

QUALITY ENHANCEMENT IN HIGHER EDUCATION LANGUAGE STUDIES IN FINLAND

Kari Sajavaara

Centre for Applied Language Studies, Jyväskylän yliopisto, Finland
e-mail: sajavaar@cc.jyu.fi

1 GENERAL INTRODUCTION

1.1 Languages spoken in Finland

The reasons for the bilingual status of Finland can be found in the history of the country. Finland has a population of about 5.2 million in an area which is only slightly smaller than that of Germany. The country became independent in 1917 after a period of more than a hundred years as an autonomous Grand Duchy of Finland under Russian sovereignty. Before the Russian rule, Finland had been part of the kingdom of Sweden. Finnish, the language of the majority of the population, was given the same status with Swedish as late as 1888. Russian was never an official language of the country, and has never been widely used or learnt in Finland.

According to the new Constitution effective from the year 2000, Finland has *two national languages*, Finnish and Swedish. A new Bill of Language Rights, to replace the earlier one which dates back to 1922 and was based on the 1919 Constitution, was submitted to the Finnish Parliament in 2002. The Constitution guarantees the same rights to the speakers of Finnish and Swedish. Most of the 291,000 speakers of Swedish (5.7% of the population) live in major cities and rural areas along the coast of the Baltic Sea. Sami speakers have been granted restricted language rights, including primary education in their mother tongue. They number c. 1,700 and live in the northernmost areas of the country. Finnish sign language is used as a first language by c. 5,000 Finns, and Romany by c. 3,000 speakers. Both of these two have been given an official status with restricted rights. Moreover, well over 100 languages are spoken by persons living in Finland.

In 2001, the total number of the people living in Finland who spoke a language other than Finnish, Swedish, or Saame was 109,000. There were 31,000 speakers of Russian, 11,000 of Estonian, 7,400 of English, 6,900 of Somali, and 5,300 of Arabic. The number of the inhabitants who had migrated from Russia grew very rapidly in the 1990s, after descendants of Finns who had settled in Russia were given the right to move to Finland. Otherwise, Finland has applied a very restrictive immigration policy, which is why the migrant population of the country is relatively small.

The speakers of the two national languages are required to study the non-native national language in the comprehensive school. Public authorities are obliged to provide services in both of the two languages. The two languages have an equal status in education and culture. Children's parents have the right to choose the language in which they want their children to be educated, while for Sami children, the language depends on parentage. Local governments are unilingual Finnish or Swedish or bilingual Finnish/Swedish or Swedish/Finnish depending on the proportions of the speakers of each language living in the locality. If the minority population is less than 8%, the locality is unilingual, except for some major cities, where the criterion is the absolute number of the inhabitants.

1.2 Modern languages in pre-primary, primary and secondary education

Foreign languages have always had an important position in the Finnish educational system. Languages remain in a student's study programme throughout the study career after their introduction, possibly as early as the first grade of the comprehensive school or even preschool.

The non-native national language is compulsory in the comprehensive school. In addition, pupils have to study at least one more modern language. As many as 40% of the pupils take one more modern language. The choice for the compulsory language is between English, German, French, and Russian, as restricted by the requirements concerning the accepted size of study groups. English is by far the most popular choice: practically everybody studies English as one of the languages. German, French, or Russian can rarely be offered outside bigger urban communities. It is possible to add one more modern language to the student's programme under certain circumstances.

The non-native national language is compulsory also in the upper secondary school (gymnasium), and in addition to it, students study one to three modern languages. One foreign language is compulsory, and it is the language that the students started to study as the first foreign

language in the comprehensive school, mostly English. About one third of the students take a second or a third language. There is more choice than earlier: Spanish and Italian are offered in the number of schools in addition to those mentioned above.

After the introduction of a course-based and gradeless curriculum in the upper secondary schools, students have clearly reduced their efforts in the area of language education: fewer courses are taken, and students drop out after a few courses.

The non-native national language and one modern language are also compulsory at vocational (secondary) institutions.

At the end of the upper secondary school, the students have to pass a Matriculation Examination before they can receive their school-leaving certificates. Languages have a pronounced status in this examination: three out of the four compulsory tests are concerned with languages, the mother tongue, the non-native national language, and the compulsory foreign language.

Local governments are responsible for the administration of all the levels of education up to the Matriculation Examination. Schools are entitled to make the decisions on the language programmes offered by them, but their decisions have to be endorsed by local school boards. General education is subject to the supervision by the National Board of Education, which has so far also been responsible for regular evaluations of the results. A National Evaluation Council of Education will take over the evaluation duties in 2003. The national educational policies, which also include the overall framework of the language programmes, are outlined by the Finnish Parliament with the assistance of the Ministry of Education.

1.3 The system of higher education

Finland has a dual higher education system. There are a total of 20 universities and 29 polytechnics. In addition, there are an HE-level institute for the training of senior police officers and a military academy.

All universities are state-owned. Their administration is based on a universities bill and a universities statute. In addition, there have been separate statutes specifying the degrees for different discipline areas. A new overall degrees and examinations statute to cover all degree programmes is being drafted and is expected to take force in 2005.

Ten of the universities are multifaculty institutions of higher education, three schools of economics and business administration, three universities of technology, and four art academies. Each university is required to offer academic (scientific and/or artistic) undergraduate and postgraduate degree programmes and be engaged in research work in the disciplines available. All universities are also responsible for open university and continuing education services as well as community and regional services.

The objectives, extent, and overall structure of university degrees are specified in the degrees and examinations statutes, and the universities themselves make the decisions on the contents and structure of the degrees in greater detail.

Since the mid-1990s, most university disciplines have applied a two-tier undergraduate degree system, which is not to be confused, however, with the two-cycle structure to be introduced through the Bologna process. The lower academic degree, equivalent to a Bachelor's, is expected to be attained in three years of full-time study, and the higher in 5 to 5.5 years. The higher degree can be considered equivalent to a Master's, but in Finland it is not regarded as a postgraduate degree.

The actual length of studies is much greater than the planning lengths given above. The average total study times vary a great deal from discipline to discipline, the overall mean being about six years. In the humanities, including language subjects, the mean is 7-8 years for the higher degree. In 1998, only 34% of the undergraduates enrolled in 1991 had finished the higher degree. This is possible because there are no restrictions as to the length of the study time allowed. There are two postgraduate levels after the Master's, the Licentiate and the Doctorate.

University degrees comprise a major subject and two or three minor subjects plus a varying amount of communication and language studies. All degrees include examinations in the two national languages and in one or two foreign languages.

The credit unit, called 'study week', incorporates 40 hours of student work. The higher degree (Master's) comprises 160 credits, and the lower (Bachelor's) 120 credits. A minimum of 55 credits is required for a major subject, and 35 for a minor. For all higher degrees, an extensive thesis is required, which amounts to 20 credits. (The Finnish credit unit is heavier than the ECTS unit: most Finnish universities equate the Finnish credit to 1.5 ECTS credits, some universities to 2 ECTS credits.)

The school-leaving Matriculation Examination is the standard requirement for admittance into universities. Universities select their students independently. Most departments apply a strict *numerus clausus* system involving entrance examinations. In some disciplines, several universities organize joint

entrance examinations.

Both research and teaching qualifications are required for university professors, and teaching qualifications for lecturers. The relative level of the salaries is low as against other professions at the same level of qualification. Traditional increments are based on length of service and administrative duties, but more recently, increments based on research tasks and postgraduate training duties have been introduced. Attempts are being made to introduce a new salary system where the level of the salary will depend on task demands and performance as well as qualifications. No systematic training is available for the teaching staff. For the most part, the facilities and equipment as well as premises available are of high quality.

The polytechnics were established in the 1990s to replace part of the earlier non-university higher education system and vocational education system. They are government-subsidized private institutions, which are managed through a variety of administrative systems and ownership arrangements.

The polytechnics offer three-year Bachelor's degrees (120-140 credits) in the following areas of study: technology and communication; business and administration; social affairs and health; cultural management; tourism, hotel and restaurant services; environmental studies; and humanities and teaching. A continuing education higher degree of 40 credits has been introduced on a tentative basis for some subjects. Polytechnics also admit a number of students who have done their secondary education in vocational schools. The average length of the studies for the degrees finished at the polytechnics in 2001 was 3.7 years

In 2001, a total of 20,651 new students were admitted into the universities, and 31,837 into the polytechnics. This is more than 85% of a generation of Finnish young people (c. 60,000). The high percentage is due to a backlog of candidates not having been admitted in the previous years. In addition, there are a large number of candidates who wish to change their orientation or who have already finished a HE degree and want to do another. There were a total of 162,700 students enrolled at the universities (21,000 post-MA postgraduate students), and 121,500 students at the polytechnics. No major increase will be expected in the future.

There was a pronounced increase in the number of university degrees in the 1990s: in 2001 the number of the degrees was 16,674, which was 47% higher than in 1991. The growth seems to have stopped. The number of the polytechnics degrees in 2000 there were 14,150 polytechnics degrees.

1.4 Introduction of a two-cycle structure

The Finnish universities have started the planning of the two-cycle degree structure in accordance with the Bologna process. The Ministry of Education is also engaged in the reform of the degrees, and a new degrees and examinations statute has been drafted to revise the legislation relating to the university degrees accordingly. The new degree structure is expected to be introduced as of the year 2005. The Bachelor's will comprise 180 credit units, and the Master's 120 credit units. The fact that the majority of the present degree programmes are based on a two-tier structure makes the introduction of the Bologna principles in Finland rather easy. A number of masters' programmes have already been launched by some universities.

1.5 Accreditation of new programmes and new HE institutions

In Finland there is no standing accreditation system for institutions of higher education. However, before the polytechnics were given their permanent status in the second half of the 1990s, they were exposed to an overall evaluation by the Finnish Higher Education Evaluation Council.

All Finnish universities are listed in the Universities Bill, and all polytechnics have been given their present permanent status by the Finnish government. New legislation is being drafted for the administration of the polytechnics.

New degree programmes which extend up to the level of the Master's and beyond, ie. the Licentiate and the Doctorate, cannot be established without a decision by the Finnish government. For the universities, this takes place through a listing of the programmes in the annexes to the university degrees statutes. The institutions have a full autonomy as concerns the substance and content of their degree programmes. In the new degree system to be introduced, new programmes can be established on the basis of an agreement with the Ministry.

The degrees statute specifies the total number of the credits required for the degrees. Certain general principles relating to teachers' qualifications are also included in the legislation.

The departments of certain languages have traditionally organized meetings of their representatives (mostly chair holders) to discuss the structure and content of their syllabuses. The

Directors of the University Language Centres have established a directors' council for the same purpose.

Since the number of HE institutions is very high in Finland, it does not look probable that new institutions will be established. However, there has been some public discussion about the opening in Helsinki of a private ICT-oriented university.

1.6 Quality assessment / evaluation

The general evaluation work to be carried out in Finland was outlined in a programme designed by the Finnish government for improving education and research at institutions of higher education in 1995-2000. All institutions of higher education and a number of specific disciplines were to be evaluated.

Bodies responsible. — Institutions of higher education are themselves primarily responsible for their evaluation. Statements to this effect are included in the agreements which they sign with the Ministry of Education annually. A Higher Education Evaluation Council was established in 1996. It assists universities and polytechnics as well as the Ministry of Education in matters relating to evaluation, initiates and undertakes evaluation projects in higher education and higher education policy, and promotes research in the area of evaluation.

Excellence in teaching and research. — Every three years, the Evaluation Council invites nominations from HE institutions for centres of excellence in teaching. The institutions where such centres are located receive bonus funding. The Academy of Finland, which serves as the national research council, undertakes regular evaluations of research and nominates a number of centres of excellence in research.

Categories guiding assessment. — The Evaluation Council has initiated a number of evaluations in institutions of higher education. Either entire institutions or certain disciplines have been evaluated. Several universities were evaluated at the initiative of the Ministry of Education or the universities themselves before the establishment of the Council. By the year 2000, all universities had undergone evaluation in one form or another. All polytechnics were evaluated in the 1990s before they were given their permanent status.

The disciplines that have been recently evaluated in the area of the humanities include Russian and Slavonic studies (1999-2000) and teacher education (1998-1999). An overall evaluation of the humanities was carried out in 1993. The Departments of English were exposed to a more specific evaluation by an external team of experts (Svartvik & al. 1993).

The language centres of Finnish universities were surveyed by a one-man committee in 1996 (Carlson 1996). A similar survey of language education at Finnish polytechnics was undertaken in 1999 by a committee appointed by the Ministry of Education (Sajavaara 1999).

Many departments evaluate their courses by asking students to give feedback in writing after the courses. Some faculties have adopted the practice of organising evaluation meetings at the end of semesters.

Each HE institution makes their own decisions as concerned the principles to be taken into account in their evaluations. In evaluations undertaken by the Evaluation Council, the committees nominated to carry out the task makes their decisions on the principles on an ad hoc basis.

Ranking of departments or programmes. — No rankings of departments or programmes, official or unofficial, are available.

1.7 Funding of higher education

The universities receive most of their funding from the government budget (63.5% in 2001, the rest coming from various external funding sources), and the polytechnics, which are private or municipal, are subsidized by the government (57% of the total in 2001, the rest of the funding coming from local governments). This means that the activities of all institutions of higher education in Finland are controlled by the Ministry of Education and the Finnish Parliament through various budgetary measures. No fees are charged for students who are studying in degree programmes. The institutions and the Ministry carry out annual negotiations about the following year's funding, and the Ministry makes the decision on the funding on the basis of the agreements reached at the negotiations. Since the recession of the early 1990s, the universities have been suffering from the consequences of the 20% budget cuts

that were executed as a result of the funding difficulties.

Most of the government appropriations are shared between the universities on the basis of their productivity in terms of the number of the degrees finished. A small proportion of the funding is based on performance criteria, and a similar share is given for the creation of new programmes. The Ministry of Education is planning to increase the total universities budget by c. 20% by 2004.

At the moment, the polytechnics receive their government funding on the basis of the number of new students enrolled. Plans have been made to add criteria similar to those applied to the funding of the universities.

1.8 Admission of students

All university programmes admit their students through a strict numerus clausus system. In most cases the admission is based on a combination of school leaving and matriculation grades and the candidate's performance in an entrance examination. A total of more than 500 different admittance systems exist. The number of the applications per student position varies a great deal; in some cases there may be as many as 30 applications per position. A centralized recording system was introduced a couple of years ago to prevent the candidates from accepting more than just one study position for the first year of study.

An evaluation of the student admission system was carried out by a team appointed by the Evaluation Council in 2002 (Sajavaara & al. 2002).

1.9 Student fees and student support

There are no fees for students studying in regular degree programmes. There is a specific statement to this effect in the Universities Statute.

Students receive a grant and a housing subsidy for a period of 55 months. A certain minimum of credits is required per academic year for students to be able to receive these subsidies. Government-sponsored loans are also available with open-market interests, but after the early 1990s recession these loans have not been attractive, and few students take them. It is rather common for students to be employed while they go on with their studies.

1.10 Units in higher education responsible for language programmes

Finnish universities offer a variety of language or language-related programmes and language or courses:

- X degree programmes in foreign languages in faculties of humanities (mostly called philologies);
- X language teacher education programmes;
- X degree programmes for translators and interpreters;
- X minor language programmes for comprehensive school teachers;
- X compulsory credit courses for non-language majors in national and foreign languages;
- optional credit courses for all students;
- language courses for business administration students;
- master's level courses and introductory courses in intercultural communication;
- X open university programmes (parts of degree programmes or language courses);
- continuing education programmes;
- programmes and courses in intercultural communication;
- language technology programmes, also specifically for purposes of language education.

All Finnish universities and a number of polytechnics have language centres which are responsible for language courses for non-language majors. The other programmes are run by specialized departments.

All university and polytechnics students have to pass examinations in the non-native national language and at least one foreign language. The minimum requirement is one credit in each, but the largest language programmes amount to as many as 30 credits.

Content and language integrated teaching grew in popularity in the 1990s at all levels of education. Polytechnics in particular were interested in developing programmes taught in English, because it was considered to be a good way of marketing their educational services and attracting students from abroad. Bilingual Finnish/Swedish programmes do not exist: there is a separate Swedish language university (Abo Akademi University) and a Swedish school of economics and business

administration in Helsinki. A number of chairs at the University of Helsinki are designated for speakers of Swedish.

2 DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS OF QUALITY MEASURES RELATING TO DEFINING AND DESIGNING COURSES AND PROGRAMMES IN THE AREA OF LANGUAGES

2.1 Procedures for defining the goals and objectives of language programmes

2.2.1 Departments of language (and literature) and departments of translation studies

The names of the departments and of the subjects taught in the area of languages vary. In many cases the traditional reference to philology (eg. English Philology) has been retained, but the name of the language concerned may also be combined with the word *language* or the words *language and literature*. The names give no clear indication of the orientation of the department in terms of the content of their syllabuses.

The formal decisions on the goals of department programmes are made by the Faculty Councils. The departments themselves work out the draft proposals to be endorsed by the Councils.

The Rector of the University and the University Senate can suggest changes in the draft proposals when new programmes are introduced, the Rector also at annual negotiations about the following year's funding and activities.

The goals of the programmes are mostly expressed in rather superficial terms. In many traditional subjects, to which most language subjects belong, the specifications of the programmes are particularly vague. The impression is given that everybody knows what these programmes are there for.

If any mention is made of language teacher education, it may be in the form of an indirect statement to the effect that the majority of the graduates become language teachers. Yet the enrolment as a student at a language department does not normally as such open up a route to a language teacher's qualifications, because students who wish to become teachers have to pass a separate entrance examination to be admitted into the pedagogical studies necessary for qualification.

The vagueness of the goals and objectives as expressed in university guidebooks for new students is a reason for the fact that many students enter language departments having language proficiency as their main objective. This tendency is also reinforced by the fact that although the majority of the students become teachers of foreign languages, the departments do not mostly take any responsibility for this kind of orientation. There are a few departments, however, which have made a formal decision to direct their programmes towards teacher education. This practice seems to be expanding.

A few departments now admit a proportion of their students directly into language teacher training programmes. The introduction of direct application and enrolment to English language teacher education at the University of Jyväskylä since 2000 seems to have had a positive impact on the study motivation of the students.

Moreover, very few language departments have found, or even made an attempt to find, a way to create alternative study programmes (this does not concern language programmes at business schools). But a few exceptions can also be brought up as examples of a different orientation: The Department of English at the Swedish-language Åbo Akademi University has offered a business-oriented advanced studies specialization for several decades; a similar orientation is also available at the University of Oulu. The Faculty of Humanities at Jyväskylä produced an overall plan for an extensive revision of its language programmes in the academic year 2001-2002. The objective is to build up programmes for language specialists with a clear professional orientation.

The total study times in language subjects are extended, even more so than in the humanities in general, and the dropout rates are high. One of the reasons is the fact that the departments have not been able to specify the objectives of their programmes clearly and, partly for this reason, they enrol students who are not really committed to doing what is expected of them. This means that the graduation rates of language subjects tend to remain low, which again has an impact on the financing situation with its effects on the staffing and other resources in the departments and, in the long run, on the quality of the tuition given.

On the basis of what has been said above it is quite obvious that there is an urgent need for Finnish language departments to launch a reorientation of their programmes. It is the more important because, for various reasons such as increased international interactivity and globalization, new types of professional careers are opened for language specialists, but for specialists who also have competencies and qualifications in areas other than languages such as law, economics and business, information and communication technology, cross-cultural communication, and communication studies.

Languages and literatures alone are no longer valid in the modern world in the same way they were before. This also means that more attention should be paid to added transparency of the goals and objectives.

The objectives of the training of translators and interpreters are much more transparent than those of most language departments. The training now takes place at the Departments of Modern Languages in Turku and Tampere and at two departments specialized in this area, one in Savonlinna (an affiliate to the University of Joensuu) and the other in Kouvola (an affiliate to the University of Helsinki). At Turku and Tampere, an attempt has recently been made to integrate these programmes more closely to the general language department programmes. Since the institutions at Savonlinna and Kouvola are located at a considerable distance from the universities to which they belong, it has not been unproblematic to build up well-rounded programmes which would extend from translation studies over to other subjects. Attempts have been made at the University of Helsinki to move the programme from Kouvola to Helsinki, which is not easy for reasons that relate to the employment and educational situation at Kouvola. Helsinki now offers a specialisation in translation studies. A similar specialisation is also found at the University of Vaasa with a special emphasis on Swedish.

The schools of economics and business administration offering language programmes have adjusted their structure and content to the demands of business students. Extensive assessments have been carried out on the basis of professional profiling. The same concerns the language programmes in polytechnics, in which the entire orientation of the degree programmes is more clearly professional than at universities.

All candidates for the programmes are screened through entrance examinations. The then language proficiency plays an important role in the examination, and attempts are made to fathom study motivation and study orientation through reading assignments required for the examination.

2.2.2 Language centres

As was mentioned above, all Finnish higher education degree programmes include courses in national and foreign languages. Examinations in the non-native national language and in one or two foreign languages are compulsory. The examinations in the non-native national language and the primary foreign language involve both written and spoken language skills.

In the degree statutes for both the universities and the polytechnics it is stated, as concerns the foreign language requirements, that students have to have language skills sufficient for study and for professional tasks and duties. The requirement for the non-native national language is somewhat more specific: for the degree, students have to have language skills that are necessary for civil servants to function at bilingual localities in the country.

What these requirements mean in terms of actual language skills is not specified. Providers of language courses interpret the above statutory clauses in their own way. This means that there is a great deal of variation in the grading of student performance in this respect. The transparency of the goals and objectives is poor.

The link of the language requirements with study skills and professional tasks has normally been interpreted so that the course work and examinations involve languages-for-special-purposes elements.

The directors of university language centres are of the opinion that each language centre can take care of their own examinations and set the standards required. As for the polytechnics, after the survey of language education in them in 1999, the Ministry of Education funded a project carried out in 2000-2001 by four polytechnics in collaboration with the Centre for Applied Language Studies at the University of Jyväskylä to create a language testing system for the polytechnics. In the system the grading of the language skills is correlated with the levels of the Common European Framework and the Finnish National Foreign Language Certificates. In May 2001 the prototype of system was functional in English and Swedish in three major polytechnics study programmes. The project also served as a training programme for a large number of polytechnics language teachers who worked as test item writers. The testing system is, for the time being, an additional way to assess students' language proficiency. Students who sit the tests are given certificates but the tests do not replace the regular grading given by the polytechnics teachers for their students' language skills.

In addition to the problem of there not being a consensus of opinion on the skill levels required, there is also the problem of the language centres not normally being able to offer language courses that extend beyond the minimum requirements, whatever they are in each individual case. Most language centres are constrained by financial restrictions and are unable to provide extended tuition in languages other than the major ones. In this situation students often attend courses which are repetition of what they have already done during their secondary education. Moreover, Finnish upper secondary schools

could actually offer more tuition in foreign languages than is undertaken by students; from the second year, students concentrate on subjects that are required, or which they find useful, for the Matriculation Examination. Universities and polytechnics are required to fill the gaps in their language education and use their restricted resources to do things that could have done at the secondary level.

2.3 Conversion of the goals and objectives into sets of courses

2.3.1 Language departments and departments of translation studies

Despite the fact that the faculty councils are the bodies that are formally responsible for the decisions on the content of the syllabuses, the main responsibility for the sets of courses making up the curricula lies with the departments. At the departmental level, it is the department council, where professors, other teachers and members of the staff, and students are represented, that makes the decision on the course structure. This decision is often based on preliminary work carried out by the teaching staff or various types of subcommittees or ad hoc committees.

No decisions on aspects of teaching can be made before the measures proposed are presented to the representatives of the staff.

Courses in any subject in Finland are traditionally organized on three tiers: introductory studies and subject studies, which together reach up to the bachelor's level, and advanced studies. The courses offered at these three tiers are supposed to constitute a progression in terms of sophistication and specialisation in the subject area. The first tier means, as is indicated by its name, an introduction to various areas of study in the discipline; the second tier of 'subject studies' contains the main body of knowledge and skills required, and the third, the master's level, is devoted to research qualifications and specialization.

The three-tier organization of studies mostly also applies to language skills, even if there is no clear indication as to how the progression of language proficiency is accredited. No specifications of language skills and grading scales exist. Yet it seems that experienced teachers usually agree on the grading in rather general terms.

In addition to language skills courses, the programmes normally include aspects of language history, linguistics, applied linguistics, literary theory and set books, and cultural studies. The proportion of each one of these elements varies depending on the general orientation of the department.

A general policy of what is called liberty of teaching is applied at Finnish universities. This means that every teacher has the right to make the decisions on the content and methodology of their own programmes without any interference from the outside. The content of courses is specified by the teachers themselves, and they are not normally expected to present any course framework to the department for endorsement.

At its worst the lack of common planning means that there may be a fair amount of overlap between courses, and the same elements of the content may be repeated from course to course and from tier to tier. The same problem also exists between subjects, which is particularly experienced by students who study several language subjects.

There are exceptions however: for instance, at the Kouvola Department of Translation Studies (University of Helsinki) a two-year action research experiment was recently undertaken by a teacher cooperative development group. An attempt was made to create a more coordinated syllabus across the language sections in the area of first-year writing. The objective was to increase graduation rates and introduce quality control.

2.3.2 Language centres

Most of the teaching at language centres is restricted to short-term courses at relatively advanced levels of language proficiency in languages that have been studied at school or to elementary courses in less widely known languages.

Many language centres have been developing their programmes actively. The teaching staff of the Language Centre at the University of Jyväskylä has been doing action research for several years to develop their own courses as a collaborative effort. This programme also involves development of a self-access study system. The Centre has outlined a programme to develop their teaching activities to meet better than so far the challenges of students' academic socialisation process in terms of language and communication skills.

Decisions on the organisation of teaching by the language centres are formally made by the boards of the centres. Since the centres are in most cases institutions outside the faculty and department structure, the boards consist of representatives of various interest groups, such as faculties,

students, and teachers of the centres. Specification of actual course work is the duty of individual teachers similarly to language departments

3 DESCRIPTION OF QUALITY MEASURES RELATING TO THE PROCESS OF TEACHING AND LEARNING

3.1 General considerations

Until quite recently, issues of quality in higher education were dealt with in Finland at a rather formal level only. What this means is that quality has been considered to be an outcome of measures executed in harmony with legislation, statutes, and byelaws. The quality of teaching has generally been seen to be a product of the teaching experience and general professional (research and teaching) qualifications of the teaching staff. Qualifications derived from teacher training or courses in the pedagogy of higher education are not required.

The term *quality enhancement* clearly implies what is the most important aspect of quality in education: quality is to be seen as a *process*. The product of quality enhancement measures remains mediocre unless its process nature is understood. Consideration of the outcome of evaluations performed in Finland so far shows this unambiguously.

There are a multitude of factors that can have an impact on the quality of education. The final outcome in terms of quality mostly depends on a combined effect of all of them, but in some cases there may be just one factor or set of factors that influence the quality markedly. The problem with quality enhancement is that it is practically impossible to tell which factor or factors are the ones that should be exposed to specific corrective measures. This is why it is necessary to approach quality enhancement incrementally and try to make corrections gradually at all fronts. The role of each individual factor also depends on the type of language education: in the training of language majors in language (philology) departments it is different from, for instance, that of translators and interpreters or non-language majors.

The content of language education reflects, to a large extent, the tradition of European philological syllabuses. There is a fair degree of variation from department to department, which means that the proportions devoted to linguistics, literary studies, cultural background, and language proficiency may differ considerably. Some departments stick to a rather traditional philological (historical) syllabus, while in others, more attention is paid to more modern approaches to language and linguistics, applied linguistics, or even teacher qualifications. All language majors have done an introductory course in linguistics, history of the language concerned, some applied linguistics in most cases, survey of the literature(s) in the language concerned, and aspects of the history and culture of the country. A relatively high level of language proficiency can be reached, at least in languages like English, where the starting level is high. Many departments offer a variety of specialized optional courses. All degrees comprise an extensive thesis (c. 80 pages).

Language departments tend to teach their courses in the language taught in the department. Certain introductory courses or courses taught by Finnish teachers to groups of Finnish students are taught in Finnish (or Swedish). Most of the written assignments, including the masters' theses, are produced in the language of the department. The fact that there are a large number of native speakers of the languages taught in language departments, language centres, and polytechnics also means that languages other than Finnish are commonly used in higher education level language teaching.

In the 1990s, particularly after the number of exchange programmes was increased as a result of Finland's accession to the European Union, courses taught in various subjects in English became more common. In 2001 some 350 courses were taught in English in the entire higher education system in Finland. Some 50 programmes in the Finnish universities and 75 in the Finnish polytechnics were in English. A Ministry of Education memorandum published in 2001 calls for higher quality however.

The Finnish degree programmes give qualifications to language teachers who are competent providers of language education in a rather traditional sense. Some programmes specialize in certain more developed aspects of language education, such as cooperative learning at Tampere and use of portfolios in teaching and evaluation at Jyväskylä. Jyväskylä also provides for an MA level specialization in applied linguistics with a fair number of options. Moreover, Jyväskylä launched a new language technology specialization for language teachers in the autumn of 2001. Jyväskylä also has a Chair in Intercultural Communication.

There are a number of specific problem areas which can be considered critical for language education as a whole at Finnish universities:

- Most faculties of humanities have suffered reductions in their budgeting, which has resulted in cuts in resources available for the tuition given; one of the adverse effects has been increased workloads for the teaching staff; at the same time, student numbers have been increased to

- raise the number of the degrees to be finished;
- Finnish universities rely more and more on external funding, but access to it is not very easily attainable by language departments; ICT might be a new route to such funding but it can only be available if language departments acknowledge their responsibility in the area of language teaching and teacher training or create new types of contacts with working life;
- Library holdings have gradually become more restricted as a result of financial constraints; there is an excellent interlibrary loan system, which compensates for some of the gaps;
- Most departments are small: in many cases one professor, a few (native) lecturers, and an assistant; a fair amount of the teaching is given by part-time teachers; the small number of staff members means that the supply of options in the curriculum cannot be very wide and the chances of offering a variety of specializations are not good;
- At most universities computer facilities are rather easily available for staff and students, particularly since a fair proportion of students have computers of their own; high quality IT facilities for language teaching are not as easily accessible; in many cases the staff are not sophisticated in the area of ICT.
- Low levels of language proficiency at entrance to university in languages other than English means problems for curriculum design; some departments arrange zero-level courses during the first year but many departments are not able to assist their students sufficiently;
- The three providers of course content to teacher trainees - language departments, teacher education departments, and university training schools - do not normally pay enough attention to the integration of their programmes; consultation and common planning takes place only sporadically; curriculum planning is not one of the strengths of Finnish universities: not enough attention is paid to the sequencing and objectives (necessity) of courses to provide a coherent entity for students and to assist the progress of the study process;
- Departments have problems in recruiting the right kind of students for teacher education, ie. students who are genuinely motivated to study the subject and interested in becoming language teachers; the dropout rates are high, and many students 'drift' into teacher education due to lack of alternatives;
- Many graduates from teacher education become language teachers at polytechnics and vocational secondary schools without specializing in vocationally or professionally oriented education in any way; the same concerns various types of adult education (evening schools, adult training institutes, etc.);
- Student guidance before and after enrolment could be stepped up; pre-recruitment guidance tends to be sporadic, and candidates do not always know what will expect them after they enter the programmes; many of them come to language departments because they liked to study languages at school and did not know what else to do, and then gradually drift into teacher education, since there are few alternatives;
- Student workloads are heavy in language subjects, clearly heavier than in the other humanities subjects; most undergraduates study two languages, which means that the workloads are excessive as against the credits gained.

3.2 Teaching methods

In the course of the past ten to fifteen years there has been a clear shift from teacher-centred teaching methods over to more learner-centred ones. To the extent it has been possible, lectures have been replaced by workshops and seminars, although in many departments the restrictions imposed by funding shortages have curtailed this trend. A fair proportion of all teaching in the area of languages is still taking place in the lecture format.

In language departments it has always been necessary to divide the student body into smaller groups for language proficiency work. In many cases, departments still adhere to rather traditional types of teaching expected to improve students' language skills, including courses in pronunciation, translation from the mother tongue and into the mother tongue, and courses in conversation. Some departments have integrated language proficiency with various types of content courses. With the exception of what are called conversation courses, oral skills have been largely neglected. The same is also true of writing skills. Traditionally, students were themselves responsible for developing their language skills, which may still be a partial explanation for the present orientation of the syllabus.

Tenured native-speaker lecturers are largely responsible for language proficiency work at language departments. A fair number of native speakers are also employed by university language centres and language programmes in polytechnics.

Advanced types of language and multimedia laboratory are used at all institutions of higher

education for language proficiency work.

Examinations have always played an important role in Finland. At its worst, students have been exposed to far too many examinations throughout the academic year. A certain proportion of the syllabus content has always been examined through reading assignments and examinations based on the material read.

In some cases, face-to-face type of courses have been replaced by reading and essay assignments and combination of face-to-face sessions and essay assignments. This can sometimes be an outcome from the restrictions imposed on teaching resources in the 1990s and not from attempts at reforming teaching methodology.

Before the 1990s it was not possible for two teachers to collaborate and teach one and the same group simultaneously together. The new way to measure the teaching loads in terms of 1,600 annual hours of working time introduced in the mid-1990s made this possible, and it has proved out to be useful in certain types of language courses, such as academic writing.

There is a great deal of interest in what is called virtual university. The Ministry of Education is sponsoring various activities towards this objective. All universities in Finland are making an effort to boost practices in this area. Individual teachers have introduced courses that are available through the net, and there is some inter-university collaboration. The council of language centre directors has launched a 'virtual language centre', a network of courses and materials available for students at all universities.

3.3 Pedagogical concepts

In the course of the 1990s a clear shift took place in higher education from teacher-centredness over to an emphasis on learning: students became to be considered actors in the educational process.

The traditional academic pedagogical concept in Finland centred round an emphasis on individual work by students. They themselves were expected to take the responsibility for their own progress and the planning of their studies. A change towards a more centralised and programmed system took place in connection with the examinations and degree reform at the beginning of the 1980s. A great deal of attention has since then been paid to student guidance through detailed syllabuses and by appointment of study counsellors. Departments were also expected to nominate senior students to serve as student tutors for newly enrolled colleagues.

Today departments are expected to give detailed instructions to their students in their department programme guides and their home pages. In addition to student tutors, staff tutors have been appointed by many of the departments. Some departments have also adopted the practice of assisting their students to draw personal study plans.

All these measures are expected to cut down the time it takes for Finnish students to finish their degrees. Students graduating with the Finnish equivalent of the MA degree are 27-28 years of age on an average. In language subjects the study times tend to be the longest in the humanities, the average being 7-8 years. The overall time has gradually decreased but it is still considered too long. Moreover, many students start their studies rather late, at the age of 22-23.

3.4 Teaching materials

With the exception of reading assignments, teaching materials are produced in most cases by individual teachers. Standard textbooks are not normally available because the market is rather small in a country with a relatively small population. There is not much interdepartmental collaboration.

A number of language centres collaborated in the mid-1990s to produce language teaching material to be available in the net. The project was not very successful.

In the 1970s and 1980s the Language Centre for Finnish Universities produced a considerable amount of printed language teaching materials to be used in language centres. In the course of the 1990s the activity was gradually given up, mainly because the language centres had been able to develop their own activities and had become more independent in this respect. Moreover, the conditions for the financing of such activity became more constrained.

Language centres and polytechnics have acquired a fair amount of multimedia material to be used in their multimedia laboratories, particularly for self-access purposes.

3.5 Course descriptions

University faculty or department councils make the decisions for fixed periods of time on the syllabuses to be applied in the subjects taught in the departments. The programme guides specify the objectives of

course units and often give rough outlines of course content. Teachers are given, however, plenty of leeway to develop the course content in accordance with the principle of liberty of teaching.

4 DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS OF QUALITY MEASURES RELATING TO THE TRAINING OF HIGHER EDUCATION TEACHERS AND TRAINERS WORKING IN THE AREA OF LANGUAGES

4.1 Teaching qualifications of the staff

When permanent teaching posts and temporary posts extending over a period longer than two years are to be filled at Finnish universities, the candidates are expected to give evidence of their teaching qualifications. Earlier this was done by means of a trial lecture given in front of the faculty council for professorships and a committee appointed by the faculty council for positions other than professorships. More recently an attempt has been made to give more weight to teaching qualifications in the appointment process. In addition to a trial lecture, most faculties now require a pedagogical portfolio which is expected to cover, in addition to a description of the teaching experience of the candidate, also examples of course outlines and teaching materials prepared by the candidate and a characterisation of the candidate's teaching philosophy. Moreover, representatives of the faculty council may interview the candidate.

The nomination of the top candidates for a position now takes place on the basis of (1) the scholarly merits as evaluated, always for professorships and at many institutions also for lectorships, by external assessors, (2) a trial lecture, (3) any other teaching qualifications, and (4) practical experience in relevant areas of activity.

There seems to be a consensus of opinion that the screening of the candidates through this process is a guarantee for quality of teaching. Finnish universities are gradually moving towards a system in which the degree required for all positions will be a relevant doctor's degree. At the moment a Finnish licentiate degree or equivalent is sufficient for lectorships.

At polytechnics, a licentiate degree or a doctor's degree is required for senior teaching positions. The candidate's teaching qualifications are also assessed.

The career prospects of the teaching staff at language departments and language centres are not very good because the number of higher positions is rather small. Most of the positions are tenured, except at language centres, which tend to employ a large number of part time instructors.

4.2 Teacher education

Many candidates applying for positions in higher education acquire their teaching qualifications through the general teacher education programmes offered by universities. Specialized programmes for HE teachers are rather restricted, but suggestions have been made to make such programmes compulsory. No systematic training for trainers of translators and interpreters is available either. No specific training is available for HE language teachers.

Tailored courses are available in the area of information and communication technology as applied to higher education.

In Finland all teacher education takes place at institutions of higher education, either universities with faculties of education or polytechnics with schools of vocational teacher education. A total of 11 universities offer teacher education programmes. In seven of them, there are degree programmes which lead to the qualifications required of language teachers. Language teacher education is arranged jointly by language departments in faculties of humanities and teacher education departments. Graduates from language departments can also qualify for language teaching by doing their pedagogical training at polytechnics with vocational teacher education programmes.

The pedagogical studies include a period of teaching practice, which is mostly done at schools affiliated to universities, so called 'normal' schools, but which can also be arranged at other schools.

Students are admitted into pedagogical studies through an entrance examination where their motivation and suitability for the teaching profession are examined. Normally this takes place after the students have been enrolled in their subject study programmes, ie. the students are first screened by language departments using criteria of their own (mainly language proficiency and examination based on set books relating to languages and literatures) and the students to be admitted to teacher education are then chosen from among those admitted. The entrance into teacher education used to take place after the second year but there has been a tendency for faculties to move it earlier, even to the very first semester in some cases. A number of universities have recently admitted a certain number of new entrants directly into language teacher specialisation.

Most universities now offer a large number of staff development programmes to improve the quality of teaching. More and more attention is also paid to human resources management. Specific measures have been introduced at many institutions to provide extracurricular activities. Attempts are also being made to make staff mobility possible.

5 DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS OF QUALITY MEASURES RELATING TO THE ORGANISATION AND MANAGEMENT OF THE PROCESS OF TEACHING AND LEARNING

5.1 Course schedules

The degree system introduced at the beginning of the 1980s resulted in highly overloaded schedules for students. Weekly schedules of classroom contact hours were extended to well over 30 periods in many cases. The changes throughout the 1980s and early in the 1990s brought about cuts in the total number of contact hours but the credit given for course work for students in language subjects is still more restricted than it is in other types of subjects.

Since many language students mostly study at least two language subjects, which all have heavy work loads, the weekly schedules easily involve a great deal of overlap, which makes it difficult for students to complete their course requirements. The departments try to negotiate with each other about ways to avoid overlap but it is mostly left to the students to try and build up personal schedules which are manageable.

5.2 Workloads

Language subjects are known for their heavy workloads, which are partly due to the fact that, in addition to the substance relating to various content areas, students are expected to acquire a high level of language proficiency. Since the present financing of the universities depends on the number of degrees produced, more attention is now paid to reasonable workload levels, and it is to be expected that language departments will try to make changes in their syllabuses accordingly.

Teacher workloads are uniform throughout the university system. An overall workload of 1,600 annual working hours is applied uniformly. Any kind of work, research, teaching, or administration, is included.

5.3 Information management systems

All universities keep computerized centralized records of the achievement of individual students. In addition, many departments have their own records. It seems however that observation of overall student performance is rather sporadic.

5.4 Division of tasks among staff members

Deans and heads of departments are not full-time functionaries at Finnish universities. They are elected from among the staff of the faculty or department. Deans are Professors, and heads of departments have to have doctors' degrees.

Tasks are divided among the teaching staff on the basis of research and teaching qualifications, on the one hand, and personal interests, on the other. M.A. level research seminars are mostly taught by Professors, and it is mostly Professors, or exceptionally other staff members with doctors' degrees, who supervise the students' work for their M.A. theses.

Earlier full Professors were expected to be responsible for courses at the M.A. level but today the division of tasks is based on expertise and interests rather than qualifications.

Most departments organize a series of meetings towards the end of the academic year to negotiate the division of tasks for the following year.

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