situations, social services professionals should pay attention to communicating unbiasedly and professionally using appropriate and professional vocabulary.

In their work, social services professionals also have to identify and resolve ethical conflicts following the ethical guidelines and legislation in the social sector. Social services professional recognizes and respects the client's needs, wishes, and interests. In case of encountering conflict situations, social services professional strives to take into account the perspectives and interests of the different parties.

In addition, social services professionals strive to secure the care of clients in the most vulnerable position. Social services professionals implement their organization's self-monitoring plan and works actively to promote client safety. Social services professional strives to discuss ethical issues also in their work community and society (Helminen et al., 2020, pp. 7-8).

5.4 Critical and inclusive social competence

A social services professional should be capable of professional critical reflection and be able to analyze processes that produce inequality, disadvantage and, well-being and prevent marginalization. In addition, a social services professional shall be able to defend the interests of vulnerable and silenced people (Suomen ammattikorkeakoulujen sosiaalialan koulutuksen verkosto, 2016).

To notice and recognize a client is in a difficult position, social services professionals need to understand both a client's and also other parties' language context and culture. Understanding the client's situation as a whole and being able to defend the client's interest demands strong interaction and language skills in all forms.

A social services professional should be aware of the power relations between the employee and the client and reflect the manifestation of power, for example, when making client-related decisions. From the perspective of client safety expertise and implementation, a social services professional should be able to reflect on their professional competence (Helminen et al., 2020, pp. 10-11).

5.5 Work community, management and entrepreneurial competence

A social services professional must have work community, management, and entrepreneurial skills to be able to work in demanding client work positions and as a supervisor (Helminen et al., 2020, p. 12). Social services professionals should be able to work cooperatively in multidisciplinary teams and work communities as well as in international environments (Suomen ammattikorkeakoulujen sosiaalialan koulutuksen verkosto, 2016). Working in teams, projects and networks includes various communication situations which can be either professional or related to social interaction (Jäppinen, 2010, p.6). For example, such situations are meetings where employers discuss current issues related to working place and therefore also learn new things. To be able to participate in such meetings and understand the content, employers must have sufficient Finnish language skills (Jäppinen, 2010, pp. 10-11).

Also, working in demanding positions with clients demands an understanding of how a well-functioning work community and organization affect the client's well-being and safety. As a member of the work community and multidisciplinary team, social services professionals must work according to the agreed common rules. Common rules in the work community are of immense importance as they guarantee the right to good treatment, participation, service, and care the client needs (Helminen et al., 2020, p. 12).

When working in the position of supervisor, a social services professional must understand their supervisory responsibility and obligations, both from the perspective of the work community and also from the perspective of client safety. Management and supervisory work and knowing the key labor legislation ensure that teams and individuals work in such a way that client safety is not compromised (Helminen et al., 2020; Suomen ammattikorkeakoulujen sosiaalialan koulutuksen verkosto, 2016).

Management also ensures that the work community and employees have sufficient resources and knowledge to work professionally and thus client safety is not compromised.

The occupational health and safety of employees, the promotion of well-being at work, and the management of competence guarantee the clients competent, well-being, and healthy employees who are able to handle client work (Helminen et al., 2020, p. 12).

5.6 Research development and innovation competence

Social services professionals should be capable of innovative problem-solving and network work in the development of the social sector. In addition, social services professional shall know to develop the client work methods, work practices and service processes based on partnership. To the competences belong as well planning, implementing and evaluating development projects. Social services professional should apply research and development methods to develop operating practices. All in all, social services professionals should act by the ethical principles and guidelines of research and development work and produce, and evaluate information to promote the well-being of the clients (Suomen ammattikorkeakoulujen sosiaalialan koulutuksen verkosto, 2016).

6 DPSS curriculum and study requirements

I have familiarized myself with the old and new curriculums, and based on my findings I have done a comparison between the old curriculum of 2019 and the new upcoming curriculum of 2023. The 2019 curriculum which I refer to as the old curriculum was chosen as the students of the study group have either already completed or will soon complete their studies. Comparing the curriculums to each other, I look at the changes that have been made in the new curriculum and how this affects the development of the other professional social services competences.

6.1 The DPSS requirements and curriculum of 2019

6.1.1 Prerequisites and study paths

Metropolia University of Applied Sciences offered 22 study places for studies in DPSS that began in the autumn of 2019. Applicants were required to have prerequisites in Finnish knowledge to be accepted to study in this degree programme. Students accepted to this study programme, could choose between two study paths: the path of social guidance and the path of early childhood education.

Students studying in the early childhood education path study 60 ECTS of early childhood education courses and get besides a Bachelor of Social Services also the qualification of a kindergarten pedagogue (Study guide Metropolia, n.d.b).

6.1.2 Subject-matter courses

In the beginning of the DPSS studies in the curriculum of 2019, students got introduced to their studies at the University of Applied Sciences. Students got familiar with social pedagogy and the technology of professional communication. Courses in the curriculum provide students with knowledge of the Finnish welfare state, decision-making system, and supporting clients with different pedagogical approaches.

Curriculum proceeds with the facilitation of empowerment and applying professional ethics in the client work as well as the diverse life of the clients. Students, for example, deepen their knowledge in the field of child protection and substance abuse. Students learn about applying relevant legislation, case management, and online counselling.

The curriculum includes also a multidisciplinary innovation project where students practice their problem-solving and teamwork skills. Into curriculum is implemented course in the research and development which includes processing, analyzing, disputing, and reporting data and results.

In the last courses of the curriculum, students practice their strategic thinking, leadership, and entrepreneurship skills. Part of the curriculum is also elective studies which can be chosen freely depending on the student's interests (Study guide Metropolia, n.d. b).

6.1.3 Language courses

Into the curriculum of 2019 is implemented one Finnish as a second language course. The idea of the Finnish as a second language course is that students practice the use of formal and informal Finnish language and communication in working life in social services (Study guide Metropolia, n.d.d). For students to be able to participate in the course, they must have the minimum language proficiency level of independent user B1 according to the Common European Framework for Languages (CEFR). Common Reference levels are presented below.

Table 1. Common Reference levels (Council of Europe, 2023).

PROFICIENT USER	C2	-Is able to easily understand almost everything both in oral and written form. -Can gather information from various oral and written sources, and reconstruct arguments coherently. -Is able to express himself spontaneously, very fluently, and precisely, even in complex situations.
	C1	Can understand a wide range of demanding, longer texts and recognize hidden meanings. -Is able to express themselves fluently and spontaneously without searching for expressions. -Can write clear, well-structured, detailed text on complex topics that
INDEPENDENT USER	B2	-Is able to understand the main ideas of complex texts on concrete and abstract topics, including discussions in their field of expertise. -Can interact with native speakers quite fluently and spontaneously without strain for either party. -Is able to write clear and detailed texts on a wide variety of topics and express their own opinion on a current issue, with pros and cons of various options.
	B1	-Is able to understand the main points of clear, standard language on familiar topics related to work, school, hobbies, etc. -Can deal with most situations in an area where the language is spoken. -Is able to produce simple and coherent text on a subject that is familiar or of personal interest. - Knows how to describe experiences and events, own dreams, and ambitions, and briefly justify and explain opinions and own plans.
BASIC USER	A2	-Is able to understand phrases and common expressions related to the most relevant areas (e.g personal and family information, employment). -Can describe their own background and -Can communicate in simple tasks that require a simple and direct exchange of information on familiar matters in areas of immediate need.
	A1	-Is able to understand and use familiar everyday expressions and very simple phrases -Is able to introduce themselves and others -Can ask simple questions, for example, where you live, things you own -Can communicate if the other person speaks slowly and clearly

The students of the DPSS starting group 2019 are by the end of their studies expected to have gained sufficient knowledge of the Finnish language to facilitate their employment in social services. The required level to be gained by the time of graduation is B1 (Metropolia, 2020b).

The Finnish-speaking students attend one Swedish for working life course and practice the interaction related to social services in the Swedish language (Study guide Metropolia, n.d.d).

6.1.4 Work placements

In the curriculum of 2019 are implemented three work placements plus one internship in voluntary work. During the first internship, students practice guidance and support individuals and communities in their daily life.

Students learn the basics of documenting and evaluating their activities. In the second internship, students practice supporting clients by facilitating empowerment. Students practice communication and interaction skills in inclusive and professional relations. The third internship aims to deepen the student's understanding of ethical principles of socio-pedagogical work and apply research and development knowledge in practice.

A part of the curriculum is also an internship in voluntary work. Through the voluntary work students strengthen their professional competences (Study guide Metropolia, n.d.b).

6.1.5 Bachelor's thesis

The curriculum includes planning, implementing, reporting, and publishing a bachelor's thesis. Bachelor's thesis is a final project related to social services. In thesis, a student demonstrates their gained knowledge of the DPSS studies (Study guide Metropolia, n.d. b).

6.2 DPSS requirements and changes in the curriculum of 2023

At the beginning of 2023, Metropolia University of Applied Sciences introduced a new curriculum for DPSS. The new curriculum applies to these students who will start their studies in the fall of 2023.

6.2.1 Prerequisites and study paths

Metropolia University of Applied Sciences offers 35 study places for the upcoming DPSS studies in the autumn of 2023. Students starting in autumn 2023 will no longer be required to have prior knowledge in the Finnish language, which enables also non-Finnish speakers to apply to study in this degree programme.

There is no information available yet but it could be assumed that future DPSS students will be able to choose between two study paths: social counselling and early childhood education. In comparison to the old curriculum of 2019, students choosing the early childhood education path will receive a qualification of a Bachelor of Social Services in Early Childhood Education instead of a kindergarten pedagogue (Talentia, n.d.). This change is based on the Act on Early Childhood Education and Care (Varhaiskasvatuslaki 540/2018, 27 §).

6.2.2 Subject-matter courses

Compared to the DPSS curriculum of 2019, in the new DPSS curriculum of 2023, some of the courses have been removed and condensed, for example, Social Counseling with Adults and Disability and Chronic Illness. Instead of these courses, the new curriculum offers courses with more global content such as Facing Superdiversity and Discovering Challenges in Urban Areas (see Appendix 2). These are topics that have recently been discussed and were not in the curriculum previously.

The Finnish curriculum of Degree Programme in Social Services has remained the same. This means that a Finnish-speaking applicant can choose between two different programmes when applying to study for social services. Finnish-speaking students can take courses both from the English and also Finnish side of the programme. The possibility to choose enables a student to take courses that interest them and therefore develop and deepen the competences for their future working life.

Those students who study in an English-language degree programme and whose Finnish language skills are not sufficient might not be able to take certain specialization courses in Finnish which were previously available also in English.

6.2.3 Kielikummi language tutoring activity

Already before DPSS introduced the new curriculum for autumn 2023, some changes affecting language support for Finnish as a second language speaking students were made already in 2021. In the fall of 2021, a language tutoring activity called Kielikummi was launched at Metropolia University of Applied Sciences. Kielikummi language tutoring activity is offered as the 5 ECTS course "Internship in the Voluntary and Civic Environments".

Finnish-speaking students who decide to take part in the Kielikummi language tutoring activity, get in contact with the Finnish as a second language teacher in social services at Metropolia. The teacher looks for suitable pairs and when a suitable match has been found, students get each other's information and plan the language activity. The idea of Kielikummi is to bring together Finnish-speaking and international students studying in the Bachelor's Degree Programme in Social Services. Kielikummi language tutoring activity brings together Finnish-speaking students who help international students with

learning the Finnish language and culture, and therefore integration into the Finnish environment and society.

Based on so-far experiences of Kielikummi language tutoring activity, Iso-Heiniemi & Korpela (2022) say that Kielikummi language activity has been successful and is going to be continued in the future.

6.2.4 Finnish language courses and Personal Language Study Plan

Students beginning with their DPSS studies in the autumn of 2023, will have made a Personal Language Study Plan abbreviated as Language PSP (Study guide Metropolia, n.d.a). Language PSP has been developed especially to support English-language degrees and international students. This tool is used as part of the planning of studies and working career. It is a tool in the form of questions regarding Finnish language knowledge. With the help of this tool, students can reflect and map the knowledge of their Finnish language skills. Students' Language PSP tools can be found at the end of the thesis (See Appendix 1). Also work placements supervisors and Finnish as a second language teachers use questions in the Language PSP tool for discussions with students to map student's Finnish language skills and progress (Kielibuusti, 2020)

The new curriculum offers seven 5 ECTS Finnish language courses. In terms of scope, this means a total of 35 ECTS of Finnish language studies. In the curriculum, there are four basic Finnish language courses (levels A1-B1) and three advanced courses (levels B1-B2) focusing on the professional vocabulary needed in working life in social services (Study guide Metropolia, n.d. c).

In the new curriculum, more Finnish language courses are offered which offers better possibilities for Finnish language learning compared to the previous, old curriculum. Courses at different levels enable students to develop their Finnish language skills according to their language level.

Students who do not speak Finnish at all, start studying the Finnish language at the beginners level A1 and are expected to reach the B2 level during their 3.5 years of studies. Based on studying the new curriculum, it should be kept in mind that some students may participate in all of the Finnish language courses. This means that those students either eventually miss out on 30 ECTS of other courses or might graduate later as they

have more ECTS to complete. The reason for this is that on average and according to the study requirements students complete about 30 ECTS per semester.

On the other hand, in the DPSS study also Finnish-speaking students who do not attend any of the Finnish language courses and can therefore choose other elective courses instead. As they can choose 30 ECTS of elective courses, such students have a lot better possibilities to gain knowledge in social services and develop stronger social services competencies. Social services professionals work in demanding professional tasks that require a wide variety of skills.

Such big differences in taking different courses among students might cause differences in the knowledge gained from other courses. Those students who study the Finnish language and therefore cannot completely or not at all take other elective courses might be at risk that their knowledge and development of other social services competencies will lag behind.

6.2.5 Work placements

A change in the curriculum has also been made in terms of work placements. The new curriculum focuses on language awareness and encourages students to pay attention to the Finnish language.

The new curriculum still has three work placements, yet compared to the old curriculum, work placements in the new curriculum include both practicing social competencies and also the Finnish language. Those students who are still in the process of studying the Finnish language, practice their Finnish language skills during the work placements.

For Finnish-speaking students, the focus is on supporting the Finnish language learner. Before going to the work placements, students form a pair. The Finnish Language or Finnish language-aware goals of the work placements are specified for each student depending on the student's interests (Study guide Metropolia, n.d. b).

7 Implementation of the thesis

7.1 The purpose, goal and research question

The request for this thesis came from DPSS who conducted two surveys in 2022. The goal of this thesis is to examine the experiences of DPSS alumni on the content of the previous curriculum, and how the DPSS programme prepares students for the working life in social services.

The purpose of this thesis is to help DPSS to understand the previous challenges in Finnish language learning during DPSS studies and to support the further development of the new DPSS curriculum from the point of Finnish language learning. In this thesis, I look for the answer to the following question:

What kind of Finnish language skills and competences social services professionals need for working life in social services?

7.2 Survey data

I have received the survey data from the head of DPSS. The survey data consists of two surveys. In 2022, DPSS conducted two surveys. The surveys contained different questions, e.g about the required working life skills in social services in Finland, and the challenges that employees of foreign background face in their working life, possibly due to the lack of Finnish language skills. The content of the questions in the surveys was decided by DPSS who conducted the surveys.

The surveys were sent by the head of the Degree Programme in Social Services (DPSS) to the working life partners of DPSS, members of the advisory board of the social services degrees, and DPSS alumni. The first survey was sent to the working life partners and members of the advisory board for the social services degrees which will from now on will be referred to as a group of social services professionals. The second survey was sent to the alumni of DPSS via a closed Facebook group. Everyone answered voluntarily and anonymously, and everyone permitted for the answers to be used in the study. Research ethical principles were followed in the implementation of the survey.

In the first survey a group of social services professionals took part. The group consisted of 15 participants. The questions were asked both in Finnish and English language. All

of the participants in the survey answered the questions in Finnish language. The participants were asked questions related to language skills, for example, what kind of Finnish language skills are needed for working in social services in a Finnish-speaking environment and, what kind of language support working place offers to their employees. In addition, the participants were asked questions about the competences required in social services, and how well the DPSS prepares students for the future working life in this field. The questionnaire can be found in Appendix 3.

In the second survey took part 16 alumni of DPSS. Questions were sent and also answered in the English language. Questions sent to alumni were similar but also included questions about gaining employment after graduation in social services, the important factors during the DPSS studies, and professional development in social services. In addition, alumni were asked questions about their knowledge of the Finnish language, work placements affecting the Finnish language skills, and Finnish language learning support during DPSS studies. The questionnaire can be found in Appendix 4.

As mentioned above, I have received the survey data from the head of DPSS. Receiving the survey data and not conducting the survey on my own have both positive and negative sides. Good sides of receiving the survey data might be better possibilities to focus on the analysis of the survey data. The negative side of receiving the survey data from someone else might be not being able to choose the questions of the surveys myself and not being able to choose in which way questions are asked and through which platforms. As the questions of the surveys were decided by DPSS, I could not decide on the content of the questions myself, for example, based on the previous studies.

Altogether 31 participants took part in the surveys, 16 alumni and 15 participants from the group of social services professionals which consists of DPSS working life partners and members of the advisory board for the social services degrees. The group of social services was sent a questionnaire via email. The negative side of the survey data is that there is no information available to how many persons the survey was sent. There is also not much information on who are the working partners of DPSS and members of the advisory board for the social services degrees.

The limitation has to be considered also with alumni. Alumni participated in the survey through the closed Facebook group. No information is available, on how many alumni are a part of this Facebook group. Considering that the curriculum of 2019 offered 22

places, between 2013 and 2021 (the graduation years of alumni mentioned in the answers) probably altogether around 150 alumni graduated. Some of the alumni who participated in the survey, had graduated already many years ago. It might be possible that these alumni don't necessarily remember their studies too well. With a small sample of participants from an online group, there is always a risk that the data suffers from selection. For example, it might be that alumni who have had bad experience of their studies might be over represented as they want to share their experiences.

7.3 About the research method

Content analysis is a research method tool used for analyzing qualitative data. With this research method, data can be systematically and objectively organized into a concise and clear format keeping the content information (Tuomi & Sarajärvi, 2009, p. 103). In the process of data analysis, there are three stages. These stages are: reducing the data, clustering the data, and abstracting (Tuomi & Sarajärvi, 2009, p. 108).

In the reduction phase, the data is reduced by removing irrelevant information from the study. The reduction can be, for example, condensing or splitting information into parts. From reduction of data the outcome is a list of expressions (Tuomi & Sarajärvi, 2009, pp. 109-110).

In the clustering phase, similar expressions are put in the same groups. From these groups are formed subclasses which are named after preliminary concepts for the analysis. In this stage, the data becomes more concise as individual expressions become generalized (Tuomi & Sarajärvi, 2009, p.111).

In the abstraction phase, from the subclasses are formed even more general classes known as superclasses. The process is continued so far that there are formed main classes. The idea is to form such generalized classes from which can be drawn conclusions (Tuomi & Sarajärvi, 2009, pp.111-112).

7.4 The process of content analysis

In this thesis, at in the beginning of the content analysis (fin. sisällönanalyysi), I familiarized myself with the material, which is two surveys. While familiarizing myself with the survey answers, I identified from the answers essential expressions (fin. ilmaisu) and collected them into the same list.

In the list, I organized similar expressions together. From these expressions, subclasses (fin. alaluokka) began to form. From subcategories began to form superclasses (fin. yläluokka) and from superclasses were formed main classes (fin. pääluokka). Below in Table 2 is presented an example of the content analysis process in this thesis.

Table 2. Stages of content analysis (Tuomi & Sarajärvi, 2009, pp. 109-112)

Getting familiarized with data	Original text	<i>While the Finnish teacher we had was excellent, it was only one course so I don't think it was enough for me. However, my peers had much better Finnish than I did.</i>
Reduction of data	Reduced expression	<i>One course of Finnish was not enough</i>
Clustering the data	Subclasses are formed	<i>Insufficiency of language courses</i>
Abstracting	Superclasses are formed	<i>Language skills gained from studying</i>
Abstracting	Main classes are formed	<i>Studies at Metropolia University of Applied Sciences</i>

8 Results

8.1 Backgrounds of the participants

8.1.1 Background of the group of social services professionals

Most of the respondents of the group of social services professionals stated that their education is a Bachelor of Social Services.

In addition, some of the respondents stated that besides the Bachelor's Degree in social services, they have also a University of Applied Sciences Master's Degree in Social Services or a University Master's Degree in Social work. The rest of the respondents stated that they have education in physiotherapy, psychology, or (special) education. Participants of the group of social services professionals stated that they work in positions of supervisor, manager, coordinator, specialist, or psychologist. All of the respondents that at their workplace, they speak and use the Finnish language as their main language.

8.1.2 Backgrounds and language skills of alumni

Alumni who participated in the survey graduated from DPSS between 2013 and 2021. That means that these alumni studied in the old DPSS curriculum as the new curriculum will be in use from the autumn of 2023. In 2022, when the survey was sent out, most of the alumni answered that they work either as social counselors or as kindergarten teachers. Those working in the positions of social counsellor mostly in direct contact with clients said that the main language at their workplace is Finnish and their command of the Finnish language is at least average but mostly excellent or fluent.

Those working in early childhood education stated that at their workplace the most commonly used language is English. Finnish is used occasionally. The majority of respondents working in early childhood education stated that they work in an English or some other foreign language-speaking kindergarten and their Finnish language skills are poor or at most average.

Based on the answers from all respondents it turns out that the more Finnish is spoken at the workplace, the better the respondents feel their Finnish language skills are. Many respondents stated that they feel that knowing the Finnish language has over time improved their employment opportunities.

8.2 Analysis of the surveys

8.2.1 Main classes formed from the content analysis

While going through the process of the content analysis, the following main classes were formed:

- The importance of the Finnish language skills in the workplace

- The utility of multilingualism in the workplace
- Finnish language teaching
- The importance of work placements in studying the Finnish language
- The importance of peer support
- The influence of the lecturer in learning the Finnish language
- The need for versatile skills in working life
- Interaction skills
- Challenges in Finnish language skills in social services in the future

8.2.2 Importance of the language skills at working place

Results from both surveys indicate that in most of the workplaces Finnish language is a requirement for employment. In majority of the workplaces, Finnish is spoken as the main spoken language when working with clients and for communication between employees.

Finnish is however not used in all workplaces. In some places English and Swedish languages are also used widely. Such examples are foreign language kindergartens.

Most of the respondents mentioned that they often encounter clients of different backgrounds and mother tongues. For such situations translation and interpreting services are used but this does not eliminate the employer's demand to comprehend sufficient Finnish language. Some of the respondents mentioned that in their workplace, some employees are multilingual and able to communicate with clients in their mother language. Such often-used languages are Russian, Arabic, Somali, and Estonian.

Languages are used also in written form. Most of the participants of the group of social services professionals stated that they daily use e-mail and the Teams application at their workplace. Teams is mainly used for video meetings and sending instant messages. In addition to that, the respondents mentioned that at the workplace employees use the intranet and Apotti system for documenting. It can be considered that for using Teams and documenting in Apotti system different kind of language is required. For documenting to Apotti knowledge of the formal written Finnish language is needed. For using Teams, more colloquial and everyday language is used.

Some of the respondents mentioned that there are employees whose Finnish language still needs improvement. Such employees whose Finnish language skills need improvement and are employed by the City of Helsinki, emphasized that City of Helsinki has offered Finnish language training to them.

8.2.3 Finnish language skills gained during the DPSS studies of alumni

Answers from the participants indicate that 5 ECTS Finnish language course helped some students in developing their Finnish language skills but only one 5 ECTS course is not enough. The answers show that students were able to use the Finnish language also in some other courses than the Finnish language course. Being able to practice Finnish also in other courses supported the students' Finnish language development. For example, some teachers encouraged students to read academic articles written in the Finnish language. Students who did their work placements in Finnish felt that their Finnish language has improved due to work placements performed in a Finnish-speaking environment. Several alumni answered that they would have wished for more language support from other peers whose Finnish language skills are stronger.

From the answers it can be concluded that the use of the Finnish language in other courses, work placements, and real-life situations enables more efficient Finnish language learning.

8.2.4 Work placements and their effect on the language skills of DPSS alumni

Participants were asked two questions about their work placements. Alumni were asked whether they had done their internship in the Finnish language and, had the work placements in the Finnish language impacted their development of language skills.

The majority of the alumni answered that they did their work placements in the Finnish language. Many of those who did the work placements in a Finnish-speaking environment, answered that the work placement in the Finnish language helped the development of their Finnish language a lot.

However, a few of the respondents who did their work placement in the Finnish language felt that either they did not dare to use the Finnish language enough or their Finnish language developed only in specific areas.

8.2.5 Factors supporting the DPSS studies and professional development

Alumni were asked about the most important factors that support their DPSS studies' development of their social services professional identity.

As the main factors which supported alumni during DPSS, alumni brought out the work placements, some of the DPSS lecturers, and peer support. The majority of the alumni brought out that they found some of the DPSS lecturers supportive because they had good skills in encountering students, knew how to support student's professional growth and well-being, and offered good guidance during the work placements. One of the alumni respondents felt that the teaching staff did not offer much support during DPSS studies.

As mentioned above, peer support was another important supportive factor for most of the alumni. They found that in their own study group was a mutual feeling of belonging, strong support and appreciation between study group members. On the other hand, a few of alumni felt that peer support was poor in their study group. From these answers it can be concluded that the benefit of the peer support depends on the study group itself.

As in DPSS study both Finnish and students of foreign backgrounds, there could form groups based on the native language. Those who do not understand the Finnish language might feel that they do not belong to the group or find it harder to connect with native speakers. In the future, Metropolia University of Applied Sciences and DPSS could maybe observe, how the peer support gets realized and if necessary offer additional support to the study group.

8.2.6 Professional skills needed in social services and competences of graduates

As one of the questions in the survey targeted at the group of social services professionals, participants were asked about their opinion on, how well DPSS prepares recent graduates for working life in social services. Participants were asked, whether skills learned during DPSS are enough and what skills graduates lack. The group of Social services professionals emphasized that in the social sector, very versatile skills are needed in working life. As the main core competence needed in social services, most of the social services professionals emphasized skills, on how to encounter and interact with clients. Especially in the child protection field and crisis work, knowledge on how to encounter clients in traumatic or acute situations and create a confidential relationship respecting cultural and linguistic specific is needed often. In addition to that knowledge and understanding of legislation related to child protection, immigration, social care, and refugees, recognizing vulnerability and exploitation, such as human trafficking are parts of core competences as well.

As other core competences, social services professionals listed prioritization of work tasks due to the large number of clients and the clients' constantly changing situations. In almost every position, digital and documenting skills are something every professional in social services should have.

Most of the social services professionals answered that in their opinion DPSS studies give basic skills for working in social services. The majority of participants had an opinion that working life skills get deepened with working experience through the years, yet an employee must have a desire to develop additional skills at work. In addition, problem-solving skills, self-initiative, and flexibility are also needed skills at the working place. In their answers, a few of the participants emphasized that for documenting and reporting very good Finnish skills are needed and education institutions should teach such skills in Finnish language courses. From the answers it appears that the education does not give sufficient skills for working, e.g. in child protection services. In the social services professionals' opinion, graduates lack skills on how to work in difficult client situations.

As the skills needed in the future, most of participants of the group of social services professionals especially emphasized strong interaction and encountering skills and strong digital skills. In addition, some answered that knowledge in specific fields like child protection, intellectual disability, and trauma, and crisis work will be needed and already is needed a lot.

As future needed skills were mentioned also a better understanding of multiculturalism and skills to work in a multi-professional team. A few of the participants found important also management skills and knowledge in occupational health and well-being.

8.2.7 Future challenges in social services

One of the questions in the surveys dealt with the future challenges in social services. This question was targeted at alumni. As a big challenge, most of the alumni emphasized lack of Finnish language skills. Both alumni with poor and also those with excellent Finnish language skills emphasized that DPSS didn't provide graduates with enough Finnish language skills. In their opinion, a lack of Finnish skills is a big disadvantage and limits the possibilities of getting employed.

Besides the lack Finnish language skills, alumni mentioned digitalization. Alumni explained that social services professionals should keep in mind that the digital skills of the

clients vary. Alumni stated that not all of the clients have the knowledge or possibility to use digital services and this shall be in the future taken better into account. Social services professionals shall keep in mind not only that the Finnish population is aging rapidly but remember also that among this population are people of immigrant background who might need extra support.

9 Discussions

9.1 Limitations of the thesis

In this thesis, I researched, what kind of Finnish language skills and competences social services professionals need for working life in social services, yet certain things were beyond the scope of the study. A comparison between the old and new curriculum was done. In this thesis I haven't tried to find the answer, to whether the new renewed DPSS curriculum of 2023 can meet the working life needs which arose from the results of the surveys done by DPSS.

9.2 Changes in the prerequisites

Metropolia University of Applied Sciences has increased study places and removed Finnish language prerequisites for the upcoming DPSS studies in the autumn of 2023.

Increasing the study places from 22 to 35 and removing language prerequisites makes it more accessible and easier for international students to apply to study in the English-language programme in Social Services.

Removing prerequisites in the Finnish language on the other hand means that students in an English-language degree programme who do not speak any Finnish language skills at all, start learning the Finnish language from the beginning and aim to reach a level of B2 within 3.5 years. Based on the previous studies, 5-7 years of active learning are needed to achieve sufficient Finnish language skills for working life. Therefore, it might be unrealistic for students to expect to gain that high level of Finnish language and at the same time learn the content of social services in order to gain professional competences within 3.5 years of studies.

The results of the surveys conducted by DPSS in 2022 indicate that in the old curriculum, students felt that one 5 ECTS Finnish as a second language course was not enough to gain strong Finnish language skills for working life.

9.3 Changes in the new curriculum and suggestions for further development

9.3.1 Finnish language skills

Many new changes have been made in the new DPSS curriculum of 2023. The amount of Finnish language courses has been increased and Finnish as a second language-speaking students are supported by their Finnish-speaking pair during the work placements. Therefore learning the Finnish language might be more effective and faster because the support lasts during the whole period of work placement and student who learns the language is not left on their own. The positive side of the renewed curriculum from the point of language teaching is also the Personal Language study plan. With the help of this tool, a student, Finnish language teacher, and work placement supervisor can follow the progress of the student's language skills. A con of the new renewed curriculum is that those students who will attend all the Finnish courses, might have a lower possibility to deepen their competences or they might graduate later.

No matter how good-quality Finnish language studies Metropolia University of Applied Sciences might provide in the new curriculum, there is still a risk that students might forget their Finnish language skills in case they will not be using the Finnish language after graduation. Based on the alumni's answers to the survey, this can happen especially if getting employed in other than a Finnish-speaking environment. The less the Finnish language is used, the bigger is chance that at some point a person feels less and less comfortable using the language.

There might be ways to support Finnish language learning and practicing the Finnish language also after graduation. When students from the renewed DPSS will have graduated, Metropolia University of Applied Sciences could organize a free repetitive course for their Finnish as a second language speaking alumni and in this way stimulate them to keep on using the Finnish language and encourage students to seek employment in a Finnish-speak environment. Such repetitive course might be a way to commit future graduates to stay in Finland and get employed in this country as Finland needs the help of international students to improve the situation in shortage of labor in social and health care sector.

9.3.2 Documenting and reporting skills

Participants in the surveys brought up also another important points. Alumni, for example, felt that DPSS gives good basic skills for working life in social services, yet there is a need for a course focusing on documenting in the client system, such as Apotti. Also from the group of social services professionals' point of view, graduates lack knowledge of documenting and reporting which employers already expect them to have when applying for a workplace in social services.

Neither old nor the new DPSS curriculum contains a course which could specifically focus on teaching students documenting and reporting skills. Based on the survey results, such course could be helpful and could be added into curriculum in the future when the curriculum will be renewed the next time. Organizing such course might bring some challenges because at work places employees might use different styles and ways of documenting. For example, someone might using the passive voice such as “Together with the client discussed about the upcoming meeting with a social worker”. On the other hand, another employee might use active voice such as “Together with I client we discussed about their upcoming meeting with a social worker”.

There is not only 1 correct way of documenting and reporting but the style of documenting and reporting might depend on the agreement at the work place or whole organization. In addition to different styles of documenting and reporting, there are also many different client systems. Currently the most used client system might be Apotti which is widely used in public organizations in Metropolitan area, for example, City of Helsinki and Wellbeing Services county of Vantaa and Kerava. Private organizations might use, for example, Nappula or DomaCare client systems. Teaching on, how to use different systems might be too demanding and maybe not necessarily. However, it could be possible that Metropolia University of Applied Sciences would in the future organize some course which would focus on teaching the basics of documenting. Metropolia could implement this, e.g. by inviting guest lecturers working in different fields both public and private sector. For example, Metropolia could invite some guest working in child protection in Familiar organization and a guest working in kindergarten in City of Helsinki organization. Guests could show students some concrete examples on documenting, e.g. how to write a clear and condensed report on discussion or meeting with client or summary on a child's placement into welfare institution. By inviting guest lecturers, students could also get to know different organizations and possible work places in the future.

9.4 Skills needed in the future

9.4.1 Specific subject-matter courses

When asked about the skills needed in the future, most of the participants in the group of social services professionals mentioned, e.g. understanding of multiculturalism, skills on how to encounter clients, and knowledge in specific fields like child protection, intellectual disability, and trauma and crisis work will be needed and is already needed. Some of the specific subject-matter courses (see Appendix 2) have been removed in the English-language curriculum and there are no corresponding courses available. In the Finnish curriculum, such studies remain in the curriculum. Students from DPSS can take such specific courses from the Finnish curriculum and vice versa. This is convenient for those students who speak Finnish as they can choose between a variety of courses from both English and Finnish curriculum.

9.4.2 Understanding multiculturalism

Some of the specific subject-matter courses have been removed from the new curriculum but some new different courses such as Facing Superdiversity and Challenges in Urban Areas have been added into English curriculum (see Appendix 2). These courses might give future social services professionals versatile knowledge and new perspectives on working with clients of different cultures and backgrounds.

Despite some of the specific subject-matter courses have been removed, it is important to understand that not all of the future social services will seek employment in specific fields such as disability or child protection. Yet, in each of the specific field within social services, social services professionals do and will always encounter clients of different backgrounds and origins. Therefore gaining knowledge and perspective on multiculturalism might give understanding and knowledge that is probably needed in any kind of workplace in social services.

DSSS curriculum consists of 210 ECTS and no education institution can offer such curriculum which would suit everyone in all ways. Metropolia University of Applied Sciences cannot also offer limitless amount of specific subject-matter courses. However, Metropolia University of Applied Sciences could maybe better and more often advertise Campus online platform. Campus online is an online joint platform where all of the Finnish University of Applied Sciences in Finland offer different courses online.

9.4.3 Encountering skills

As other skills needed in the future in social services were mentioned also skills, on how to encounter clients, especially in difficult situations. It might be impossible for Metropolia University of Applied Sciences to prepare students for difficult client situations. Situations in real working life are unpredictable and there might be no common rule, on how to approach a client in difficult situation as each client situation is different from one another.

What Metropolia University of Applied Sciences could maybe do in the future, is to organize, for example, some kind of simulation classes where students work in a group and practice generally communication with clients. A teacher of a subject-matter course could prepare some scenario in advance and divide students into small groups. In the simulation could participate both students from English and Finnish DPSS who would practice different client situation and communication within a small group. Simulations could be done both in English and Finnish languages. Therefore, students from the English side of studies could practice their Finnish language skills and students from Finnish side could practice their English skills at the same time a part of simulation.

10 Conclusion

The goal of this thesis was to map and summarize the results of the surveys conducted by DPSS in 2022 and look for the answer, on what kind of Finnish language skills and professional competences social services professionals need for working life in this field. I have received the survey data from the head of DPSS and qualitative content analysis was used to analyze the data.

I have had a look at the previous studies on the employment situation in social and healthcare in Finland. A previous study done by Tevameri (2021, pp. 49-50), indicates that Finland is suffering from a great shortage of labor and is in the next fifteen years in need of 200 000 social and health care employees. Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment of Finland (n.d.) emphasizes that to improve the situation, Finland needs work-based immigration and international students.

Metropolia University of Applied Sciences has increased the number of studying places in an English-language degree programme in social services and has removed prerequisites in the Finnish language. Some of the international students who will start their

studies in the new curriculum of 2023 might start learning the Finnish language from the very beginning.

Learning the Finnish language from the very beginning and at the same time studying the content of social services in the English language might be difficult. However, without sufficient Finnish language skills, it might be hard to find employment in social services. For example, a study done by Mustonen & Tuisku (2019) in nursing, which is close to social services, indicates that knowledge of Finnish language skills is required in Finnish-speaking workplaces. Komppa (2015, pp. 173-174, 178-179) state that employers expect that employers have adequate language skills when applying for work positions.

Based on the results of the surveys, in the past, Finnish language teaching in DPSS was proven insufficient. However, other ways to learn and practice the Finnish language were, for example, work placements and reading articles in Finnish language at the subject-matter courses. Based on the results of the surveys, language skills are an essential part of professionalism in social services. Language skills are needed and are present in each of the social services professionals' competence.

Many changes have been made in the upcoming DPSS curriculum. The amount of Finnish language class have been increased and extra language support has been added. Despite some of the specific subject-matter courses have been deleted, new courses focusing on multiculturalism and understanding diversity might give wide perspectives on understand clients' backgrounds and cultures.

In the future, there are things DPSS could still develop. For example, DPSS could in the future organize integrated lessons and simulation classes. Integrated lessons might be helpful for students who begin learning the Finnish language from the very beginning. In such lessons, subject-course lecturer could teach the content and Finnish as a second language teacher could, for example, practice the vocabulary with students who need support with in Finnish language learning. Based on the study conducted by Tervasoff & Silvan (2020), such integrated and simulated lessons have been proven successful. They might bring good results also at in DPSS studies and also in other degrees at Metropolia University of Applied Sciences.

This thesis might help DPSS to understand the previous challenges in learning the Finnish learning during DPSS studies in the old curriculum. The changes made in the new

curriculum and suggestions I presented can help and support DPSS in the further development of DPSS. New similar study could be made on the effectiveness of the new curriculum, when students from studying the new curriculum will graduate.

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Personal Language Study plan (PSP) for students: Proficiency in the languages of Finland

Background: In order to provide you with better and more versatile opportunities to find employment in Finland after you have graduated, you will benefit from knowing Finnish/Swedish.

Objective: The aim of Language PSP is to help you reflect on and set goals for learning Finnish/Swedish – primarily independently and, if necessary, through discussions with your teachers. The Language PSP will also help you plan your own road to the mastery of Finnish/Swedish.

Do this: Reflect on the questions below independently. If you would like to discuss the questions with your teacher or supervisor, please answer the questions before the discussion. It takes 5–10 minutes to answer.

Record your answers and update them if necessary. It is a good idea to return to them whenever you discuss your studies with teachers and supervisors.

A. Questions about studying and working in Finnish/Swedish

Questions related to studying and working guide you to think about the significance of competence in different languages in your future work tasks.

1. What kind of work do you study for: who do you have to communicate with and what kind of language skills do you need?
2. If your degree/studies include training periods/a traineeship/traineeships, in which language would you like to complete them?

B. Questions about your Finnish/Swedish skills

The purpose of the questions related to proficiency in the languages of Finland is to help you understand your level of Finnish/Swedish. The questions can also help you set goals to develop your Finnish/Swedish skills.

3. Would you like to learn more Finnish/Swedish? Why do you want / don't want it?
4. In your opinion, how is using Finnish/Swedish going for you? You can select multiple options.
 - a) I do not understand nor speak Finnish/Swedish at all.
 - b) I listen to and understand a little in familiar and recurring situations; I do not speak or write Finnish/Swedish myself.
 - c) I believe I understand the language fairly well in familiar and recurring situations; I speak and write it just a little.

- d) I understand Finnish/Swedish in a wide variety of situations, and I can briefly discuss things and events.
 - e) I listen to and read in Finnish/Swedish regularly and proficiently, but I don't like speaking Finnish/Swedish.
 - f) I use Finnish/Swedish daily in social interactions and in service situations (orally and in writing).
 - g) I speak Finnish/Swedish fluently in my studies, but written assignments are often challenging.
 - h) I study/work in Finnish/Swedish. I also do well in written tasks.
5. Have you participated in an official Finnish/Swedish language test (e.g., the YKI certificate)?
- a. No.
 - b. Yes (which level and when?)
6. What kind of Finnish/Swedish skills will you aim for in the future? In what situations would you like to be able to use Finnish? Please indicate which of the following best describes your goal/future.
- a) I will work and/or complete a traineeship in Finnish/Swedish.
 - b) I will actively use Finnish/Swedish in everyday situations, hobbies and with my family and friends, but I work in English or another language.
 - c) I understand Finnish/Swedish in everyday situations, but I do not actively use Finnish/Swedish in my hobbies, simple service situations and when communicating with friends.
 - d) I do not think I will need Finnish/Swedish skills in the future.
7. What is your concrete next goal?
- a) I will complete a Finnish/Swedish course.
 - b) I will start using Finnish/Swedish in different situations.
 - c) I will write an e-mail/another message in Finnish/Swedish.
 - d) I will exchange news with my friends in Finnish/Swedish.
 - e) I will watch a Finnish TV series/film / listen to a podcast/music /audio book in Finnish/Swedish. I will use subtitles if they are available.
 - f) I will read news headlines in Finnish/Swedish.
 - g) I will follow the news in plain Finnish weekly.
 - h) [I will start using the "kielivinkki" app]
 - i) I will do something else, please specify. Define it yourself:

C. Background questions

The purpose of the background questions of Language PSP is to inspire you to reflect on your own language learning style and method and to raise your awareness of the different areas of language skills and all the places where you can learn a language.

8. What languages do you use in your everyday life?
9. With whom and in which situations do you use these languages?
10. What kind of language learning feels nice and meaningful to you? You can select multiple options.
 - a) I learn the language best on a course under the guidance of a language teacher.
 - b) Independent study with the help of online materials (such as YLE Kielikoulu) and self-study materials is good for me.
 - c) I study the language myself using a textbook and a dictionary.
 - d) I learn and practise the language by listening. I listen to music, podcasts, conversations, etc.
 - e) I learn and practise the language by watching TV shows, movies, YouTube videos, etc.
 - f) I learn and practise the language by reading (plain) news or headlines, magazines, texts in my own field, blogs, etc.
 - g) I learn and practise the language by reading and writing in informal situations, such as WhatsApp messages and social media.
 - h) I like language games and language applications, such as Wordle and Duolingo.
 - i) I like learning the language in social situations, for example at the cashier of a shop/café, talking to friends or a teacher, at the study office or in work situations.
 - j) I like to experiment and use my existing language skills boldly in all situations.

D. Dream freely

11. After graduation, I intend to live and work...
12. If my current plans change, I will...
13. If I were very fluent in Finnish/Swedish, then I'd...
14. Five years from now, I see myself...

Differences between old curriculum of 2019 and the upcoming curriculum of 2023

Course in old 2019 curriculum	ECTS	Corresponding (or partially corresponding) course in 2023 curriculum
Introduction to Studying	5	Orientation to studies
Professional Communication and IT Skills	5	Professional communication and academic writing
Introduction to Social Pedagogy	5	Introduction to social pedagogy
Development of the Welfare State	5	Development of the welfare state
Work and Working Environments in Social Services	5	Working environments in social services
Swedish at Work	5	Swedish at work / Finnish for professionals (B1)
Individual Growth and Development	5	Human behavior in the social environment
Childhood Growth and Development	5	<i>No information available yet on the early childhood education path</i>
Social Participation and Exclusion	5	Inclusion and disadvantage
Everyday Life of Families and Children in Finnish Society	5	<i>No information available yet on the early childhood education path</i>
Individual and Community Counselling	5	Basics of individual, group and community counselling
First Internship	5	Work placement and language internship 1 – Social pedagogy and client's everyday life
Supporting Everyday Life in Sociopedagogical Work	10	<i>No corresponding course</i>
Supporting Daily Life in Early Education	10	<i>No information available yet on the early childhood education path</i>
Empowering, Ethics and Work Challenges	10	Empowerment, ethics and work challenges 1
Internship in Voluntary Work	5	Internship in voluntary and civic environments
Child Protection	5	Child protection
Mental Health and Substance Abuse	5	Mental health and substance abuse
Disability and Chronic Illness	5	<i>No corresponding course</i>
Special Needs Support in Early Education	5	<i>No information available yet on the early childhood education path</i>
Case Management	10	Social service work
Basics of Research and Development	5	Basics of research and development
Second Internship	15	Work placement and language internship 2 – Sustainable development in client work 1
Innovation Project	10	Multidisciplinary Innovation Project 1

Advanced Research and Development	5	Advanced research and development
Special Education in Different Phases of Life	5	<i>No information available yet on the early childhood education path</i>
Social Counselling with Adults	5	<i>No corresponding course</i>
The Impact of Changes in Social Security on Everyday Life	5	<i>No corresponding course</i>
Abusive Behaviour and Domestic Violence	5	<i>No corresponding course</i>
Socio-pedagogical Community Work	5	Exploring creativity in community based development
Creative Methods	5	Creative methods and advocacy work
Community Animation	5	<i>No corresponding course</i>
Youth as a Phase of Life	5	<i>No corresponding course</i>
Work with Families	5	<i>No corresponding course</i>
Abusive Behaviour and Domestic Violence	5	<i>No corresponding course</i>
Basics of Early Childhood Education	5	<i>No information available yet on the early childhood education path</i>
Learning in Early Childhood	5	<i>No information available yet on the early childhood education path</i>
Pedagogical Activities in Early Childhood Education	10	<i>No information available yet on the early childhood education path</i>
Planning of the Bachelor's Thesis	5	Planning the bachelor's thesis and english
Leadership and Development of the Work Community	5	<i>No corresponding course</i>
Implementing the Bachelor's Thesis	5	Implementing the bachelor's thesis
Reporting and Publication of the Bachelor's Thesis	5	Reporting and publication of the bachelor's thesis
Entrepreneurship in Welfare, Leadership and Service Production	5	Leadership and entrepreneurship in social services
3. Internship	20	Work placement and language internship 3 - Strengthening antidiscriminatory competences
<i>No corresponding course</i>		Introduction to the urban context
<i>No corresponding course</i>		Discovering challenges in urban areas
<i>No corresponding course</i>		Language aware and anti-discriminatory guidance
<i>No corresponding course</i>		Professional development and career planning
<i>No corresponding course</i>		Facing superdiversity
<i>No corresponding course</i>		Finnish 1 (A1.2)
<i>No corresponding course</i>		Finnish 2 (A1.3–A2.1.)
<i>No corresponding course</i>		Finnish 3 (A2.1/A2.2)
<i>No corresponding course</i>		Finnish 4 (A2.2/B1.1)

<i>No corresponding course</i>		Finnish for professionals 2 (B1 – B2)
<i>No corresponding course</i>		Professional Finnish in the social field (B2)

Questionnaire for the working life partners of DPSS

1. Missä tehtävässä työskentelet ja mikä on koulutuksesi? / What are your work duties in your current position and what is your educational background?
2. Mitä kieliä työpaikallasi puhutaan ja millaisissa tilanteissa eri kieliä käytetään? / What languages are spoken in your work environment and in which situations are different languages used?
3. Miten eri kielet otetaan työpaikallasi huomioon, tarjotaanko kielitukea tarvittaessa? / How are different languages taken into account in your working environment, for example is there language support available if needed?
4. Minkälaisia hyviä viestintäkäytäntöjä teillä on työn sujuvuuden takaamiseksi? / What kinds of good communication practices do you have to support work integration (ability to adapt and function successfully as well as a to feel a sense of belonging in
5. Hyödynnetäänkö työpaikassanne työntekijöiden monikielisyyttä? Jos kyllä, niin miten? / Are you able to take advantage of your employee's diverse language skills? If yes, how?
6. Millaista sosiaalialan ydinosaamista työpaikallasi tarvitaan? / What kinds of core competences are needed in your work environment?
7. Koetko, että vastavalmistuneilta tai harjoitteluilta suorittavilta puuttuu joitakin oleellisia taitoja? / Do you feel that our graduates or interns are missing necessary core skills?
8. Mitä sosionomin tulee tulevaisuudessa osata? /What should a social services professional know how to do in the future?
9. Millaiset valmiudet koulutus mielestäsi antaa vastavalmistuneelle sosionomille toimia sosiaalialan työtehtävissä? / In your opinion, what type of preparatory education should we give to recently graduated sosionomi so that they can manage their work task?

Muita kommentteja / Other comments

Questionnaire for DPSS alumni

1. When did you graduate from Metropolia?
2. Where were you employed right after graduation?
3. Where are you working now and in what position?
4. What languages are spoken at your workplace? And in what kind of situations?
5. Is this your 'dream job' or do you feel that you have fewer opportunities as a result of certain factors (please explain)?
6. How are different languages taken into account in your working environment, is there for example, language support? What kinds of good communication practices do you have to support work integration?
7. What do you see as the most important contributing factors in gaining your current position in the social services field - for example, how have you progressed in your career since your first place of employment (better Finnish skills, more experience)
8. Have there been challenges in getting a job within the social service field? If so, what reasons do you find behind these challenges?
9. When looking back, which themes/topics/courses in the DPSS did you find most important or remarkable for developing your professionalism?
10. What other factors (e.g., peer support, tutoring) during the studies supported your studies in general and development of your social service professionalism?
11. What do you see as future challenges in the labor market that DPSS should consider?
12. What do you see as necessary or core skills of future social service professionals?

Other comments

1. How would you describe your Finnish language skills?
2. Did the DPSS studies support language learning and if so, how and in which courses? Would you have needed some extra support for this?
3. Did you do your internships in a Finnish language environment?
If yes, how did the internship affect your language skills?
If not, knowing what you know now about working in social services, would you choose you internships differently?
4. Do you feel that you are disadvantaged (not seen as part of the community/passed over for promotions) as a result of your language skills.