

Finnish Foreign Language Teachers' Views on Teaching and Study Reality in Their Classes: The KIELO Project's Rationale and Results

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Abstract—The purpose of this research has been to survey the approaches to foreign language (FL) teaching and studying in Finnish FL classrooms. The central idea was to try to identify the main types of teaching and study activities according to the FL teachers. The survey was conducted as an online questionnaire with the help of the Federation of Foreign Language Teachers in Finland (SUKOL) in 2010. The FL teachers were asked to describe their own teaching and their students' studying in the classrooms. The questionnaire consisted of 115 items with a Likert scale (1–4) and eight open questions. Altogether 147 FL teachers responded to the survey. In this article we highlight the KIELO research project's rationale, the research methodology and the research findings concerning teaching and study activities the FL teachers see to be most/least common in their classroom, and the differences between context-dependent and context-independent teachers. The implications of these two teaching approaches are discussed.

Index Terms—foreign language teaching, foreign language studying, foreign language classroom, context-dependent teaching, context-independent teaching

I. INTRODUCTION

The KIELO project (“Language Teaching” or Kieltenopetus in Finnish; 2009–, ongoing) is a research and developmental project in foreign language (FL) teaching, studying and learning, with a view on foreign language classroom reality. The starting point for the project was an interest in getting deeper understanding of the reality of FL teaching and study practices in FL classrooms in Finland, to have more research-based knowledge to develop foreign language teacher education and in-service teacher training. The research aim is to describe, analyze and interpret teaching and study practices in foreign language classrooms: the ways in which foreign languages are taught and studied, how these ways are justified by the teachers and perceived by the students.

The KIELO project is a national and international project. The Finnish research covers, so far, dozens of theses (pedagogical studies and master theses) and a national KIELO survey. The international research cooperation includes Japan, Chile and tentatively South Korea, countries in which the KIELO survey has been conducted within their national educational context.

In this article we first deal briefly with the societal, didactic and methodological premises of the KIELO project in order to give some background information to the main body of this article, focusing on the Finnish survey and its preliminary results.

II. THE RATIONALE OF THE KIELO PROJECT

We first discuss some societal, didactic and methodological premises behind the rationale of the KIELO research on teaching, studying and learning in FL classrooms in Finland.

A. Societal Premises

The four societal premises include the Finnish national core curriculum, the national language education policy, formal, informal and non-formal education, and the Finnish society.

The basic values for FL teaching, specified in the national core curricula (LOPS, 2003; POPS, 2004), focus, among other things, on social interaction and study strategies. They also define the objectives, emphases and assessment of FL teaching. It is important to notice, however, that the Finnish FL teachers have always been free to choose the teaching methods and approaches they prefer and want to use.

The Finnish language education policy and future guidelines are widely mapped in the KIEPO project (2005–2007). One of the key observations in the closing report of the project (Luukka and Pöyhönen, 2007) is that research results are not exploited systematically enough in the planning of FL education in Finland. However, only research-based knowledge could help FL educators anticipate future challenges and cope with them in a meaningful way.

One of the recent megatrends in education is strengthening links and obscuring boundaries between formal, informal and non-formal education (e.g. Conner, 1997–2007). It has been, and still is, a general belief that learning takes place principally, or even exclusively, in formal education, that is, in the institutional school system. The good results since 2000 in the OECD-based PISA studies (PISA Key findings, e.g. 2006; 2009) have understandably encouraged many Finns to see that the Finnish school system works well and that the objectives of the national core curriculum are sound. There is, however, a risk in formal education to forget that people learn naturally in out-of-school, real-life contexts as well. According to the sociocultural approach, learning is a typical way of being a human being. It is aptly claimed by Säljö (2001: 112) that a human being cannot avoid learning. In this spirit, we argue that formal FL teaching should therefore exploit the rich informal affordances, such as the Internet, which are a natural part of students' lives. Non-formal learning should not be ignored either. Performances, movies, presentations at museums and science centers, for instance, can be used for language-pedagogical purposes, too. The way to afford FL learning opportunities and to make students use foreign languages is to open the doors and windows of FL classrooms and to let the Internet, social media, and various digital and mobile technologies in.

The Finnish society is becoming increasingly multicultural. It is predicted that in Helsinki, the capital city of Finland, the percentage of the students with an immigrant background is growing from the present 11% to about 23% by 2025 in primary and secondary schools (Merimaa, 2008). Multiculturalism is equally connected with national and cultural identity (e.g. Uljens, 2007) and therefore, to our way of thinking, a topical challenge to FL teaching. As language and culture are indivisible, FL teaching and studying inevitably also mean teaching and studying culture and intercultural communication. In addition, FL teaching is also education to respect diversity, to enhance awareness and understanding of multiculturalism.

To sum up, the societal premises of FL teaching represent life-enhancing challenges to Finnish FL classrooms.

B. Didactic Premises

Our main didactic premise is based on the framework of the FL didactic teaching–studying–learning (TSL) process (Fig. 1). This framework provides an instrument to describe, analyze and reflect on the various dimensions of pedagogical reality in FL classrooms, which helps us to better understand teaching, study practices, and learning.



Figure 1. The Foreign Language Didactic Teaching–Studying–Learning Process
(in the spirit of Uljens, 1997; in Finnish in Harjanne, 2006, p. 57).

In this framework, the three components (teaching, studying, learning) are equally taken into consideration to guarantee deeper understanding of the pedagogical practices in FL classrooms. In the KIELO project, we argue that teaching can promote learning, but we cannot expect that teaching a foreign language automatically leads to learning it. Instead we see that through their teaching FL teachers can direct students' study processes, and that the students can direct their own learning through their studying. In addition, we have to bear in mind that foreign languages are also often learnt without purposive teaching or studying in informal educational contexts, such as in leisure-time activities. Further, the TSL process is recursive implying that students' learning impacts their study practices. In the same way, teaching is affected by the students' studying and learning. In the KIELO project the focus is on FL teaching and studying, which are clearly observable activities and can be controlled and developed.

To be able to analyze, reflect on and understand the complex reality of FL classrooms, we will use our model (Fig. 2) developed on the basis of Uljens's (1997) school didactic model.

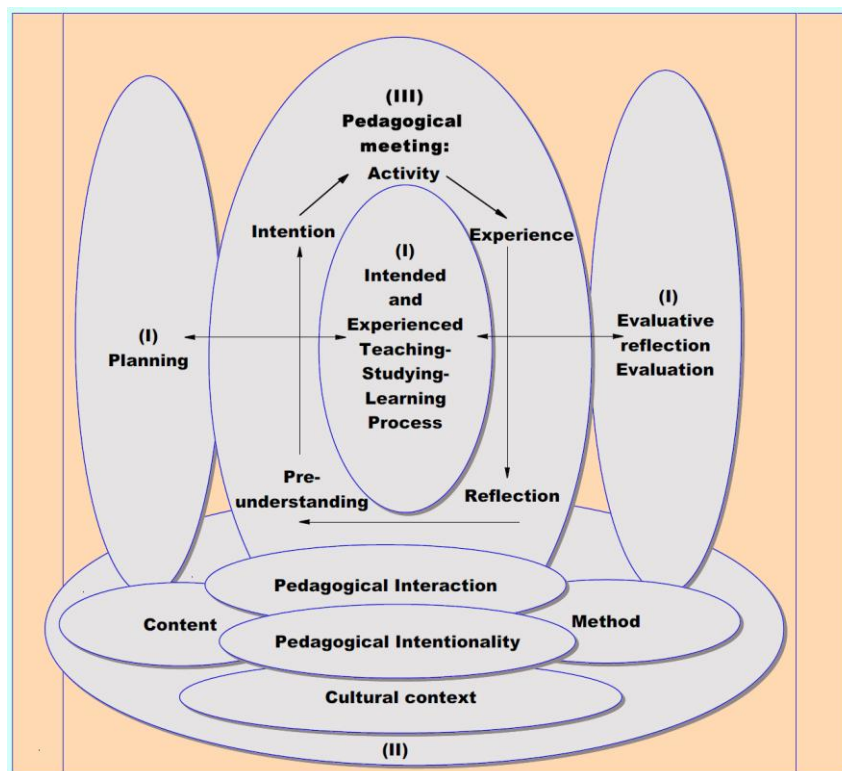


Figure 2. The forms (I) and aspects (II) of pedagogical activity and the pedagogical meeting (III) in the framework of the didactic teaching–studying–learning process. (Based on Uljens's reflective model of school didactics [1997, p. 65]; in Finnish in Harjanne, 2006, p. 63; modified and visualized by Harjanne).

The forms (I) and aspects (II) of pedagogical activity and the pedagogical meeting (III) explicate the relevant components linked to FL teaching and are interconnected in a complex way. The forms of pedagogical activity are teaching planning, the teaching–studying–learning process, and evaluative reflection and evaluation of the TSL process. In line with the activity theory (Leontjev, 1978), the TSL process can be seen from a dual perspective: as something planned or intended, and as something already completed or experienced. This dual mode is in fact a central research perspective in the KIELO project. The activity theory by Leontjev (1978), based on sociocultural theory, emphasizes the situational nature of activities and actions (Lantolf, 2000a). According to this theory, people's activities are determined by the sociocultural context, their sociocultural history and their orientation and objectives, which should be taken into account in FL research (e.g. Säljö 2000).

The aspects of pedagogical activity, that is, intentionality, context, interaction, content and method, are in close interplay and closely included in the three forms of pedagogical activity. We discuss the didactic framework of TSL process more thoroughly elsewhere (e.g. Harjanne, 2006: 58–64; Harjanne & Tella, 2007). Here, we highlight only one of the pedagogical aspects: context. The sociocultural context of a FL classroom influences what is taught, studied, and learnt and how. The theoretical basis of this view rests on socio-constructivistic theories (e.g. Fox, 2001) and sociocultural theories (e.g. Lantolf, 2000a). The context connected to the TSL process is social, cultural, mental and pedagogical, *inter alia*. The relevance of the cultural context in pedagogical process is emphasized by Uljens (1997), for instance. Society, school, classroom and curriculum are examples of cultural contexts. Students are representatives of the local cultural context and their home background, and they help these contexts become involved in classroom activities. The values of teachers and students as well as their respective roles are considerably culture-related. (Uljens, 1997: 25–26, 83–87.) Consequently, FL teaching cannot be understood without taking into consideration its sociocultural, mental and pedagogical context.

The pedagogical meeting includes teachers' and students' intentions based on their prior experiences, and reflection of them. These intentions become observable through the teacher's teaching and the students' study processes. We see that the teachers' values, conceptions, beliefs, experiences and expectations of FL teaching, studying and learning channel their pedagogical action and practices. This view is supported for instance by Borg (2006), who discusses the significance of language teachers' cognition. Borg claims that language teachers' way of teaching is affected by their values, practical and theoretical knowledge and their beliefs of themselves, of their students, and of teaching, studying and learning. Consequently, in the KIELO project we see in accordance with the sociocultural view (e.g. Lantolf, 2000b) that students' orientation to FL teaching, studying and learning channels their studying in a significant way. Students' orientation to pedagogical activity and studying are steered by their values, conceptions, beliefs, experiences and expectations of FL teaching, studying and learning.

We also contend that FL teachers' expertise includes theoretical knowledge, practical knowledge and skills based on experience and tacit knowledge, and the integration of theory and practice. In addition, we see in line with Borg (2006) that professional development requires systematic and purposive reflection of one's own teaching and its justification. Borg (2006) claims that language teachers need to reflect on their own teaching in order to be aware of their own beliefs, as unconscious thought patterns may limit the influence of practical and theoretical knowledge on cognition and thus on teaching. One of the aims of this KIELO survey is precisely to activate the respondents to reflect their own teaching and their students' studying.

C. Methodological Premises

Communicative language teaching (CLT) has been the dominant methodological approach in Finland, and in many countries all over the world, for many decades, at least in theory and in Finnish FL core curricula (LOPS, 1994, 2003; POPS, 1994, 2004). Our research interest in the KIELO project is to investigate different teaching and study practices in FL classrooms within the frame of CLT, how CLT is interpreted and implemented by FL teachers in classrooms, and in what way the teachers justify their practices.

The theoretical background and the methodological features of communicative language teaching have been widely discussed (e.g. Richards & Rodgers, 2001: 158–173; Ellis 2003; see also Harjanne, 2006; Harjanne & Tella, 2009). We refer here only very briefly to some key aspects. CLT is one potential methodological approach to meet the challenges that the widened view of communicative language proficiency (CEFR, 2001) and the widened view of FL learning, seen as a combination of different views or as socio-cultural view (e.g. Sjö 2000), give. The main features of CLT can be listed as follows: (i) student-centeredness referring to direct practice of the target language, meaningful tasks and communication from the students' point of view and students' participation in planning, and reflective evaluation of teaching and one's own studying; (ii) consideration of all components of communicative language proficiency (CEFR, 2001) or intercultural communicative competence (e.g. Byram, 2010) as in real life; (iii) integration of listening, reading, writing and speaking as in real life.

Our research interest in the KIELO project in the FL teaching and study practices within the frame of CLT rises from the national, and also international, research findings that show that CLT is far from the reality in many FL classrooms, although CLT has been promoted for quite a few decades. According to some studies, it is surprisingly common that in English-language classrooms in Finland both teachers (e.g. Bonnet, 2002) and students (e.g. Nikula, 2007) use Finnish. Teaching and studying appear to focus on linguistic structures in isolation from meaning and language functions (e.g. Alanen, 2000). However, there are also studies (e.g. Harjanne, 2006) that show that CLT is used with good results. Many international research findings (e.g. Li, 1998; Sato & Kleinsasser, 1999) also point to CLT being quite a rarely-used approach in many FL classrooms. It is, however, indicative that in interviews and enquiries the teachers themselves claim they use CLT, but when observed they tend to prefer traditional grammar-based teaching. In certain cases the reason may well be that many FL teachers simply do not believe that communicative tasks could promote students' FL learning (e.g. Gatbonton & Segalowitz, 2005: 327). FL teachers' beliefs seem to direct their teaching practices and if their beliefs are in parallel with traditional language teaching, they prefer it, as Borg (1999), for instance, argues. In addition, some FL teachers may have misunderstood what CLT really is. Brown (2001: 43–46) states that FL teachers should make sure that they really understand the principles of CLT in order to be able to plan their teaching accordingly.

III. THE STUDY

A. Research Task

The KIELO project's societal, didactic and methodological premises led to the key research task, which is to describe, analyze and interpret what the language teaching reality is in FL classrooms, in what ways foreign languages are taught and studied, and on what pedagogical grounds. The purpose of the KIELO research is to get a socially and contextually constructed perspective on the teaching and study activities taking place in Finnish FL classrooms. In this article, we focus on the following research question that determines our data analysis: What are the Finnish FL teachers' main approaches to FL teaching?

Vygotsky (1978) argues that FL teaching, studying and learning are mediated by social and cultural context. According to social-cultural ideas, the students in the classroom take part in constructing the studying and learning context and content. Personal learning is mediated by communication and learning at the social level (e.g. Lantolf, 2000b; Sjö 2000). The interaction does not just make the learning easier; rather, interaction *is* learning (van Lier, 2000). As an indicator of personal learning, we can use the social participation and communication (e.g. Donato, 2000). As Vygotsky (1978) explains, the students and the teacher create a Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), in which the language is situated in a cultural context. The students can learn a foreign language through the shared context and content produced together with the peers and the teacher. These views are related to CLT and we refer to this approach as a context-dependent approach. The other approach is a context-independent approach, in which language learning is considered as (more) individually mediated. According to cognitive approaches a student is seen as an active information processor of linguistic input and FL learning is seen as individual information construction, language acquisition, on the basis of former language knowledge (Sfard, 1998; Skehan, 1998). The target of learning can be said to be primarily an individual's enrichment of language knowledge. These views are related to more traditional FL teaching.

B. Data Collection

The data were collected through a questionnaire addressed to the members of the Federation of Foreign Language Teachers in Finland (SUKOL). It was conducted online in 2010 via the University of Helsinki E-form system. The construction of the questionnaire items was based on earlier research and theory on communicative language teaching (e.g. Ellis, 2003; Skehan, 2003). The respondents were guided to evaluate their own teaching and their students' studying according to their own views and experiences as FL teachers. The questionnaire includes two parts: 115 statements and 8 open questions. The 115 statements cover 15 salient themes related to communicative language teaching: 1) teacher/student roles in the FL classroom; 2) teacher-centeredness vs. student-centeredness including planning of teaching, choice and performance of tasks and assessment; 3) native language vs. target language used by the teachers and the students; 4) emphasis of reading, writing, speaking and listening; 5) task features (mechanical and context-isolated exercises of words and structures vs. communicative tasks); 6) focus on meaning vs. form; 7) grammar exercises vs. tasks; 8) exercise book vs. teachers' own tasks; 9) individual vs. group work; 10) text book vs. authentic materials; 11) traditional teaching and studying in the classroom vs. studying on the Internet and informal learning outside the classroom; 12) practicing of study skills; 13) scaffolding (teacher–student, student–student); 14) differentiation, and 15) language and intercultural communication. The 8 open questions concern the FL teachers' views on (i) the factors linked to good FL teaching and studying; (ii) their rationale behind these factors and (iii) which of these factors are very seldom realized in their classroom, and (iv) the factors linked to communicative language teaching and a communicative task.

The respondents consisted of 132 female and 15 male Finnish FL teachers. 40 teachers were 30–40 years old, 50 were 40–50 years old, and 57 teachers were over 50. Most of the teachers (n=81) taught only one language, 53 teachers taught two languages and 13 taught three or more languages. The languages taught were English (102 teachers), Swedish (64 teachers), German (32 teachers), French (11 teachers), Spanish (8 teachers), Russian (6 teachers), Italian (3 teachers) and Finnish as a second language (1 teacher). This distribution of the languages relates fairly well to the situation at the Finnish school. Most of the teachers (n=62) taught at lower secondary school (grades 7–9), 47 teachers taught at upper secondary school (grades 10–12), and 40 teachers taught at primary school (grades 1–6). 25 teachers taught in adult education. Many teachers thus taught not only at one school level.

C. Data Analysis

In this article, data analysis focuses on the quantitative data (responses to the 115 Likert-scale statements). The respondents were asked to rate the 115 statements on a four-point rating scale (1 = not true [does not happen in my classes]; 2 = slightly true; 3 = considerably true; 4 = fully true). The 115 items describing the FL teaching and studying in the classroom were analyzed with reliability analysis (Cronbach's alpha) for producing reliable summary variables. The reliability analysis revealed that some of the original summary variables needed some adjustments. Five items were not included in any of the subscales owing to decreasing impact on Cronbach's alphas. Based on the theoretical framework of the questionnaire, 20 summary variables were extracted from the 115 items. In the end, the label of each summary variable was decided by interpreting the content of the summary variable into a meaningful whole (see Table 1).

In the process of summary variable creation, cluster analysis was also used to reveal the major approaches to FL teaching. Cluster analysis is an exploratory tool that can be used to reveal natural groupings within the respondents and each cluster can be considered as a teacher group with similar preferences in FL teaching. In the end, the meaning and content were decided by interpreting the content of the summary variables into a meaningful whole. Only the statistically-significant differences ($p < .05$) between the groups are reported with the exception of the summary variable of use of textbook, which is interesting because the order of importance is quite large between the clusters. We tried several cluster analyses with several different numbers of clusters ending to a two-cluster solution. The preferences and differences between the groups can be studied and compared by using the means and standard deviations of the summary variables in each group (see Tables 2–6).

IV. RESULTS

A. Approaches to FL Teaching

The preliminary results are first discussed on the basis of the 20 summary variables. These 20 summary variables relate to how the Finnish FL teachers see their teaching and their students' studying in their own FL classrooms. The descriptive analyses of the summary variables with the number of items, internal consistency (Cronbach's α), scale means (M), standard deviations (SD), and minimum/maximum values per variable are presented in Table 1. Comparing the means of the summary variables enables to see which activities the teachers see to be most/least common in their classroom. Comparing the standard deviations in the summary variables enables to study where the teachers differ most in their teaching.

TABLE 1.
THE RELIABILITIES OF THE SUMMARY VARIABLES: THE NUMBER OF ITEMS, INTERNAL CONSISTENCY (CRONBACH'S ALPHA), MEANS (M), STANDARD DEVIATIONS (SD) AND MINIMUM/MAXIMUM VALUES PER VARIABLE (N=147).

Summary variable	n of items	Cronbach's α	M	SD	Min./Max.
1 Teacher-centeredness	8	.69	2.82	0.39	1.5/3.8
2 Student-centeredness	12	.79	2.69	0.34	1.6/3.7
3 Student as a participant	12	.74	2.13	0.34	1.3/3.1
4 Teacher using target language	6	.81	2.53	0.50	1.5/4.0
5 Student using target language	7	.71	2.76	0.40	1.6/3.9
6 Encouragement in using target language	3	.81	3.39	0.54	2.0/4.0
7 Communicative oral tasks	3	.74	2.96	0.53	2.0/4.0
8 Communicative written tasks	2	.58	2.56	0.52	1.5/4.0
9 Real-life tasks	3	.69	2.89	0.49	1.7/4.0
10 Communicative grammar tasks	3	.65	2.63	0.53	1.3/4.0
11 Non-communicative tasks	2	.69	2.26	0.55	1.0/4.0
12 Collective creation of discussion	4	.77	2.26	0.54	1.0/4.0
13 Peer scaffolding	4	.83	2.95	0.53	2.0/4.0
14 Use of textbook	4	.79	2.98	0.52	1.5/4.0
15 Use of own tasks	3	.74	2.51	0.67	1.0/4.0
16 Use of authentic materials	7	.76	2.05	0.47	1.1/3.7
17 Use of ICTs	5	.77	2.09	0.55	1.0/3.8
18 Integration of language and culture	9	.90	2.66	0.57	1.3/4.0
19 Mentoring in study skills	6	.75	2.42	0.48	1.5/4.0
20 Differentiation	7	.73	2.47	0.44	1.3/3.7

Note: The descriptors for means (M) in the analysis are as follows:

1 = not true (does not happen in my classes); 2 = slightly true; 3 = considerably true; 4 = fully true.

The reliability of all the summary variables seen in the light of internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha) is distinctly high. The internal consistency of the 20 summary variables is at least .69 with only two exceptions: communicative grammar tasks (.65) and communicative written tasks (.58). Integration of language and culture has the highest reliability (.90), followed by peer scaffolding (.83), teacher using target language (.81) and encouragement in using target language (.81).

In general, the Finnish FL teachers claim that they encourage their students to use the target language considerably (M = 3.39), and that they use considerably textbooks (M = 2.98), communicative oral tasks (M = 2.96) and real-life tasks (M = 2.89). Further, a fair amount of peer scaffolding (M = 2.95) takes place in their classrooms according to the teachers. Use of authentic material (M = 2.05) and use of ICT (M = 2.09) gain the lowest means in teaching practices as evaluated by the teachers. The Finnish FL teachers in this study seem to follow the principles of communicative language teaching (CLT) most in terms of use of communicative oral tasks (M = 2.96) and real-life tasks (M = 2.89). Additionally, they encourage their students to use the target language (M = 3.39). Conflicting results concerning the principles of CLT are instead the following: teacher-centeredness is quite considerable (M = 2.82); the students' role as participants is slightly true (M = 2.13) and the teachers do not use the target language much (M = 2.53). It is also a conflicting result that despite quite considerable use of real-life tasks (M = 2.89), using authentic material is very low (M = 2.05). Furthermore, the considerable use of textbooks (M = 2.98) raises a question about the communicativeness of the used textbooks. It is also to be noted that the FL teachers in this study differ the most in using their own tasks (SD = 0.67) and integrating language and culture (SD = 0.55), which are encouraged activities in CLT. The teachers differ the least in their teaching concerning student-centeredness (SD = 0.34) and students as participants (SD = 0.34), whose summary variables have rather low means and thus point to a non-communicative approach to FL teaching.

It is obvious that not all Finnish FL teachers have the same preferences. After summary variable creation we used cluster analysis to reveal the hidden teacher groups and to gain more perspective on different FL teaching approaches. A K-means cluster analysis with a two-cluster solution was conducted. The final centers of the two clusters were named as a context-dependent cluster and a context-independent cluster. In the following analysis the main summary variables and their emphasis on either cluster are described (Table 2).

TABLE 2.
THE MEANS AND MEAN DIFFERENCES OF THE SUMMARY VARIABLES IN A TWO-CLUSTER SOLUTION.

Summary variable	Context-dependent teaching M	Context-independent teaching M	Mean difference	Order Difference
Use of own tasks	2.93	2.16	0.77	-9
Integration of language and culture	3.01	2.37	0.64	-6
Encouragement in using target language	3.69	3.13	0.56	0
Collective creation of discussion	2.56	2	0.56	-1
Use of ICT	2.4	1.85	0.55	-2
Mentoring in study skills	2.68	2.2	0.48	-1
Use of authentic materials	2.32	1.84	0.48	-2
Peer scaffolding	3.19	2.72	0.47	-3
Communicative oral tasks	3.19	2.75	0.44	-2
Real-life tasks	3.12	2.68	0.44	-2
Teacher using target language	2.74	2.32	0.42	-1
Communicative grammar tasks	2.83	2.43	0.4	1
Communicative written tasks	2.73	2.4	0.33	3
Differentiation	2.65	2.32	0.33	1
Student using target language	2.92	2.6	0.32	2
Student as a participant	2.28	1.98	0.3	1
Teacher-centeredness	3.07	2.83	0.24	2
Student-centeredness	2.81	2.6	0.21	3
Use of textbook	2.93	2.99	-0.06	6
Non-communicative tasks	2.12	2.39	-0.27	9

In the cluster classification (Table 2), 60 teachers were classified as context-dependent teachers and 71 as context-independent teachers (16 teachers who did not evaluate all items were omitted from the analysis). The means of the two clusters were statistically significant ($p < .05$) except for the use of textbooks ($t = -.602, df = 129, p = .548$). In general, the context-dependent FL teachers had a higher mean in most summary variables. The only exceptions were the summary variables of non-communicative tasks and use of textbooks, in which the context-independent teachers had, understandably, a higher mean. However, we have to be careful when comparing means, because the two clusters of teachers may have used different scales in their evaluations. Thus, in Table 2 also the order differences of the two clusters of teachers are presented. Of the 20 summary variables, only 4 have radically different order differences. In the following presentation, we look more closely into the 4 summary variables with the largest order differences to reveal the practices and pedagogical choices of the context-dependent and context-independent teachers.

B. Context-dependent Approach to FL Teaching

Use of own tasks ($\alpha = .742$). The largest difference on the mean (.77) and the order of the summary variables (-9) was in use of own tasks for the two teacher clusters (Table 2). The context-dependent teachers design tasks themselves more than the context-independent teachers, if the teaching material does not meet their requirements (Table 3).

TABLE 3.
THE MEAN VALUES OF THE VARIABLES IN THE SUMMARY VARIABLE USE OF OWN TASKS OF THE TWO TEACHER CLUSTERS.

Teaching approach	Context-dependent teaching M (SD)	Context-independent teaching M (SD)
I plan communicative tasks myself, if there isn't any in the textbook	3.13 (.81)	2.2 (.67)
I plan tasks myself to meet my requirements	3.00 (.84)	2.17 (.63)
I change textbook tasks to meet my requirements	2.67 (.75)	2.13 (.72)

As we can see in Table 3, the largest difference is in the variable 'I plan communicative tasks myself, if there isn't any in the textbook'. Designing own tasks is clearly related to the communicative context and content of the tasks. This result highlights the fact that the teachers see the importance of communication in FL classrooms. Communication means sharing content. When people are communicating, they exchange information, ideas, emotions or motives. Sharing means communality in the classroom. The context-dependent teachers specify that if there are no communicative tasks in the textbook, they prepare them themselves. The more active the interaction and the communication in the classroom are, the more opportunities there are also for an enhanced Zone of Proximal Development. When teachers and students have a lot of shared context and content in the study and learning environment, teaching can have a deeper impact on the students. The context-independent FL teachers do not consider communication so important in their classrooms. If language is seen as a code and language proficiency as language knowledge and if language learning is seen individually mediated, the shared study and learning environment may not be as important.

The statement 'I change textbook tasks to meet my requirement' has the smallest mean difference between the teacher clusters. The context-independent teachers seem to design fewer tasks themselves in general. When FL learning is seen as an individual skill, focusing on the textbook is understandable. A FL textbook may offer a complete learning platform for individual learning. The context-dependent FL teachers may ignore the textbook tasks completely and more easily, if they do not meet their requirements.

Integration of language and culture ($\alpha = .903$). The context-dependent FL teachers emphasized the cultural dimension of language and communication more than the context-independent teachers. The mean difference between the two teacher clusters was .64 and the order of the summary variable for the two teacher clusters was (-6). To be able to evaluate the importance of this difference, we present the variables that are included in the summary variable and the mean differences of the variables in Table 4.

TABLE 4.
THE MEAN VALUES OF THE VARIABLES IN THE SUMMARY VARIABLE INTEGRATION OF LANGUAGE AND CULTURE
OF THE TWO TEACHER CLUSTERS.

<i>Teaching approach</i>	<i>Context-dependent teaching M(SD)</i>	<i>Context-independent teaching M(SD)</i>
I emphasize also the non-verbal communication of the target language in my teaching	2.73 (.78)	1.97 (.63)
I emphasize the communication styles of the target culture in my teaching	3.15 (.66)	2.45 (.65)
I help the students to interpret the target language speaker and consider his/her cultural background	2.62 (.83)	1.94 (.79)
I connect a lot of cultural exchange material in my teaching	2.82 (.75)	2.14 (.68)
The cultural styles of the target language communication are a part of my teaching	3.33 (.60)	2.72 (.78)
I think I have skills to teach communication between cultures	2.92 (.65)	2.32 (.73)
Communication between cultures is a part of my teaching	2.97 (.76)	2.38 (.72)
I help the students to see the cultural ties of the native and target language	3.07 (.66)	2.48 (.58)
The culture of the target country is a part of my teaching	3.47 (.68)	2.96 (.69)

The largest difference between context dependent and context-independent teaching (.76) was in the variable 'I emphasize also the non-verbal communication of the target language in my teaching'. The context-dependent FL teachers emphasized non-verbal communication more. Communication, producing shared content, is again central. Non-verbal communication is highly culture-related and an integral part of face-to-face communication. Therefore in order to be able to participate in this kind of communication and to interpret other interlocutors, that is, to be an intercultural speaker, the students also need to be aware of and practice non-verbal communication in the target language.

The context-dependent FL teachers emphasized the communication styles of the target culture more (difference .70) than the context-independent teachers. The same language and words are likely to mean different things in different communication cultures. Expressions used and interpretations made always depend on the communication context and the communication culture of the speaker and the interpreter. The context-independent teachers may concentrate more on the linguistic competences, like grammar and vocabulary. Perhaps they do not even consider that using "correct" language carries a different message in different contexts.

Helping the students to interpret the target language speakers and consider their background was more important for the context-dependent teachers than for the context-independent teachers (difference .68). This tendency related to a lot of cultural exchange material in teaching (difference .68). In context-dependent teaching, the study and learning environment is richer with cultural styles of the target language communication (difference .61). The context-dependent teachers think that they have the skills to teach communication between cultures (difference .60) and, consequently, communication between cultures is a part of their teaching (difference .59)

The context-independent teachers had a lower mean on all the variables of integration of language and culture. Cultural and contextual aspects of the target language and communication are clearly less important to them. Considering language as culture-independent means to discard the communication culture of the target language and the communication context. For these teachers, there seems to be only one correct and right way to use the target language. Interestingly, language tests are often prepared for measuring independent and correct linguistic competences, although the cultural aspects may blur the correctness. Next we will take a closer look at context-independent teaching.

C. Context-independent Approach to FL Teaching

Non-communicative tasks ($\alpha = .687$). The mean for all teachers in the summary variable of non-communicative tasks was low ($M = 2.26$). Usually the teachers do not seem to value these tasks highly. However, it may be no surprise that the context-independent teachers preferred non-communicative tasks more than context-dependent teachers (difference .27). A more detailed description of the summary variable can be seen in Table 5.

TABLE 5.
THE MEAN VALUES OF THE VARIABLES IN THE SUMMARY VARIABLE NON-COMMUNICATIVE TASKS
OF THE TWO TEACHER CLUSTERS.

<i>Teaching approach</i>	<i>Context-dependent teaching M (SD)</i>	<i>Context-independent teaching M (SD)</i>
The students do vocabulary tasks, in which they practice words without communication context	2.1 (.66)	2.3 (.60)
The students do grammar tasks, in which they practice grammatical structures without communication context	2.13 (.60)	2.49 (.61)

In context-independent FL teaching the students did more vocabulary tasks, in which they practice words without communication context, than in context-dependent teaching (difference .20). This makes sense. The context-independent teachers may consider that general context-free vocabulary helps the students to communicate and become understood in all kinds of contexts. The defined and “correct” vocabulary is also easy to evaluate and the students’ progress is easier to test.

The context-independent teachers tended to give more grammar tasks, in which the students practice grammatical structures without communication context, than the context-dependent teachers (difference .36). This was hardly surprising either. The context-independent teachers may perceive grammar structures as the correct ones in any communication context. Then it is a sensible pedagogical procedure to isolate the grammatical structures into general rules that should be applied to the whole specter of language use. The context-independent teacher may perceive teaching according to a traditional FL teaching method in the same way as some of the classical piano teachers: You need to know the theory and practice scales; only after the basic toolbox is adopted can the rules be effectively broken.

Use of textbooks ($\alpha = .788$). The mean difference (.06) of the context-dependent and context-independent FL teachers in the summary variable of use of textbooks is very small and not statistically significant. However, the context-independent teachers ranked this summary variable 4 places higher in order than the context-dependent teachers. The reason for this difference in ranking but not in mean is worth considering. We could argue that both teacher types used textbook as much, but there may still be important aspects of their teaching styles uncovered. To evaluate the summary variable more closely, we present the items in Table 6.

TABLE 6.
THE MEAN VALUES OF THE VARIABLES IN THE SUMMARY VARIABLE USE OF TEXTBOOKS
OF THE TWO TEACHER CLUSTERS.

<i>Teaching approach</i>	<i>Context-dependent teaching M (SD)</i>	<i>Context-independent teaching M (SD)</i>
I use a textbook	3.60 (.59)	3.62 (.54)
There are communicative tasks in the textbooks I use	3.03 (.78)	2.97 (.65)
The textbooks meet my requirements for communication	2.57 (.70)	2.69 (.73)
Textbook tasks meet my requirements	2.53 (.75)	2.68 (.67)

The differences between the two teacher clusters concerning the summary variable of use of textbooks are almost non-existent and none of them is statistically significant. Either the teachers used the same textbooks and evaluated them in the same way or both teacher groups had found textbooks to suit their needs. Our conclusion is that both teacher clusters use textbooks a lot. The teachers seemed fairly satisfied with the textbooks they used and reported to have found a good number of communicative tasks in them. This raises, however, some doubt, as several studies (e.g. Kaukonen, 2010) indicate that communicative tasks are not very common in Finnish FL textbooks. Why was the ranking different but not the mean? Did the teacher groups have different evaluation criteria? This remains to be answered in a follow-up study.

V. CONCLUSION

In general, this study indicates that the Finnish FL teachers use textbooks extensively. The teachers claimed that they firmly encourage their students to use the target language in the classroom and that they use communicative oral tasks. On the other hand, it was found out that the students did not use the target language as much as they were encouraged to do and that their role as participants was low. Further, the teachers claimed that they use real-life tasks quite considerably. Nevertheless, it turned out that using authentic materials and ICT was limited. These contradictory research findings call for further research.

Two different kinds of approaches to FL teaching were identified in the cluster analysis: a context-dependent approach and a context-independent approach. The teachers following the context-dependent approach tended to favor communicative and real-life tasks and they claimed that they design their own tasks if the textbook should not meet their requirements. The teachers favoring a context-independent approach prioritized more non-communicative vocabulary and grammar tasks. According to the order differences, the context-independent teachers preferred using textbooks more than the context-dependent teachers, but the mean difference did not quite support this result.

The survey does not necessary describe what really happens in the FL classroom, even though the teachers were asked to describe their classroom practices and their students’ studying in relation to the 115 items. The teachers may

not be fully aware of what is going on in their classrooms, which would mean that the survey reflects teachers' beliefs more than reality. The results may thus describe the beliefs or hopes of the FL teachers. Whatever the situation, the results are in line with the ways the respondents wanted to describe their teaching. It can be concluded that teaching and studying in the context-dependent FL teachers' classrooms followed more the principles of CLT than in the context-independent teachers' classrooms. The context-independent teachers' lower means indicate that the statements did meet less their approach to teaching and their students' studying.

In the final analysis, one could ask whether the FL teachers should be more context-dependent or more context-independent. One way to find answers to this question could be to test the students' foreign language skills in communication, which is the primary target of FL teaching today. Which of these two approaches might contribute to leading to more beneficial and productive results? Perhaps the question could be posed like this: Are language teachers expected to isolate their students' language competencies in order to be able to objectively measure their individual skills or, on the other hand, would it be educationally more appropriate to engage language students in more socially-oriented interactional activities, so as to reveal their real potential for participating in and coping with future real-life communicative challenges in multicultural environments?

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