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STUDENT COUNCELLING IN FINNISH UPPER-SECONDARY SCHOOLS Students' and student counsellors' experiences using digital tools for student counselling

STUDENT COUNSELLING IN FINNISH UPPER-SECONDAY SCHOOLS
Students' and student counsellors' experiences of digital tools for student counselling

Marianna Halonen Thesis Spring 2020 Master's Degree in Education Entrepreneurship Oulu University of Applied Sciences

#### **ABSTRACT**

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The world is changing rapidly with strong effects on working life. The uncertainty of the future increases and many students are planning for their future without knowing how the future looks. We all know there will be new professions but what kind of professions and the qualifications needed for those are unknown. Student counselling is playing a remarkable role to address this uncertainty and the purpose of this study is to explore upper-secondary school students and student counsellors experiences of student counselling and especially digital tools used to support the counselling process. Recently, reform for upper-secondary education has taken place and new legislation come into effect in August 2019. New core curriculum for upper-secondary education was published November 2019 and it will be effective in 2021. The results of this study relate to the requirements in the upper-secondary school student counselling curriculum and activities raising from the reform.

The method for collecting data was through an online survey with multiple-choice and open questions for student counsellors and students. Questions focus on students' and student counsellors' opinions and insights.

The survey results from both for students and student counsellors indicate that the need for student counselling is strongest in the areas of planning the further studies and career. Also, there is a need for tools to track the progress of studies in real time with none of the students or student counsellors using digital tools for this purpose. The results of this study are aligned with the content of the upper-secondary school reform and the areas of development are touching upon student counselling. There is a specific emphasis on smoother transition to further studies and the means for this is developing cooperation with the higher education institutions and working life.

Student counsellors' responses suggest that they do not have enough time for personal student counselling as required in the new core curriculum for student counselling. Utilizing virtual opportunities and digital tools represent a possible support but there is also a need for additional funding from the government to be able to fully execute the new curriculum for student counselling. It is important to get more data to support the development of student counselling and this study gives some insights of the status of student counselling in the Finnish Upper Secondary Schools.

Keywords: Finnish education, student counselling, online student counselling, career planning, student counselling reform, student counselling curriculum, upper-secondary school

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# 2 INTRODUCTION

The lack of adequate student counselling has been observed for decades, but the situation has not noticeably changed. (Numminen, U., Kasurinen H., 2003). The role of student counselling is getting even more important in the rapidly changing world. Today's students are studying and making decisions for their future. There will be jobs that don't even exist today and that's why career planning is complex. Even though the need for student counselling has increased the resources have not. According to the studies (Karvonen, S.,2013) upper-secondary students would like to have more personal counselling and information about professions and further education possibilities.

Upper-secondary school students are affected by the demands of changing society and burn-out as well as stress have become more common. According to a study from the Ministry of Education in Finland (Tornberg, A. & Töytäri, A. ,2017) approximately 20 % of the girls and 10 % of the boys feel exhausted time to time because of the study stress and pressure they are feeling. Well-being is seen as a more and more important factor to academic success in upper-secondary schools. Student counselling should not only be guidance for academic matters but also support in student well-being, self-management and study-life balance. This could only be done together with the school staff, students and their guardians.

There is a lack of resources for student counselling in the Finnish upper-secondary schools and the student counsellors own experience is that they do not have enough face-to-face time for student counselling (Tornberg, A. & Töytäri, A. 2017). Online student counselling could play a role in supporting students in their studies and career planning and would be a good addition to face-to-face student counselling. It seems that online student counselling is still not commonly and systematically used in upper-secondary schools and there is little research on the topic. The students are already living in an online world and this study proposes that online tools can be a good asset in student counselling and improve the situation with the lacking resources if they are well designed and meet the needs of the students and student counsellors.

Digital learning tools and technology enable students to develop effective self-directed learning skills: problem solving, critical thinking and collaboration. Students that are using digital learning tools and technology become more engaged in the learning process. Some technology-supported pedagogical models, such as gaming and VR have potential to improve students' learning outcomes, including the development of higher-order thinking skills. They also seem to expand the range of learning opportunities made available to students (Tvillinggaard Bonde, M. 2017)

The students' attitudes are positive towards technology tools that take care of simple functions such as registration to courses but prefer face-to-face advising about more personal and complex matters such as career planning. (Kalamkarian, H., Karp, M., 2017) It is important to find out what kind of technology and online tools would work in personal advising and counselling since the education institutions are lacking resources for face-to-face counselling. On the other hand, if most of the routine type of counselling such as guidance on how to choose right courses and build a relevant study schedule could be done online, face-to-face time can be used for more complex issues like career planning, mentoring etc.

The experts and decision makers of education have also realized the need of support for the uppersecondary students in the changing world. This is one reason why the reform of upper-secondary education

This study explores the extent of online tool use in the student counselling in the Finnish upper-secondary schools. I also look into what types of activities the online tools in student counselling are used for. This study is relevant for student counsellors and education authorities to support development of student counselling in the Finnish Upper Secondary Schools.

# 3 BACKGROUND

### 3.1 Theoretical background

According to Spangar et al (2000) there are more than 400 different models and theories in counselling. Counselling is very wide concept and there are lot of approaches to it but in the beginning the scientific background for counselling was psychological. In the next two chapters I will concentrate on two of the major approaches to counselling. These two approaches person – centered counselling and socio-dynamic theory for counselling have had impact on the development of the student counselling in Finland.

"Counselling is a way of entering into a relationship based on established principles and special knowledge to facilitate self-knowledge, acceptance and emotional growth and optimal development of personal resources. The final objective is to give the individual the opportunity to evolve toward a more satisfying way of life by increasing his or her own resources." (British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy, 2010)

### 3.2 Person – centered counselling

In 1942, Carl Rogers presented a model based on customer and individual centric therapy and it became one of the dominant theories in the late 20th century. Rogers wanted to separate his counselling theory from the psycho-dynamic approach created by Sigmund Freud. Person-centered counselling (PCC) is a humanistic approach to counselling and it is based on the assumption that human beings are experts of themselves and they have access to their own innate expert resources of self-understanding and self-direction. The role of the counsellor is to provide a facilitative environment for the counsellee to find necessary conditions within themselves. These conditions are:

- Psychological contact between counsellee and counsellor
- Counsellee incongruence
- Cousellor congruency
- Unconditional positive regard (UPR)
- Empathic understanding
- Counsellee recognizes the UPR, congruence and empathic understanding of the counsellor

These core conditions are proposed to demonstrate an appreciation of personhood and individuality. which encapsulates the theoretical concept of 'self'. Self - concept refers to the perceptions and beliefs counsellee holds about themselves.

Rogers based person-centered counselling on the assumption that all human beings are seeking a positive self - concept, and it is this innate motivation towards self - fulfilment that is nurtured during person - centered counselling. The main principles that Rogers presented, **authenticity**, **appreciation and empathy**, are the key principles in many counselling theories nowadays.

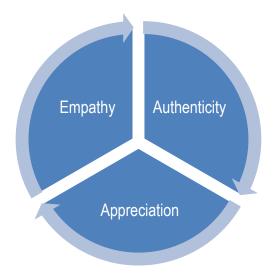


Figure 1: Person – centered counselling (Rogers, 1942)

# 3.3 Socio-dynamic theory for counselling

"Every worry and trouble, big and small, that a person can experience has an ethical-moral dimension. To ask: What kind of career is best and possible for me is to ask: How should I live my life? We helpers should assist people to find answers to this fundamental moral and existential question." (R. Vance Peavy, 2002)

Socio-dynamic theory for counselling is developed by Canadian R. Vance Peavy in the 1980s' and is based on a philosophical approach to career counselling in which each individual is viewed as capable of constructing his / her own life based on the discovery of what has personal meaning. The purpose of the counselling process is to explore the current situation of the person under counselling and based on that create a personal plan. With this plan it is possible to work towards the personal goals. According to Peavy socio-dynamic counselling is seen specifically as a method for career counselling and it is emphasizing the importance of the teamwork and collaboration in counselling. Despite that fact the counsellor cannot only concentrate on career or occupation because the current situation of the person is affected by all the factors in life. According to Peavy basis for the counselling needs to be on constructive thinking where the person is seen as an active and meaningful participant. The goal of socio-dynamic counselling is to help counsellee to realize one's potential and basically how he/she wants to live the life. (Peavy, R. 2000)

# 3.4 Student counselling in Finland

# 3.4.1 Education system

In Finland, counselling has traditionally been an application of psychology and pedagogy and it has been divided into two fields: vocational guidance delivered by the employment services and student counselling delivered by the educational institutions. (Sinisalo 2000, 191.) In this study, I will concentrate on the student counselling delivered by the education institutions, more specifically upper-secondary schools in Finland.

Finnish students are entitled to student counselling throughout the entire education system. From the secondary school (years 7-9 in basic education) to upper secondary education student counselling is a separate subject taught by a student counsellor. In higher-education student counselling is integrated into all studies, it is not a separate subject.

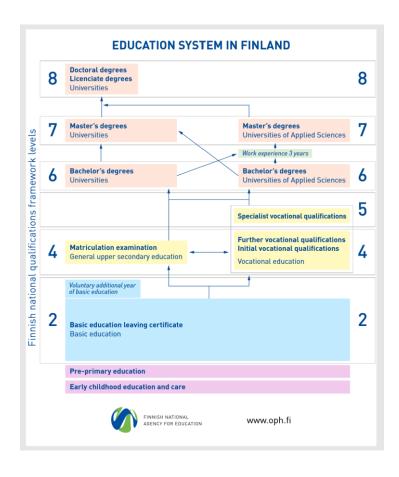


Figure 2: Education system in Finland (The Finnish National Agency for Education 2020)

# 3.4.2 Curriculum for student counselling in upper-secondary schools

After completing comprehensive school, the student may apply to upper secondary institutes, either uppersecondary school or vocational school. General upper secondary education in Finland provides students with extensive general knowledge to begin studies in further education institutes such as universities, universities of applied sciences and vocational training. The general upper-secondary school is based on courses with no specific year-classes. After completing the studies at the upper-secondary school the students take the Finnish national matriculation examination. (The Ministry of Education and Culture, Finland 2019)

In Finland, the student counselling curriculum for upper-secondary school is based on a socio-dynamic approach for counselling (Kasurinen 2006). This theory is the background for the studies of the student counsellors, and it is applicable in the upper-secondary school student counselling.

The purpose of student counselling in upper-secondary schools is to support students in all the studies during the upper-secondary school and ensure that the students have all the necessary skills and knowledge to be able to move to further studies and work life. The student counselling should for a continuum from the beginning to end of general upper-secondary education. It should provide students with sufficient basic knowledge and skills for planning their upper-secondary and further studies and reflecting on the direction of their career. Student counselling should support students' well-being, growth and development, offer material for increasing self-knowledge and self-regulation, and encourage students towards active citizenship. During general upper-secondary education, the student counsellors deliver:

- personal counselling
- counselling in groups / within a subject
- counselling in small groups and peer guidance

Education institutions draw up a counselling plan as part of the local curriculum. The plan serves as a means of developing guidance and counselling in the entire educational institution and describes:

- the counselling activities and its objectives
- the division of responsibility for the counselling tasks and work
- the counselling provided in the transition points of education
- counselling cooperation with the key partners

The counselling plan is drawn up in cooperation with students, guardians and stakeholders and it is assessed in regular basis.(National Agency for Education Finland (2015) *National Core Curriculum; Student counselling*).

The new legislation for the upper-secondary schools became effective August 1st 2019 and the aim among other things is to make the transition to next stages of education smoother by creating more personalized and flexible learning paths and offering needed support for the students. (Act on General Upper-secondary Education 2018).

There are two mandatory courses of student counselling in the Finnish upper-secondary schools. The two courses are:

- a) Me as a student (Minä opiskelijana)
- b) Post-graduate studies and work life (Jatko-opinnot ja työelämä)

During these two courses the students are expected to find his / her personal way of learning and developing the skills and plan the future. The students are supported to become active and responsible citizens who will be able to build their study and work life. The expectations for the student counselling are versatile and being able to give personal guidance and support for each student is a demanding work just in two courses. That's why it is emphasized also in the curriculum that student counselling is not only the job of the student counsellors but the whole school community. This is one of the major changes in the new curriculum for upper-secondary schools in Finland.

# 3.4.3 The national quality criteria for student counselling

The Finnish Agency for Education (2014) has created the national quality criteria for student counselling in the Finnish schools. The quality criteria for student counselling was developed to ensure the quality of counselling in primary, secondary and upper secondary education as well as in vocational training. The aim of the national quality criteria for student counselling is to ensure equality and accessibility of the counselling services to the students across Finland.

The quality criteria for student counselling are a tool for the education providers to support and ensure the high quality and development work of the student counselling. The criteria is helping educational institutions, administrations and decision-makers to have ongoing evaluation processes for student counselling and develop the quality based on the evaluation.

Student counselling is intended to be continuous, interactive and goal-oriented activity to support learning and growth of the student and it is a joint work of everyone working in education institutions. Every student is respected as an individual who has the right for adequate counselling and support. The student is an active part of the counselling and evaluates one's learning and development. The purpose of student

counselling is to increase the student's self-knowledge and to help in recognizing his / her strengths and areas of development. The student counselling supports the development of student's professional identity, career planning and life skills needed to enter the further studies and working life. The student counselling has an important role in student's life when she / he is building the capacity needed in the future and it is also playing a key role in increasing well-being and preventing exclusion. The quality criteria for student counselling is heavily relying on socio-dynamic theory of counselling.

The quality criteria for student counselling are executed locally by the education providers through 12 themes (Table 1). Education providers will choose the means to execute these themes in all levels of education and from different perspectives: education provider, school, student, guardians, teacher, teaching and leadership.

# Themes for good quality student counselling



Figure 3: Themes for good quality student counselling. (The Finnish Agency for Education 2014)

# 3.4.4 The current state of student counselling in the upper-secondary schools

This chapter is giving a basic information about the status of student counselling in the Finnish uppersecondary schools. There are also suggestions how to improve student counselling based on previous research.

The number of upper-secondary school students in Finland is gradually increasing and the forecast for the coming years shows that there will be a peak within ten years and then the number of students starts gradually decreasing. This information is important when planning and resourcing student counselling in upper-secondary schools.

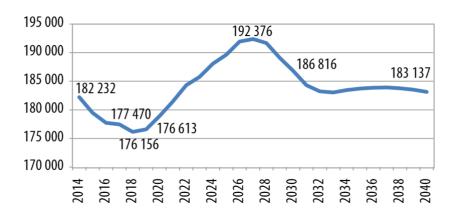


Figure 4: Number of 16-18 years old upper-secondary school students

Source: Statistics Finland 2017

According to Statistics Finland in the year 2015 only 32 % of the upper-secondary school new graduates continue immediately in post-graduate studies (Tornberg, A. & Töytäri, A. 2017). In Finland, the transition from the secondary education to post-graduate studies is slower than in average in other OECD countries.

Development of the quality of student counselling could be one way to speed up this transition in Finland. This means for example undertaking a systemic approach for collecting feedback and utilizing the collected data. Hautamäki (2014) finds that in general the upper-secondary schools in Finland are giving the students necessary skills and positive attitude towards further studies. The students are also more self-confident and able to collaborate than earlier. Despite this there are areas that need development and Hautamäki is specifying four such areas:

- 1. Upper-secondary studies need to be less fragmented
- 2. The position of general knowledge subjects needs to be strengthened
- 3. The general and job-related readiness need to be improved
- 4. The student counselling needs to be developed

Hautamäki suggests changes for upper-secondary school student counselling to create more future oriented study content that better prepare the students for the post-graduate studies. The differences in student counselling between individual? upper-secondary schools are remarkable and there is a need for holistic change in the counselling system. The most problematic areas are the selection of the right courses in upper-secondary school, systematic guidance for post-graduate studies and support for shaping professional identity already in upper-secondary phase of the studies. In developing student counselling there should be more holistic approach, and this should include all the teachers and staff in the upper-secondary school, not only student counsellors. (Hautamäki, 2014)

This viewpoint is supported by the Union of Upper Secondary School Students in Finland which conducted a study of the upper-secondary school students' experiences in student counselling. According to this study, the students want more personal counselling and part of the students feel that the upper-secondary school student counselling is concentrating too much on guidance how to manage in the matriculation examination. Students would also like to have more counselling in post-graduate studies and work life. In many upper-secondary schools the student counsellors have so many students that it is impossible to give personal student counselling within the given resources. (Saari, J. 2017)

# 3.4.5 Reform of general upper secondary education

In the year 2017 the Government decided to reform general upper secondary education in Finland. It aims to:

- increase the attractiveness of general upper secondary education
- enhance the quality of education and learning outcomes
- make the transition to higher education smoother.

With these actions the upper secondary education aims to provide more personalized and flexible study pathways with the required support and guidance. The most important changes in the reform of general upper secondary education are:

- Credits instead of courses
- Studies across subject boundaries
- Closer cooperation with higher education institutions
- Stronger focus on internationality
- Matriculation examinations could be retaken as many times as a student wish
- Special-needs education and support for students
- Personal study plan for every student
- Competence acquired elsewhere would be recognized
- More personal study guidance
- Guidance for former students
- Zero tolerance for bullying

The reform is being planned and prepared by the Ministry of Education and Culture and the Finnish National Agency for Education together with a wide array of stakeholders and experts. (Reform of general upper secondary education, Ministry of Education and Culture 2019). The new core curriculum of the upper secondary education was published 7.11.2019 and will be effective August 2021.

Many of the areas of the reform has a strong direct or indirect impact on student counselling. The new core curriculum of the upper secondary education states that counselling supports the student's wellbeing, growth and development, offers elements to increase self-awareness and self-direction and encourages active citizenship. The counselling is a joint work of upper-secondary school personnel, which includes cooperation with higher education and working life.

The new curriculum states that counselling should be personalized by considering the individual basis for learning, needs, objectives, free-time activities, interests, skills and other factors influencing the student's life.

Based on the national core curriculum each upper secondary school needs to have a local curriculum. As a part of the local curriculum there needs to be a plan for student counselling which includes the following:

- Key concepts of the student counselling
- Tasks and objectives
- Organizing student counselling
- Operators and responsibilities
- Counselling in transition phases: cooperation with basic education, higher education, vocational education and other education providers and organizing counselling after upper secondary studies
- Content, methods and pedagogy of the student counselling
- Cooperation with the working life and other actors outside of the education institutions
- Evaluation of counselling

Under the Upper Secondary School Law (714/2018) a student creates a personal study plan, including study plan, matriculation examination plan and plan for the further studies and career. This plan will be created by support of teachers and student counsellors and will be regularly updated as the studies proceed (Finnish National Agency for Education, National Core Curriculum for Upper Secondary Education, 2019).

The reform of general upper secondary education is setting expectations for student counselling and this increases the need for student counselling resources. The student counselling is not only the student counsellors' responsibility but the joint effort of the whole school personnel. (Finnish National Agency for Education, National Core Curriculum for Upper Secondary Education, 2019).

Especially the requirements for the counselling after upper secondary studies and the rapid change of the working life is the combination that creates a lot of pressure on student counselling. In this situation the new tools are needed, and advanced online student counselling solutions could play remarkable role in it.

## 3.4.6 Online tools for student counselling in Finland

Online tools for student counselling are not widely available in Finland. Most of the tools are either part of the student administration system like Wilma or part of learning management system (LMS) like ItsLearning. There are two web-based student counselling tools: Opintokamu and Oponetti. Both have content and information about student counselling, and it is also possible to pass self-study online courses for student counselling. What all the above are lacking is a tool for a student and student counsellor to follow and track all the studies during upper-secondary school and offer a type of dashboard of the studies. Online communication tools seem not be widely used in personal guidance as part of student counselling curriculum.

### 4 METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study is to find out what kind of online student counselling services are available for the upper-secondary school students in Finland and how are they used. Both students' and student counsellors' experiences are explored. The research conducted is qualitative and descriptive in nature.

The research questions are:

- 1. What are the online tools used in the Finnish upper-secondary schools? How are they used?
- 2. What kind of tools would upper-secondary school students and student counsellors like to have to support student counselling?

#### 4.1 Data collection

The method for collecting data was conducting an online survey with multiple-choice and open questions for student counsellors and students. The forms were delivered in Finnish language and then results translated into English. The questionnaire for the upper-secondary school students can be found in Appendix 1 (English) and appendix 2 (Finnish). The questionnaire for the student counsellors can be found in Appendix 3 (English) and Appendix 4 (Finnish).

The survey request to the upper-secondary school students was delivered via upper-secondary school students I know personally. They shared the link in their social networks. I also published a short story of my thesis at my workplace's Yammer group. Yammer is internal social media type of tool for companies. In Yammer I asked my colleagues to share the link to the survey with their children who are studying in the upper-secondary school. The number (N) of respondents was 53.

The survey request to the student counsellors was delivered by email to the student counsellor network I have through my work. The survey link was also shared in the student counsellors' Facebook group <a href="https://www.facebook.com/groups/511352878960315/">https://www.facebook.com/groups/511352878960315/</a> two times in October 2019. The number (N) of respondents was 32.

Both surveys were conducted between August and October 2019.

# 4.2 Findings

# 4.2.1 Sample - Upper-secondary School Students

The first two questions for the upper-secondary students are general: gender and years studied in upper-secondary school. The following tables give information about these general facts of the respondents.

A bit more than half of the respondents (55%) are male, 43% female and 2% other.

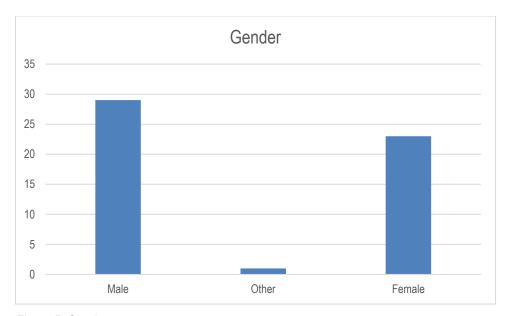


Figure 5: Gender

The great majority of the respondents (85%) have been studying in the upper-secondary school two (2) years, 13% three (3) or more years and 2% one (1) year.

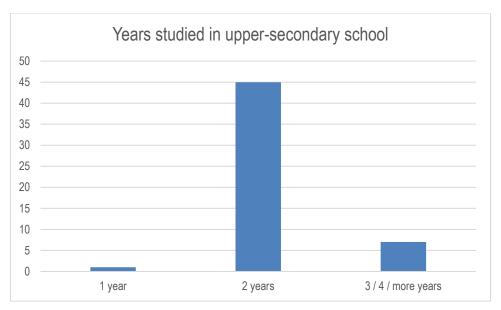


Figure 6: Years of studies in upper-secondary school

In the question 3 the students are asked if there is enough student counselling in the upper-secondary school. Only 30% of the students responded that there is not enough student counselling.

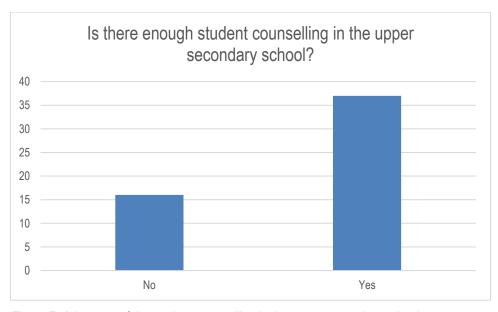


Figure 7: Adequacy of the student counselling in the upper secondary school

In the question 4 the students who responded 'no' in the previous question were asked to choose from four categories in which areas they would like to have more student counselling (if any). The students could choose several categories. The categories are:

- 1. Planning of the studies in the upper-secondary school
- 2. Planning of the post-graduate studies
- 3. Career planning and the knowledge of working life
- 4. Other

75% of the respondents want to have more student counselling in the planning of the post-graduate studies, 50% in the planning of the studies in the upper-secondary school and 40% in the career planning and the knowledge of working life. The students could choose several categories.

	In which areas you would like to have more student counselling?			
es	Planning of the studies in	Planning of the	Career planning	
Categories	the upper-secondary school	post-graduate	and the knowledge	Other
Cate		studies	of working life	Other
% of	50%	75%	40%	0%
students*				

<sup>\*</sup> the students could choose several categories

Figure 8: In which areas the students would like to have more student counselling?

Question number 5 is about the adequacy of the online tool(s) for the student counselling in upper-secondary school and the respondents were asked if they have online tool(s) in use in the student counselling courses. Most of the students (87%) responded that they do not have any online tools in use in their upper-secondary school student counselling. Only 13% reported that they use an online tool or tools in their student counselling studies.

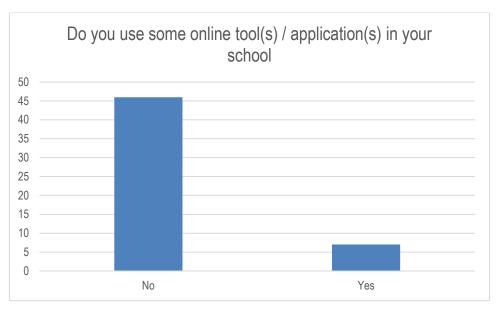


Figure 9: Adequacy of online tool(s) in upper-secondary school student counselling

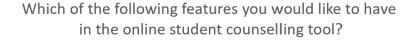
In the question number 6 those students who responded that they have online tool(s) in use in the student counselling were asked to tell which tool(s) and / or application(s) they use. 57% of those students who responded 'yes' told that the tool used in student counselling is the student administration system (Wilma), not a tool specifically developed for student counselling. 29% of the students responded the tool used for student counselling is the general cloud service they use for communicating and sharing the documents (Microsoft Teams, Office 365). Only one student responded using a tool specifically designed for student counselling (Opintokamu)

Ţ.	What online tool(s) / application(s) you use for student counselling studies?					
Categorie s	Student administration system	Cloud service	Other			
ပိ						
% of	57%	29%	14%			
students						

Figure 10: Tool(s) / application(s) used for student counselling

The questions 7 and 8 are specially about online tools in upper-secondary school student counselling: do the students use any online tools at the moment and in what areas of the student counselling they would like to use online tools.

Approximately third (32%) of the students would like to have a tool for planning studies and career and real time view on the personal progress of the studies (28%). 21% of the students would like to have a possibility for online discussion with the student counsellor, 11% with the mentor / expert from the working life and 8% with the other students.



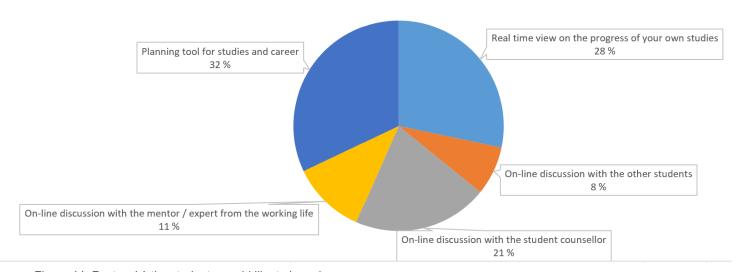


Figure 11: Feature(s) the students would like to have in

The last question is open for any wishes or suggestions to the student counselling in upper-secondary school. Only 15 % of the respondents answered the open question. All of them mentioned that they would like to have more counselling for different study options after upper secondary school and support for career planning. "I would like to have more information of the working life and maybe visitors from universities and companies." (2nd year upper-secondary school student)

# 4.2.2 Sample – student counsellors

The first three questions for the student counsellors are general: age, gender and working years as a student-counsellor. The following tables give information about these general facts of the respondents. 34% of the respondents are 31 - 40 years, 31% are 41 - 50 years, 22% are 51 - 65 years and 13% are 20 - 30 years.

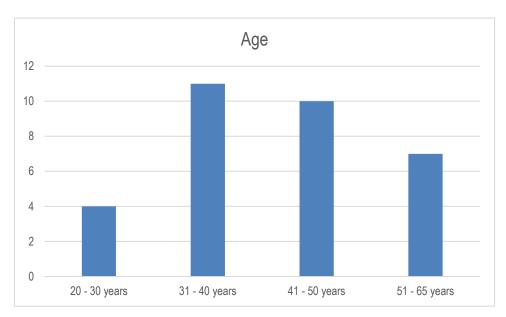


Figure 12: Age

Most of the respondents (91%) are women.

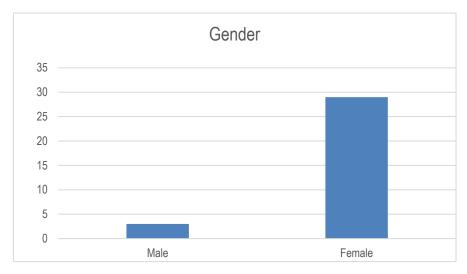


Figure 13: Gender

More than a third of the respondents (34%) are rather new in the profession and been working as student counsellor maximum 5 years. 31% of the respondents have been working as student counsellors 11 - 20 years, 25% of the respondents 6 - 10 years and 9% more than 20 years.

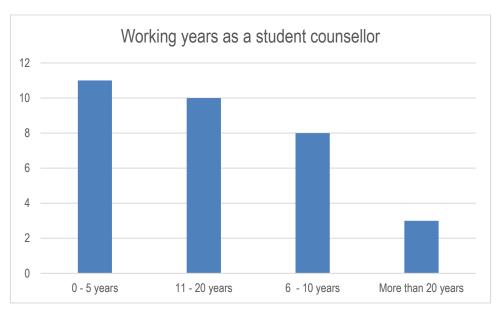


Figure 14: Working years as a student counsellor

The questions 4 is about the student counsellors experience of being able to deliver adequate student counselling for the upper-secondary school students. More than two thirds (72%) of the respondents state that they do not have enough time for student counselling during the mandatory upper secondary school student counselling courses.

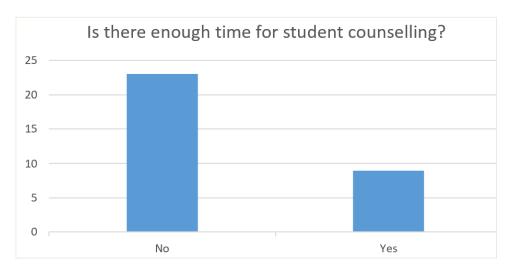


Figure 15: Adequacy of the student counselling

In question 5 the respondents are asked to choose from three categories in which areas they would like to have more resources for student counselling (if any). More than one category could be chosen. 72% of the respondents mentioned that they would like to have more resources for supporting the students in career planning and the knowledge of working life. More than half (56%) would need more resources for planning of the post-graduate studies and 25% for supporting upper secondary school studies.

	In what areas of student counselling you would need more resources?		
ries	Career planning and the knowledge	Planning of the post-	Support for upper
Categories	of working life	graduate studies	secondary school
ပိ			studies
number of			
student	23 / 32	18 / 32	8 / 32
counsellors'			
mentions			

Figure 16: The areas of student counselling where more resources are needed

The questions 6, 7 and 8 are especially about online tools in upper-secondary school student counselling: do the student counsellors use any online tools at the moment and in what areas of the student counselling they would like to use online tools.

Slightly over half (53%) of the student counsellors have online tool(s) or application(s) in use.

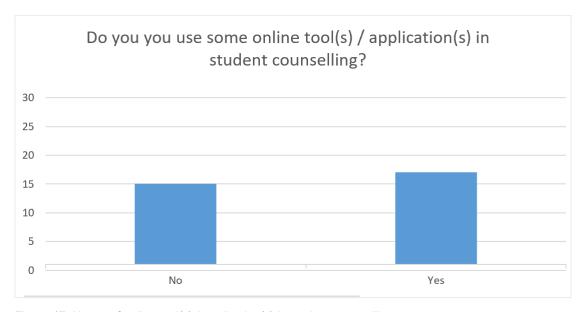


Figure 17: Usage of online tool(s) / application(s) in student counselling

When asking the respondents to name the online tool(s) / application(s) 35% of them name the general student administration system (Wilma) and 29% Opopassi which is specifically designed for upper secondary school student counselling.

In question 7 the respondents are asked to choose from four categories what kind of features they would like to have in the online student counselling tool / application (if any). More than one category could be chosen. 59% of the student counsellors would like to have the possibility for online discussions and feedback with the students and real-real time view on the students' progress. 38% would like to have online discussion with other student counsellors / teachers and 31% with the mentor / working life expert.

	In what areas of student counselling you would need more resources?			
10	Online discussion with the	Online discussion	Real-time view	Online
alsoCategories	student	with the other student counsellors / teachers	on the students' progress of the studies and possibility to give feedback	discussion with the mentor / working life expert
number of student counsellors' mentions	19 / 32	12 / 32	19 / 32	10 / 32

Figure 18: Feature(s) the student counsellors would like to have in online tool(s) / application(s)

The last question is open for any development ideas or suggestions to the student counselling in upper-secondary school. Half of the student counsellors (50%) wrote their comments on the open question. 50 % of them wanted more connections to working life and concrete examples for students how does the working life look like. More personnel resources were mentioned few times as well as better digital tools for student counselling. "I would like to have a third course of student counselling and it would concentrate only in career planning, working life connections, visits to companies and concrete ways and examples to make the different possibilities better known for the students." (Student counsellor) "I would like to have a proper well-functioning digital tool for student counselling. With the tool the students could have real-time visibility for the progress of their studies, and I could give feedback virtually." (Student counsellor) "More connections to higher education institutions, also abroad and possibilities to visit in them with the students." (Student counsellor).

### 5 DISCUSSIONS

In this chapter I will describe upper-secondary school students' and student counsellors' experiences in student counselling. Overall, based on the literature and research review, it can be concluded that there is not enough student counselling in the Finnish upper-secondary schools especially about career planning and work life knowledge.

Upper-secondary school reform and new curriculum will be effective in August 2021. I am also looking at the study results from the reform perspective, especially if the new curriculum of the student counselling will meet the needs of the students and student counsellors.

# 5.1 Upper-secondary school students experiences on student counselling

The first finding about the general adequacy of the student counselling for upper-secondary school students tells that majority (70%) of the students find there is enough student counselling and only 30% of them had the experience that the student counselling in the upper-secondary school is not adequate. 75 % of those students who found the student counselling inadequate wanted more counselling in **Planning of the post-graduate studies** and only 20% wanted more student counselling in career planning and work life knowledge. Based on this survey it seems that the plans for post-graduate studies are having the strongest focus in the students' lives and that is of course natural. In the upper-secondary school reform one of the topics was to make transition to post-graduate studies smoother and student counselling is playing remarkable role here.

In the upper-secondary school reform it is suggested that the key for smoother transition to post-graduate studies is to provide more personalized and flexible study pathways and this will be executed through many actions involving student counselling. These actions are closer cooperation with higher education institutions, personal study plan and more personal study guidance. The more information and insights the upper-secondary school students get from the further studies the smoother the transition is. It is clear from the results of this study that the students need more information and contacts to further education institutions to create a picture what would their future studies look like.

When asked about the usage of the online tools in student counselling 87% of the students responded that they do not have any online tool in use in their student counselling studies. This is remarkably high number of the respondents and is definitely the area that needs to be developed in the future. 60% of those students who responded that they use online tool(s) in their student counselling courses, named general student

administration system as the online tool for student counselling. In this survey only one respondent named online tool specifically designed for student counselling. This result supports the expectations based on the literature review: the upper-secondary schools in Finland do not have online tools for student counselling in everyday use.

We live in the era of technology and the students are very fluent in different kind of technologies in their communication and everyday life. Having online tools and supportive technology for student counselling would save the limited resources to those situation where face-to-face meetings are essential. On the other hand, those students who do not feel comfortable in discussing their personal preferences and future plans face-to-face may be more willing to have these conversations online. When asked from the students what kind of tools and functionalities they would like to have for online student counselling approximately third of the students mentioned they would like to have a tool for study and career planning. The Union for Upper-Secondary School Students in Finland found in their survey that one fourth of the students do not have a plan for further studies and this is one sign of the lack of adequate and personalized study counselling and guidance.

The upper-secondary school students also wanted to have real time view on the progress of their studies. Personal digital dashboard of the studies would serve that need as well as the requirement for more personal study guidance stated in the reform of upper-secondary education. One fifth of the students would like to have a possibility for online discussions with the student counsellor and that need is easily met with the technology in use already today.

A notable result was that only 11% of the students would like to have a mentor or expert from the working life. The reason for that may be that there are limited experiences in mentoring in education institutions overall. Mentoring is one way to meet the curriculum requirements for the closer cooperation with higher education institutions. Having a mentor from higher education institution and / or working life would give the upper-secondary school students a real picture and insight of the different possibilities for the future. Utilizing technology in finding mentors and communicating with them would give all the actors possibility to take part in these activities. This is also a question of equal opportunities that curriculum emphasizes.

Probably the biggest challenges in the upper-secondary schools' student counselling are personal study guidance and the requirement for guidance for former students who have not entered further education. It is very difficult to see these happening without addition to student counselling recourses and/or utilizing modern technology in counselling. In the biggest upper-secondary schools in Finland there are more than 1000 students and it is very challenging to provide personal student counselling for all. In the smaller upper-secondary schools there are resources for personal guidance. All the upper-secondary schools need to secure equal opportunities for student counselling stated in the curriculum and digital tools and applications

would be one way to increase equality among upper-secondary school students. The new curriculum for upper-secondary student counselling also suggests that most of the cooperation with higher education institutions and working life would be virtual and thereby accessible for all students regardless where they are living.

# 5.2 Upper-secondary school student counsellors' experiences on student counselling

Overall picture raising from this study is that the student counsellors take their job very seriously and all the respondents would like to do more or in a different way than they have resources. This is affecting the student counsellors' possibilities to support their students and their ability to shape the future. They feel that their job is important but at the same time they also are painfully aware of the limited time they have for each student. More than a third is rather new in the profession, years as student counsellor maximum five years. This does not seem to effect on the experiences though, also those student counsellors who have been in the profession more than 20 years feel that they do not have resources especially time to meet all the students' needs in student counselling.

More than two thirds of the student counsellors reported that they do not have enough time for student counselling during the two mandatory courses for student counselling. This is where student counsellors' experiences differ the most from students' experiences. Most of the students find that two courses is adequate but they would like to have changes into the content of the courses: more information about post-graduate studies and working life.

The new curriculum for student counselling states that counselling is a joint work of upper-secondary school personnel and it should not be only student counsellors' responsibility. Supporting student's wellbeing, growth and development is part of all teachers' work. The whole school community needs to work together towards this goal to fulfil the curriculum requirements. Also, the cooperation with higher education and working life is everybody's responsibility in the upper-secondary schools. It seems though that re-shaping the student counsellors' and upper-secondary school staff's job description is not enough to meet all the needs and requirements of the student counselling. The teachers' trade union has clearly indicated that there is a need for increased funding to be able to hire more student counsellors in upper-secondary schools.

In this survey the clear result is that student counsellors would like to have more time on supporting students in career planning, gaining working life knowledge, planning of post-graduate studies and the studies in upper-secondary school. In the new core curriculum of the upper-secondary education this is done by offering students the tools and activities to increase self-awareness and self-direction and to encourage

active citizenship. The requirement of personalizing the student counselling is very demanding and it is obvious it cannot be done by student counsellors only but the whole school community. New kind of school leadership is needed to shape the school culture so that individual basis for learning, needs, objectives, free-time activities, interests, skills and other factors influencing the student's life are taken into account and the student is supported holistically.

Two themes of needs for student counselling raised in the student counsellor survey. First and the most mentioned is to have more possibilities for collaboration with higher education and working life. The new curriculum for upper-secondary schools' student counselling obligates the schools have cooperation with the higher education institutes. The student counsellors are worried about the adequacy of the resources they have to be able to fulfil all the requirements. Extra course for student counselling was suggested by some student counsellors in this study. According to the reform for upper-secondary education this cooperation is in most cases easy to organize and means short study visits to local higher education institutes or expert from those institutions visiting upper-secondary schools. In these cases, virtual opportunities are extensive but not much used nowadays. It would be much easier to have a guest speaker for example form a university in a virtual meeting where travelling is not needed, and time and money would be saved. In this case the students could join the session anywhere and with a proper digital tool their attendance and activities during the session could be recoded and the credit achieved. This is also a question of equal opportunities for the students. The new curriculum for upper-secondary student counselling suggests that most of the cooperation would be virtual and hereby available for all the uppersecondary student no matter if they live in the city or countryside. The cooperation could also in some cases and with some students mean studies in the higher education institution during upper-secondary school studies. In the upper-secondary education reform there is a suggestion that approximately half of the uppersecondary school students would pass the orientation studies of higher education for two credits.

The student counsellors have similar needs with the students: they would like to have real-time visibility on the progress of the students' studies and also possibility to give feedback virtually with the same tool. The student counsellors mention that the possibilities for virtual communication and feedback are somewhat limited and even non-functional in the student administration system they use for this. Because of the lack of time the student counsellors feel that most of the student counselling is 'counselling for a student mass' not personal guidance what it should be, and the legislation requires. Utilizing digital tools whenever it is appropriate would save the limited face-to-face resources for the activities where it is most needed.

Overall, the results of this study seem to be aligned with the upper-secondary school reform. The actions and changes for upper-secondary student counselling in the new curriculum are the ones that most likely

meet the needs of the student counsellors. Funding for upper-secondary education is strongly affecting how these actions and changes are executed and how does the future of the students look like.

# 6 CONCLUSION

The importance of the student counselling is evident based in the research and literature. This survey is strongly indicating that as well. The need for change has been noticed in the Ministry of Education in Finland and the reform of the upper-secondary education aims to renew the contents, methods and pedagogies of upper-secondary education. It is evident based on this survey that the methods and tools for student counselling needs to change alongside the changes of the world, society and working life. According to this study the student counsellors do their best to support students with the limited resources and they would like to do more especially in guidance for post graduate studies and working life.

According to the studies conducted by the Teachers' Union and The Union for Upper-Secondary School Students the most important reasons for dropping out from the studies are the wrong career choices and lack of plans for the future career. There are remarkable signs of the reduction of students' well-being and trust for the future and one of the most important aims for student counselling is to support students in every aspect of life.

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# **APPENDIX 1**

# STUDENT SURVEY IN ENGLISH

1. Gender

# Online student counselling in upper secondary school - student form

This survey is part of my thesis of the Master's Degree Programme in Education Entrepreneurship in Oulu University of Applied Sciences. In this survey I try to find out students' experiences and insights of online student counselling. The survey is anonymous and there is no such data collected where the survey responder could be identified.

Male
○ Female
Other
Prefer not to say
2.1 have studied in the upper secondary school *
1 year
2 years
3 / 4 / more years
3. Is there enough student counselling in the upper secondary school? *
Yes
○ No

I. If you answered 'no' in the previous question in which area you would need more counselling? You may choose more than one answer
Planning of the studies in the upper secondary school
Planning of the postgraduate studies
Career planning and the knowledge of working life
5. Do you use some online tool(s) / application(s) in your school *
Yes
○ No
5. If you answered 'yes' in the previous question what tool(s) / application(s) do you use and for what?
Kirjoita vastaus
Which of the following features you would like to have in the online student counselling tool? You may choose more than one answer. *
On-line discussion with the student counsellor
On-line discussion with the other students
Planning tool for studies and career
Online discussion with a mentor / expert from the working life
Real time view on the progress of your own studies
3. Open question: what other wishes you may have concerning student counselling?
Kirjoita vastaus

#### STUDENT SURVEY IN FINNISH

# Lukion opinto-ohjaus verkossa - opiskelijan kyselylomake

Tämä kysely on osa Oulun ammattikorkeakoulun Education Entrepreneurship -maisteriopintojeni opinnäytetyötä. Tässä kyselyssä selvitetään opiskelijoiden kokemuksia ja näkemyksiä opintojen ohjauksesta verkossa. Kysely on anonyymi eikä vastaajista kerätä tietoja, joista vastaajan voisi tunnistaa.

1. Sukupuoli *
Mies
Nainen
O Muu
En halua kertoa
2. Opiskelen lukiossa *
1. vuotta
2. vuotta
3. / 4. vuotta tai kauemmin
3. Onko lukiossa riittävästi opinto-ohjausta *
○ Kyllä
○ Ei
4. Mikäli vastasit edelliseen kysymykseen El, mihin seuraavista osa-alueista olisi hyvä lisätä ohjausta? Voit valita useamman vaihtoehdon. *
Lukio-opintojen suunnittelu
Jatko-opintojen suunnittelu
Urasuunnittelu ja työelämätuntemus

5. Käytetäänkö lukiosi opinto-ohjauksessa jotakin teknologiasovellusta? *
○ Kyllä
○ Ei
6. Jos vastasit edelliseen kysymykseen KYLLÄ, kirjoita alle, mitä sovellusta / sovelluksia käytät ja mihin käytät niitä.
Kirjoita vastaus
7. Mitä seuraavista toiminnallisuuksista toivoisit olevan opinto-ohjauksen teknologiasovelluksissa? Voit valita useamman vastausvaihtoehdon. *
On-line keskustelu opinto-ohjaajan kanssa
On-line keskustelu muiden opiskelijoiden kanssa
Opintojen ja urasuunnittelun työkalu
On-line keskustelu työelämän edustajien / mentoreiden kanssa
Mahdollisuus seurata reaaliaikaisesti opintosuunnitelman toteutumista
8. Avoin kysymys: mitä toiveita sinulla on opinto-ohjauksen suhteen?
Kirjoita vastaus

# STUDENT COUNSELLOR SURVEY IN ENGLISH

# Online student counselling in upper secondary school - student counsellor form

This survey is part of my thesis of the Master's Degree Programme in Education Entrepreneurship in Oulu University of Applied Sciences. In this survey I try to find out student counsellors' experiences and insights of online student counselling. The survey is anonymous and there is no such data collected where the survey responder could be identified.

1. Ge	nder *
	Male
	Female
	Other
	Prefer not to say
2. Ag	e *
	20 - 30 yrs
	31 - 40 yrs
	41 - 50 yrs
0	51 - 65 yrs
3.1 ha	ave been working as a student counsellor *
	0 - 5 yrs
	6 - 10 yrs
	11 - 20 yrs
	Longer than 20 yrs

4. Is there enough time for student counselling during the mandatory upper secondary school counselling courses? *
Yes
○ No
<ul> <li>5. If you answered 'no' in the previous question in which area you would add counselling? You may choose more than one answer *</li> <li>Planning of the upper secondary school studies</li> <li>Planning of the postgraduate studies</li> </ul>
Career planning and the knowledge of working life
6. Do you use some online tool(s) / application(s) in student counselling? *  Yes  No
7. If you answered 'yes' in the previous question what tool(s) / application(s) do you use and for what?  Kirjoita vastaus
8. Which of the following features you would like to have in the online student counselling tool? You may choose more than one answer. *  On-line discussion with the students  On-line discussion with the other student counsellors / teachers  Real-time view on the students' progress in the studies and possibility to give feedback  Online discussion with a mentor / expert from the working life
9. Open question: how would you like to develop student counselling?  Kirjoita vastaus

# **APPENDIX 4**

# STUDENT COUNSELLOR SURVEY IN FINNISH

# Lukion opinto-ohjaus verkossa - opintoohjaajan kyselylomake

Tämä kysely on osa Oulun ammattikorkeakoulun Education Entrepreneurship -maisteriopintojeni opinnäytetyötä. Tässä kyselyssä selvitetään opinto-ohjaajien kokemuksia ja näkemyksiä opintojen ohjauksesta verkossa. Kysely on anonyymi eikä vastaajista kerätä tietoja, joista vastaajan voisi tunnistaa.

1. Sukupuoli *
○ Mies
Nainen
O Muu
En halua kertoa
2. lkä *
20 - 30 vuotta
31 - 40 vuota
41 - 50 vuotta
51 - 65 vuotta
3. Olen toiminut opinto-ohjaajana *
O - 5 vuotta
○ 6 - 10 vuotta
11 - 20 vuotta
Cauemmin kuin 20 vuotta
4. Pystytkö riittävästi ohjaamaan opiskelijoita opinnoissaan opinto-ohjauksen kurssimäärän puitteissa? *
○ Kyllä
○ Ei

5. Mikäli vastasit edelliseen kysymykseen EI, mihin seuraavista osa-alueista olisi hyvä lisätä ohjausta? Voit valita useamman vaihtoehdon. *
Lukio-opintojen suunnittelu
Jatko-opintojen suunnittelu
Urasuunnittelu ja työelämätuntemus
6. Onko sinulla käytössäsi jokin opinto-ohjauksen teknologiasovellus? *
○ Kyllä
○ Ei
7. Jos vastasit edelliseen kysymykseen KYLLÄ, kirjoita alle, mitä sovellusta / sovelluksia käytät ja mihin käytät niitä.
Kirjoita vastaus
8. Mitä seuraavista toiminnallisuuksista toivoisit olevan opinto-ohjauksen teknologiasovelluksissa? Voit valita useamman vastausvaihtoehdon. *
On-line keskustelu opiskelijoiden kanssa
On-line keskustelu muiden opinto-ohjaajien / opettajien kanssa
Mahdollisuus seurata reaaliaikaisesti opiskelijan opintosuunnitelman / opintokäyntien toteutumista ja antaa palautetta
On-line keskustelu työelämän edustajien / mentoreiden kanssa
9. Avoin kysymys: miten toivoisit voivasi kehittää opinto-ohjausta?
Kirjoita vastaus