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SOCIAL SERVICES, HEALTH AND SPORTS

ENHANCING COMMUNICATION AND CULTURAL AWARENESS AMONG INTERNATIONAL NURSING DEGREE STUDENTS IN THEIR FIRST INTERNSHIP. E-POSTER

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THESIS
Abstract

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<p>The integration of international nursing degree students into Finnish healthcare settings, particularly during their first internships in elderly care homes, presents challenges due to language barriers and cultural differences. These students often struggle to communicate effectively with elderly clients who predominantly speak Finnish and to adapt to Finland's work culture, which emphasizes autonomy and efficiency.</p> <p>This development work aims to create a poster with basic sentences in the Finnish language for daily communication to be used by first-year international nursing students from Savonia University of Applied Sciences while assisting elderly clients with activities of daily living in elderly care nursing homes, and information on the Finnish work culture.</p> <p>This study utilized a developmental research methodology. It assessed the needs and designed, implemented, and evaluated an E-poster to address common communication and cultural challenges. The E-poster was designed to address communication gaps by providing practical Finnish sentences for daily interactions, such as assisting clients with meals, hygiene, and mobility.</p> <p>The phrases focus on essential tasks and polite expressions to foster respectful and effective communication. These phrases were chosen to reduce misunderstandings and promote confidence among students during their internships. The E-poster also includes information about Finnish work culture to enhance students' cultural competence.</p> <p>By equipping students with these tools, the E-poster is expected to contribute to more culturally sensitive care and a more inclusive healthcare setting. The findings underscore the importance of phrases needed to access language resources in multicultural healthcare environments.</p>	
Keywords: Communication, work culture, competence,	

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1 INTRODUCTION

During their first internship in Finnish elderly care homes, international nursing students encounter significant language barriers, particularly in their interactions with elderly clients who predominantly communicate in Finnish or Swedish. A considerable number of students encounter difficulties in comprehending medical terminology and basic communication, thereby impeding their capacity to deliver care proficiently (Rathiram, et al., 2022).

The students' limited proficiency in the local languages poses challenges in articulating symptoms, understanding instructions, and addressing patients' needs, often resulting in communication breakdowns and frustration for both students and their clients (Al Shamsi, et al., 2020). Moreover, the scarcity of qualified medical interpreters in Finnish healthcare settings further compounds this issue (Lundin, et al., 2018).

In addition to language barriers, international nursing students face cultural challenges in Finnish elderly care homes. Many student nurses who regularly interacted with the elderly groups have reported feeling ill-equipped to provide adequate care for these populations (Pulido-Fuentes et al., 2017). This is due to intercultural misunderstandings and unfavorable health outcomes, contributing to widening health disparities among minority communities (Wesołowska et al., 2018).

Finland's healthcare culture values autonomy, privacy, and straightforward communication, which may be unfamiliar to students from different cultural backgrounds (Radl-Karimi et al., 2020). Students may also encounter different expectations regarding care practices, such as how elderly clients should be treated, and struggle to adjust to the work culture, which can lead to difficulties in providing culturally sensitive care.

These cultural differences can hinder the student's ability to collaborate effectively with local staff and clients (Wesołowska et al., 2018). Previous studies emphasize the importance of cultural competence in healthcare, highlighting the need for healthcare providers to develop skills to manage cultural differences effectively (Douglas et al., 2014).

Research shows that cultural competence training can improve health outcomes, communication, and patient satisfaction (Betancourt et al., 2003). However, many healthcare professionals in Finland report feeling unprepared to handle cross-cultural care, leading to communication challenges and disparities in care for immigrant populations (Kaihlainen, et al., 2019). Despite ongoing efforts to improve cultural competence, gaps remain in addressing the practical challenges faced by healthcare providers, especially in intercultural communication (Barker & Beagan, 2014).

Additionally, studies have highlighted both the importance of cultural competence, communication challenges for international students due to language barriers, and the unique work culture in Finnish healthcare that requires independence and proactive decision-making from nurses (Suhonen, et al., 2018; Kaihlainen, et al., 2019; Koskinen, et al., 2020).

These findings addressed our research objective of creating resources to aid international students. It also emphasized the need for practical solutions, such as a poster for daily communication in Finnish, to help students adjust to Finland's elderly care work environment.

This development work aims to create a poster with basic sentences in Finnish language for daily communication to use by the students while assisting elderly clients with activities of daily living in elderly care nursing homes, and information on the Finnish work culture. The development work also intends to enrich the international students with information on work culture in elderly care in nursing homes.

2 COMMUNICATION AND WORK CULTURE IN NURSING IN FINLAND

2.1 The concept of communication in nursing

Communication in nursing refers to both verbal and non-verbal exchanges between healthcare professionals and patients (Suhonen et al., 2018). In the healthcare system, communication is vital to understanding patient needs, conveying medical instructions, and ensuring patient safety. It is not just about conveying information but also about understanding patient needs, preferences, and emotions. Theories such as Peplau's Interpersonal Relations model emphasize the importance of communication in building nurse-patient relationships (Koskinen et al., 2020).

Additionally, Clear communication between healthcare providers and patients is crucial as it helps in the accurate assessment of patient's conditions, provides treatments, and renders psychological support, all with the aim of yielding positive health outcomes (Suhonen et al., 2018). In nursing practice, the use of non-verbal cues such as body language, facial expressions, and tone plays an essential role in maintaining rapport and trust with patients (Buttigieg et al., 2018).

2.2 The concept of language barrier in nursing

A language barrier arises when healthcare professionals and patients do not share a common language, potentially impeding effective communication. According to Lehto et al. (2019), language barriers can disrupt the stream of information between nurses and patients, which potentially results in misdiagnoses, inappropriate treatments, and patient dissatisfaction. Vuorenmaa et al. (2022) note that these immigrant nurses often encounter significant challenges in communicating medical instructions to patients in languages they understand, making it difficult to adhere to treatment plans.

Additionally, immigrant nurses, are usually unable to speak the host country's language fluently can result in misunderstandings and reduced quality of care (Koivuniemi, 2012). This is particularly significant in multicultural societies, where healthcare providers must communicate with patients from diverse linguistic backgrounds. A study conducted by Mäki et al. (2021) emphasized that consulting interpretation services and cultural competence are crucial to avoid errors in care delivery.

2.3 Communication and language barrier in the context of nursing in Finland

In Finland, the healthcare system has seen an influx of international populations, creating new challenges in communication within nursing practices. International nurses face considerable language barriers. This is because the primary languages spoken by the natives in Finland are Finnish and Swedish and it is also widely used in healthcare settings. This creates a significant obstacle, especially for nurses who are non-native speakers of these languages. (Vuorenmaa et al., 2022).

Research by Hyvärinen et al., (2017), highlights that the lack of proficiency in the Finnish language affects not only nurse-patient communication but also the relationship between colleagues. This can delay treatment, reduce patient satisfaction, and make the work environment more stressful for international nurses, leading to social and professional isolation (Dahl et al., 2017). The study

conducted by Vuorenmaa et al., (2022) emphasizes that miscommunication due to language differences leads to a diminished quality of care and patient dissatisfaction.

While interpreter services are available in Finland, they are not always effectively utilized due to time constraints or a lack of awareness among healthcare staff (Eklöf, et al., 2015; Heath, et al., 2023). According to Lindström and Helin (2020), many international nurses feel unprepared to manage language diversity and interpretation services are not always available. As suggested by Mäki et al. (2021), international nurses should adopt strategies for overcoming language barriers, such as learning simplified language and accessing interpreters to improve the communication process.

The combination of language barriers and inadequate training in cultural competence poses a significant challenge in Finland, potentially jeopardizing patient safety and the quality of care (Al Shamsi, et al., 2020). According to Mäki et al. (2021), addressing these barriers necessitates systematic changes in healthcare education and practices, including improved access to interpretation services and tailored training for healthcare providers to navigate multilingual and multicultural contexts.

3 WORK CULTURE IN THE CONTEXT OF NURSING IN FINLAND

3.1 Concept of work culture

The term "work culture" refers to employees' shared values, behaviors, norms, attitudes, and practices that outline the working environment in an organization. In the healthcare sector, work culture influences how tasks are approached, how employees interact, and how patient care is administered. This includes attitudes towards teamwork, decision-making, and patient care (Braithwaite et al., 2017).

In nursing practice, work culture encompasses practices related to decision-making, communication, and patient care, which influence both staff collaboration and patient outcomes (Flinkman et al., 2013). Work culture significantly impacts the ability of healthcare providers to work efficiently and harmoniously (Buttigieg et al., 2018). According to Crowder (2013), a positive work culture fosters teamwork, efficiency, and job satisfaction, while a negative work culture can result in stress, burnout, and diminished quality of patient care.

3.2 Work culture in Finnish elderly care homes

The work culture in Finnish elderly care homes is distinctive, characterized by a high degree of independence and respect for the elderly, and efficiency in patient care. Nurses in these settings are expected to take initiative, make decisions autonomously and be proactive in their decision-making process as the care provided in these elderly homes is guided by the principle of dignity and holistic wellbeing with an emphasis on both physical and mental health (Hietapakka et al., 2019). However, international nurses often struggle to adjust to this level of independence in this system, especially in circumstances where their previous work culture emphasized hierarchical or collaborative approaches (Calenda et al., 2019; Munkejord & Tingvold, 2019).

3.3 Challenges related to work culture for nursing students in elderly care homes.

For international nursing students on internships, adapting to the work culture in Finnish elderly care homes can be challenging. They may struggle with expectations of autonomy and decision-making, especially if they come from cultures where nursing roles are more hierarchical (Pitkänen et al., 2016). Moreover, language barriers and cultural differences further complicate their ability to integrate and communicate effectively with both colleagues and patients (Pitkajarvi et al., 2012; Tarkoma, 2019). International students may feel isolated, and misunderstandings may arise due to differing cultural perceptions of care and respect, impacting their learning experience and professional development (Vartiainen et al., 2016).

4 PURPOSE AND AIMS

The purpose of this development work is to create a poster to assist first-year international nursing students at Savonia University of Applied Sciences in understanding basic communication and cultural information during their first internship in nursing assessment and intervention, in elderly care homes in Finland. The aim of this development work is to create a poster with basic sentences in Finnish language for daily communication to be used by the students while assisting elderly clients with activities of daily living in elderly care nursing homes, and information on the Finnish work culture.

The development work also intends to enrich the international students with information on work culture in elderly care in nursing homes. The development work intends to answer the following question

How can the cultural and communication skills of first-year international nursing degree students in Savonia UAS, be enriched in their first internship?

5 IMPLEMENTATIONS OF THE DEVELOPMENT WORK

5.1 Description of the Development Environment and Method

Developmental work is a research methodology which centered on the creation, design, and evaluation of practical tools or materials aimed at addressing specific issues or enhancing processes within a particular field. This intervention-based approach emphasizes the direct application of research findings to develop usable solutions (Richey & Klein, 2005). As opined by Kananen and Gates (2011), the primary objectives of developmental work include assessing the current situation, exploring alternatives, defining goals, and identifying the means to achieve those goals.

The operating environment for this E-poster is the nursing homes. This environment presents specific challenges related to communication and cultural integration, especially for international nursing students who are new to the Finnish language and work culture (Kananen & Gates, 2011). This developmental work is designed for the Nursing Assessment and Intervention Internship Course for first-year international nursing degree students at Savonia University of Applied Sciences going for their internship in elderly care homes.

Savonia University of Applied Sciences, which offers nursing programs that include practical internships in various healthcare settings, including elderly care homes. Savonia University of Applied Sciences is an internationally oriented institution focused on work-life integration, committed to education, research, development, and innovation. The university is home to approximately 8,000 students, including 500 international students, and employs around 600 staff members. Savonia's campuses are situated in the cities of Kuopio, Iisalmi, and Varkaus. The university is dedicated to shaping strong professionals across seven distinct fields of study. Its diverse programs enable students to pursue their studies full-time while balancing work commitments. Savonia's key priority is internationalization, which influences education, services, research, development, and innovation activities (Savonia University, 2023).

The purpose of this development work is to create an E-poster to assist first-year international students in overcoming communication barriers during their internships in Finnish elderly care homes. The Eposter is designed to operate within this environment, providing students with basic Finnish phrases for common interactions such as assisting with meals, mobility, and personal hygiene. Developing an E-poster to assist international student nurses explore and overcome communication barriers is beneficial based on similar challenges we encountered during our first-year internship program. This instrument therefore aims to enhance the quality of care while improving international students' confidence in their communication skills, fostering a more inclusive work environment (Richey & Klein, 2005).

5.2 Planning and Designing the E-Poster

The planning and designing of the E-poster follow a structured process that is guided by educational and design theories that emphasize functionality, visual clarity, and accessibility to serve as a practical communication tool for first-year international nursing students during their internships. An E-poster, as defined by Duchin and Sherwood (1990), is an electronic version of a traditional poster that conveys information through a carefully organized layout. It should contain minimal text, clear visuals, and a logical flow of information that allows for quick understanding and practical use.

This E-poster was made using Microsoft PowerPoint software 2017, as this tool is easy to use and is familiar to the authors. In terms of technical aspects, PowerPoint was chosen as the tool for creating the E-poster due to its user-friendly features and versatility (Master's et al., 2015). This software allows for easy adjustments of colours, fonts, and layouts, making it an ideal platform for iterative design.

A literature search for the e-poster was conducted in October 2024. The search involved using keywords such as communication, language barriers, and work culture in databases such as CINAHL, PubMed, and Google Scholar. Three literature sources were adopted and reviewed.

The content of the E-poster focuses on basic Finnish phrases and essential cultural information needed for daily communication in elderly care homes. According to Masters, et al. (2015), a well designed E-poster must balance simplicity with comprehensive information. This means the E-poster will include short, direct sentences in Finnish, accompanied by translations and visual cues to enhance comprehension (Berg & Hicks, 2017; Goodhand et al., 2011).

5.3 Implementation of the E-poster

The implementation phase of the E-poster centres on its deployment. Upon the completion of the Eposter, the tutor supervising the nursing assessment and intervention internship course will disseminate it to first-year international nursing students through their course material. This course material will be printed for the first-year international students during their first internship. A feedback form will be appended to the E-poster to facilitate the collection of evaluative responses. This objective will be accomplished through our collaboration with Savonia University of Applied Sciences, which precedes their internships in elderly care facilities.

Despite the implementation of the E-poster, Bael et al. (2023) underscore the critical role of mentorship and support from Finnish colleagues are crucial for the successful integration of international nurses. This provides more comprehensive support for integration into Finnish work culture while they use Eposters to enhance their everyday communication with elderly patients at the care homes (Mikkonen, 2020).

6 DISCUSSIONS

6.1 Evaluation of Development Work Process and Output

The purpose of the development work was to create an E-poster that provides basic Finnish sentences and cultural information for first-year international nursing students at Savonia University, specifically for use in elderly care homes. Employing developmental research methods (Richey & Klein, 2005), the project focused on addressing practical communication needs in healthcare. The design and implementation phases were driven by clear objectives to effectively bridge communication gaps related to language barriers and cultural differences in elderly care settings. Furthermore, Research by Berg and Hicks (2017) underscores that a straightforward layout and clear language improve comprehension, which is essential for nursing students in need of immediate communication tools during internships.

The evaluation of the phrases of the E-poster will focus on assessing its usability as a practical tool during internships and determining its effectiveness in bridging communication gaps. A feedback form will be used to gather data from both students and their supervisors. Data analyses will be used to evaluate the responses regarding satisfaction, effectiveness, strengths, challenges, and areas of improvement for the E-poster. The evaluation will be based on its usability—specifically, whether it was easy for students to understand and access—its relevance—examining how well the content met student needs—and its impact—assessing whether the E-poster enhanced communication, reduced misunderstandings, and improved the confidence of first-year international students, ultimately bridging communication gaps in elderly care homes.

A feedback form was attached to the E-poster to enable students and supervisors to grade the performance of the tool by indicating the most useful phrases and those that needed improvement. This form will be used to evaluate the effectiveness of the E-poster to help improve communication between students and clients, foster better relationships within care teams, and enhance the student's overall confidence and integration into the work environment, reducing language-related misunderstandings.

6.2 Ethicality and Reliability

The thesis adhered to research practices and principles relevant to academic research. This study was conducted using credible scholarly sources like PubMed, CINAHL, and Google Scholar, strengthening the credibility of the data and conclusions. Additionally, we collaborated with our supervisor to ensure that this developmental work was thoroughly reviewed to reduce potential biases. Every resource used in the thesis was meticulously referenced to prevent plagiarism. The development work prioritized care to avoid culturally insensitive language and to support safe and respectful interactions. Selecting phrases for the E-poster emphasized inclusivity in addressing communication challenges among international students in Finnish elderly care.

6.3 Professional Growth

This developmental work would facilitate professional growth in several key areas. First, it would improve communication and enhance cultural competence by enabling first-year international students to communicate effectively with elderly patients during their first internship in the care homes. This will mitigate the language barrier and improve patient outcomes, which aligns with the findings of Kaihlanen et al. (2019) on the benefits of cultural competence training for healthcare providers. The process also developed practical skills in designing accessible educational materials, fostering an ability to address communication barriers—a vital skill in multicultural healthcare environments (Douglas et al., 2014). The ability to independently conduct research, plan educational tools, and engage in iterative improvements contributed significantly to professional development.

6.4 Applicability and Future Research

The content of the E-poster has direct applicability for first-year international nursing students at Savonia University, providing essential Finnish phrases and cultural insights personalized to elderly care settings. As opined by Mäki et al. (2021), tools like these play an essential role in reducing misunderstandings and enhancing patient care quality in multicultural contexts. Future research could expand this resource to cover other areas of healthcare or adapt it into digital formats accessible via mobile devices, making it even more practical in various care settings. Additionally, longitudinal studies could assess the E-poster's long-term impact on student's communication skills and confidence in delivering culturally competent care.

7 CONCLUSION

The development work aimed at creating an E-poster to support first-year international nursing students at Savonia University of Applied Sciences to address communication and cultural challenges faced during internships in Finnish elderly care homes. This tool provides essential Finnish phrases and insights into caring for elderly patients in Finnish care homes, helping bridge language barriers and fostering better integration into care teams.

The benefits of using this E-poster extend beyond immediate linguistic support. It would empower international students to improve their communication skills and engage confidently with Finnish elderly patients, enhancing both their professional competence and their ability to deliver culturally sensitive care. Furthermore, including foundational work culture elements fosters better adaptation to the Finnish healthcare environment, promoting smoother collaboration within care teams.

This thesis emphasises the importance of bridging communication gaps between Finland and its international students and foreign healthcare professionals. The structured approach that was adopted to design this developmental research ensures that the E-poster meets practical needs while being accessible and user-friendly. The feedback form attached to the work during the implementation process allows for ongoing evaluation and refinement, ensuring its sustained relevance and effectiveness.

Future research could explore digital formats to enhance accessibility and broader applications across different healthcare settings. Additionally, the application of longitudinal research could provide deeper insights into the long-term impact of such tools on students' professional development and their contribution to inclusive healthcare practices.

Ultimately, this work exemplifies how innovative, practical solutions can foster integration, build cultural competence, and enrich the educational experiences of international students. It lays a foundation for more inclusive healthcare environments, where diversity is embraced, and every caregiver is empowered to thrive in different cultural environments during their nursing practice.

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8 APPENDIX 1 E-POSTER

Comprehensive Assessment Phrases

Miten voit tänään?	-	How are you feeling today?
Oletko nukkunut hyvin viime aikoina?	-	Oletko nukkunut hyvin viime aikoina?
Tarvitsetko apua liikkumiseen?	-	Do you need help with moving around?
Voimmeko mitata verenpaineesi?	-	Can we measure your blood pressure?

Quantitative Nursing Phrases

Montako lääkettä otit tänä aamuna?	-	How many medications did you take this morning?
Mikä on kipusi asteikolla 1-10?	-	What is your pain level on a scale of 1-10?
Kuinka monta kertaa olet käynyt vessassa tänään? today?	-	How many times have you used the bathroom today?
Kävelemme 15 minuuttia ulkona.	-	We will walk outside for 15 minutes.

Qualitative Nursing Phrases

Miltä tuntuu kipu?	-	How does the pain feel?
Oletko huomannut muutoksia ruokahalussasi?	-	Have you noticed changes in your appetite?
Tuntuuko hengitys raskaalta?	-	Does your breathing feel heavy? Miten sinä selviät arjen tehtävistä?
	-	How do you manage daily tasks?

Emotional Support Phrases

Miltä sinusta tuntuu tänään?	-	How are you feeling today?
Haluatko puhua jostain erityisestä?	-	Would you like to talk about something in particular?
Olen täällä kuuntelemassa.	-	I am here to listen.
Olet tehnyt hienoa työtä tänään	-	You have done a great job today.

Psychological Support Phrases

Onko sinulla ollut huolia viime aikoina? -	Have you had any worries lately?
Haluaisitko keskustella masennuksestasi? -	Would you like to talk about your depression?
Mitä voimme tehdä auttaaksemme -	What can we do to help you relax? sinua rentoutumaan?
Voin jäädä tänne kanssasi, et ole yksin. -	I can stay here with you; you are not alone.

Medicinal Care Phrases

Onko aika ottaa lääkkeesi? -	Is it time to take your medication?
Muistitko ottaa kaikki lääkkeet tänään? -	Did you remember to take all your medications today?
Tässä on lääkkeesi, ota se veden kanssa. -	Here is your medication, take it with water.
Katsotaanpa, miten haava paranee. -	Let's check how the wound is healing.

Sociological Support Phrases

Haluatko viettää aikaa muiden kanssa päiväsalissa? -	Would you like to spend time with others in the day room
Voimmeko järjestää sinulle aikaa sosiaalinen toimintaa? -	Can we arrange time for you to engage in social activities
Sinun mielipiteesi on tärkeä meille kaikille. -	Your opinion is important to all of us.

Physiological Monitoring Phrases

Tarkistan sydämenlyöntisi. -	I will check your heartbeat.
Mittaamme happisaturaatiosi. -	We will measure your oxygen saturation.
Verenpaineesi on hieman korkea tänään. -	Your blood pressure is a bit high today.

Work Culture Phrases

Sisu -	Bravery
Kahvi tauko -	Coffee break
Uskontoa ja poliittista kantaa ei julkisteta -	Religion and political affiliations are not disclosed.
Kukaan ei puhu palkastaan toisilleen -	No one talk about their salary to the other.

APPENDIX 2: E-POSTER FEEDBACK FORM

Thank you for taking the time to provide feedback on the E-poster. Your responses will help us improve its effectiveness and usefulness for future students.

Section A: Student Feedback Only

Close Ended Questions

Under each section, please rate the statement on a scale of 1 to 5 by ticking []. Where 1 is "Strongly Disagree" and 5 is "Strongly Agree."

1. Usability of the E-Poster

The E-poster is easy to use and understand.

1 2 3 4 5

The E-poster is accessible and practical for daily use in my internship.

1 2 3 4 5

2. Content Relevance and Usefulness of the E-poster

The Finnish phrases included are useful for daily communication with elderly clients.

1 2 3 4 5

The E-poster has improved my ability to communicate confidently in Finnish.

1 2 3 4 5

3. The E-poster's Impact on Internship Experience

Using the E-poster has helped me feel more integrated into the care team.

1 2 3 4 5

The E-poster has reduced misunderstandings with clients or staff.

1 2 3 4 5

Open-Ended Feedback

Provide feedback by writing your response to the questions below:

4. What aspects of the E-poster did you find most helpful?

.....
.....

5. What improvements would you suggest for future versions of the E-poster?

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

Section B: Supervisor Feedback Only

Close Ended Questions

Under each section, please rate the statement on a scale of 1 to 5 by ticking []. Where 1 is "Strongly Disagree" and 5 is "Strongly Agree."

1. Effectiveness of the E-Poster for Student Support

The E-poster effectively supports students in basic Finnish communication.

1 2 3 4 5

The content on the E-poster aligns well with the needs of the internship setting.

1 2 3 4 5

2. Observed Impact on Student Performance

The E-poster has improved students' ability to engage with clients.

1 2 3 4 5

I noticed a positive impact on students' understanding of Finnish work culture.

1 2 3 4 5

Students using the E-poster demonstrate increased confidence in their communication skills.

1 2 3 4 5

Open-Ended Feedback

3. In your view, what is the most beneficial feature of the E-poster for students?

.....

4. Do you have any recommendations for enhancing the E-poster?

.....

