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# LANGUAGE EDUCATION REFORM IN A FINNISH UNIVERSITY OF APPLIED SCIENCES

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Finnish universities of applied sciences are practically oriented higher educational institutions strongly connected to working life. Traditionally, students study in field-specific groups with language and communication studies integrated with their professional subjects. In central Finland at JAMK University of Applied Sciences, the development of language and communication studies is the responsibility of JAMK Language Centre. Previously, various degree programs ordered their mandatory language and communication studies (English, Swedish and Communication Skills for Working Life) from JAMK Language Centre once each year according to their curricula. However, with digitalization and the diversification of student groups, the previous model lacked functionality and flexibility; hence, a reform of teaching processes and a new administrative model was needed. In 2017 - 2019, JAMK Language Centre implemented a two-year experiment focusing on the implementation of language and communication studies in multidisciplinary student groups. The literature on the future needs for working life emphasizes working in networks and more complicated problem solving. Most real-life problems require a multidisciplinary approach to solve them.

At JAMK, the language and communication courses are no longer designed for a particular field of study or degree program but are available for everyone. In practice, the students themselves select the courses most suitable for them. Degree programs no longer order field-specific courses; instead, the courses are more generic. Students have, however, the possibility to acquaint themselves with field-specific terminology when studying in multidisciplinary groups. Courses vary in length and mode of delivery (e.g. contact, online, blended). JAMK Language Centre offers 35 - 40 mandatory courses per language (English, Swedish, Finnish communication) each academic year. Online course mode of delivery, in particular, is gaining more popularity among students and requires increasing teacher input concerning pedagogical solutions of language learning in virtual environments.

The conference presentation and paper introduce the current context of language and communication education in Finnish universities of applied sciences with a special focus on JAMK Language Centre and its reform. In a doctoral thesis begun in 2017 and currently under development, Tuula Kotikoski studies the administrative and pedagogical change at JAMK Language Centre with SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats) analyses (N=22 respondents), in which the administrative staff as well as lecturers could write about their concerns and expectations regarding the new system. The research focus is on teachers' experiences of the organizational and administrative change, and how

it affects their pedagogical views (e.g. the impact of digitalization on teaching) due to a paradigm shift. As a part of the reform students' views on the new system were also asked and an online survey (N= 97 respondents) was carried out at the end of 2018. The students' views were generally positive and they reported that they enjoyed studying in multidisciplinary groups since they could get to know other students from other fields and learn more about their disciplines.

**keywords:** educational change, higher education, language teaching, multidisciplinary groups.