

Language teaching in Finland- Swedish schools – from the teachers' perspectives

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The project Kalejdospråk 2023-2025

- A research- and development project where we as researchers collaborate with teachers to develop models for an inclusive and holistic language education for all.
- Background:
 - increasing demand for language proficiency in society
 - the study of (optional) languages in schools has decreased, and the range of languages studied has narrowed
 - Early start to language studies implemented nationwide in 2020



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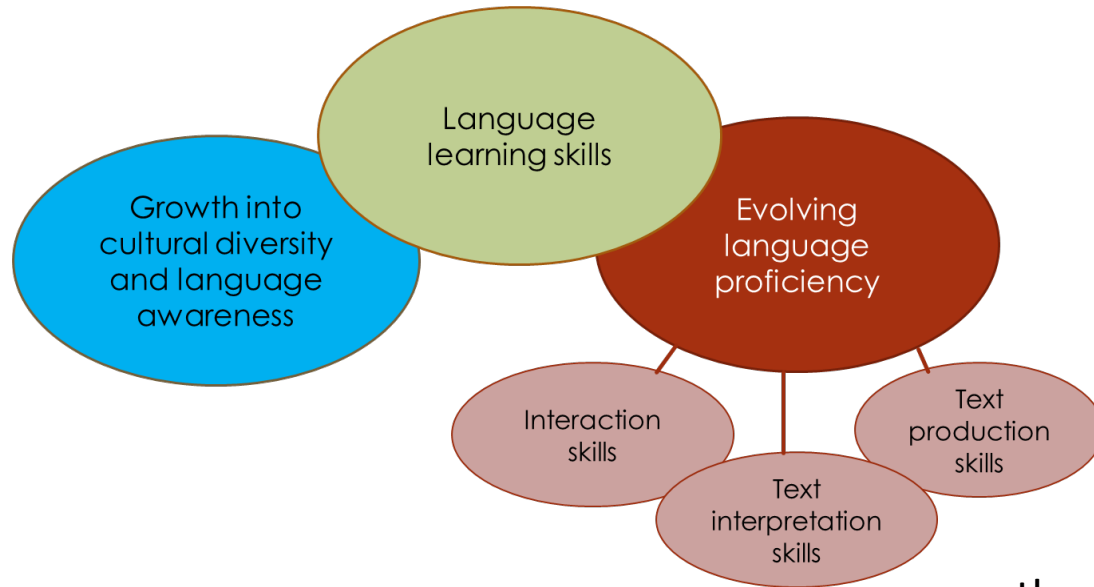
(Hahl et al., 2020; Pyykkö, 2017; Vaarala et al., 2021)

View of language learning

- builds on a **communicative** and **action-oriented approach**, where active, diverse language use and meaningful interaction form important prerequisites for language learning
- Languages are best learnt as they are being used and errors are a natural part of that process
- Language learning takes place both in and outside school. Students' need to develop skills and tools for both life wide - and lifelong learning: e.g. plurilingual competence and language awareness

Bardel, 2022; Council of Europe, 2001; Forsman et al., forthcoming

The National Core Curriculum



the NCCBE, 2014

The current study: aim and material

- We explore what language teaching practices currently look like in basic education within a Finland-Swedish context.
 - 1) What do teachers consider important when it comes to language education?
 - 2) What challenges are they currently facing?
- Survey sent out in September 2022 to all schools providing basic education in Swedish (approx. 200 schools)
 - 8 questions, open-ended and closed (multiple choice)
- 93 class teachers (grades 1-6) and 37 subject teachers (grades 7-9) representing the main Finland-Swedish regions
 - Class teachers teaching mostly Finnish and English (and Swedish as a mother tongue)
 - Subject teachers teaching English, Finnish, German, French, Spanish and Swedish (as a mother tongue)

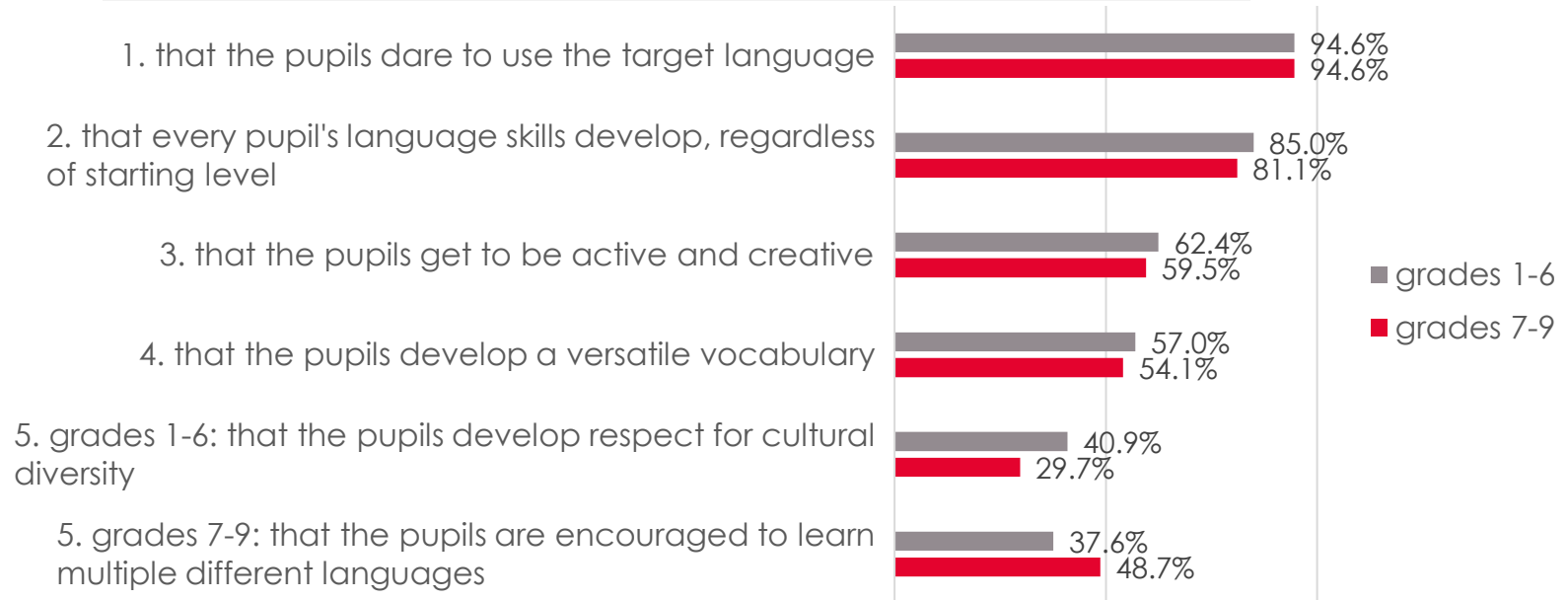
The role of textbooks in language teaching

- Teachers have traditionally heavily relied on textbooks in language teaching in Finland, which has largely influenced both content and teaching practices (Luukka et al., 2008; Tergujeff, 2013)
- Teachers in grades 1-6:
 - **84 %** stated that they only or predominantly use commercially-made teaching resources (CMTR)
 - 15% stated that they partly use CMTR
 - 1% stated that they don't use CMTR at all
- Teachers in grades 7-9:
 - **76 %** stated that they only or predominantly use commercially-made teaching resources (CMTR)
 - 16 % stated that they partly use CMTR
 - 8 % stated that they don't use CMTR at all

What do teachers consider important?

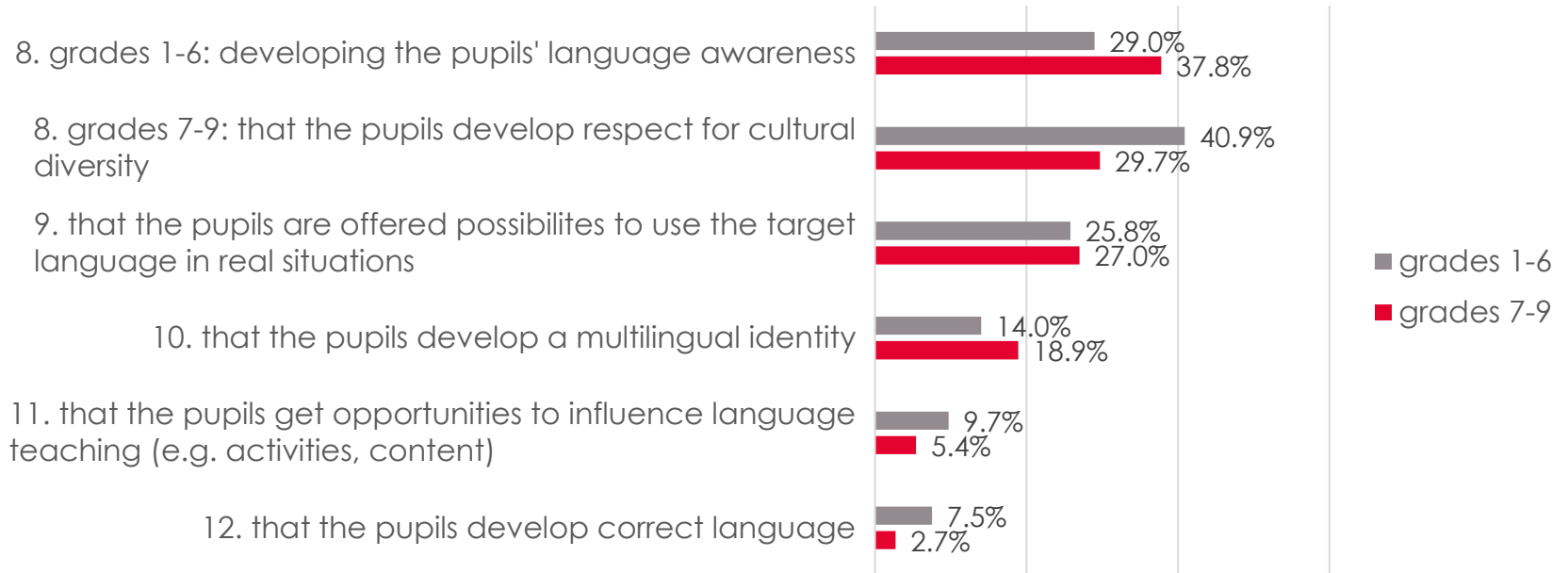
Q7: Choose five of the alternatives below that you think are most important in language teaching.

Most popular alternatives, in %

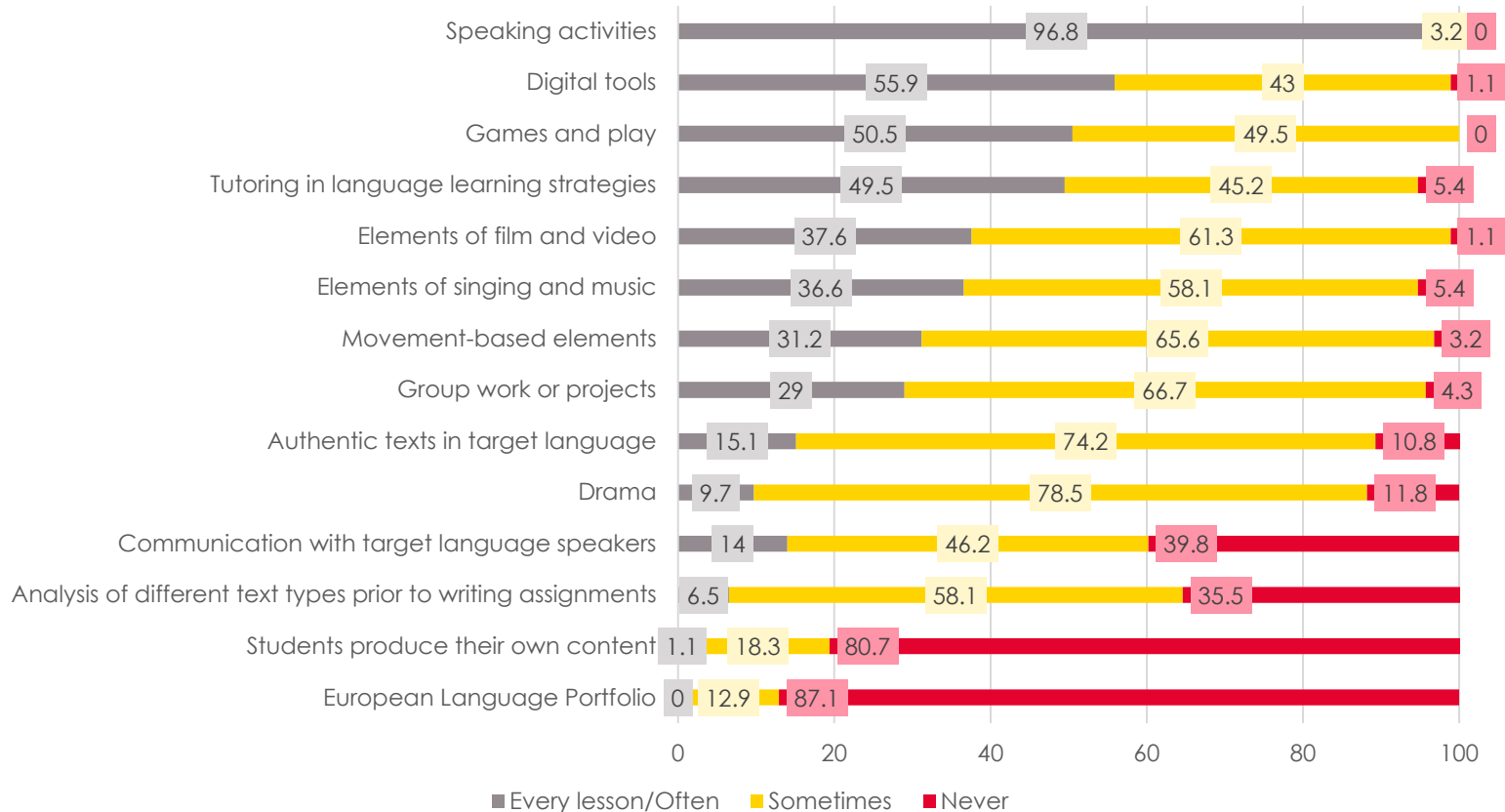


Q7: Choose five of the alternatives below that you think are most important in language teaching.

Least popular alternatives, in %



Q6: To what extent do you use the following during language lessons:
Grades 1-6, in %



Challenges

- Increasing heterogeneity
- Motivation and attitude
- Structural issues
(inadequate resources and teaching methods, lack of time, competing interests)

“The challenge is **differentiation** and to **create a safe and inspiring learning environment** when pupils' have so different starting points.”

(Finnish and English teacher grade 1- 6)

“A large part of the pupils have a better vocabulary in English than in their first language, the textbooks don't keep up. **Many pupils speak fluently already in grade 3, if not earlier. In the same group you have pupils who do not have a vocabulary in English at all.** And they have to be taught in the same group. It's a great challenge! **Many pupils also think they know English and that they don't have anything to learn, and therefore can't be bothered to put in the work...**”

(English and Finnish teacher grade 1- 6)

Challenges

- Increasing heterogeneity
- Motivation and attitude
- Structural issues
(inadequate resources and teaching methods, lack of time, competing interests)

“Something is wrong when the students find it so difficult to learn Finnish (very Swedish environment) even though we start with language showers already in preschool. I am passionate about developing Finnish teaching, but have not yet found a particularly good way, so this project is welcome. The teaching easily gets book-oriented and the students study words and expressions and then forget them just as quickly. I have thought that you should build your teaching based on real situations in everyday life. Then they would feel safer when they find themselves in such a situation in real life and not panic and resort to English. To some extent, we have started to work that way, but it will be a lot of extra work for the teacher if you have to develop suitable material on your own. Maybe there is already such a thing?”

(Finnish teacher grades 1-6)

Moving forward



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Thank you!

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