ALL LANGUAGES MATTER IN A MULTILINGUAL SOCIETY

**YOUR LANGUAGE COUNTS**

# Evaluation Report

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# An Evaluation Report of the Your Language Counts Project: Findings and Implications

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# Project Information:

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# Opening Statement

This report was prepared by the team responsible for Work Package 4 (WP4) "On-going Evaluation" of the EU project *Your Language Counts! All Languages Matter in a Multilingual Society, Starting in School* (YLC). Although the evaluation researchers were part of the project consortium, they sought to maintain as much impartiality as possible throughout the process.

While the authors bring substantial research experience to the project, the present report is intended as an overview rather than an exhaustive analysis. Practical constraints—for example, the scope and complexity of 36 in-depth interviews—mean that some findings can only be presented in a descriptive and, at times, necessarily concise manner.

# 1. Introduction

The cross-European project *Your Language Counts! All Languages Matter in a Multilingual Society, Starting in School* (YLC) seeks to analyse and enhance the state of Heritage Language Teaching (HLT) to promote the integration and educational success of multilingual learners with a heritage language (HL) background. Moreover, it aims to contribute to learners' overall academic achievement and foster a sense of belonging through knowledge – and, therefore, self-confidence – in their languages. HL-speakers are a highly diverse group of individuals comprising (in the context of the YLC project) learners with a refugee or migrant background, second- or third-generation heritage language speakers, and any learner with a diverse heritage language background. YLC developed, tested and implemented a Heritage Language Education (HLE) model, launching in different schools and mainly focusing on the lower secondary years (learners aged 12–16) in Finland, the Netherlands, and Sweden. The following languages were addressed in YLC: Arabic, Farsi, Russian, Somali, Turkish and Ukrainian.

The core of the project was an intensive professional development model, in which 18 teachers cooperated with the YLC experts. During this pilot project, HLT practices were developed, discussed and refined in a co-constructive manner. The 18 participants were teachers, who taught the HLs Arabic, Farsi, Russian, Somali, Turkish or Ukrainian at pilot schools in Sweden, Finland and the Netherlands during the school year of September 2024 to May 2025. The YLC pilot model addresses HLT practices, existing challenges and provides guidance for solutions. During that school year, participating teachers exchanged ideas on topics including materials, school organisation and family outreach, and developed practical examples in peer groups in monthly online meetings. These meetings were led by a YLC expert, who catered for the implementation of the YLC pilot model through the aforementioned professional development sessions (for more detailed descriptions of the overall project and its work packages, see: project handbook).

# 2. Evaluation and Research Design

Some of the core aims of the project were a better understanding of HL teachers' working conditions, the discovery of possible avenues to improve these conditions, an improvement of the visibility of HLT, fostering HL teachers' collaboration, an assessment of the availability of teaching and learning material for HLT as well as the co-constructive development of such material. Beyond this, the YLC project also took a strong interest in the learner communities as well as the educational success and well-being of learners. As detailed above, YLC included six HLs (Arabic, Farsi, Russian, Somali, Turkish and Ukrainian) and spanned Sweden, Finland, and the Netherlands. In the co-constructive collaboration involving 18 HL teachers in lower secondary (middle school) contexts, good practices were developed and disseminated across language communities to facilitate broader application. A comprehensive evaluation of the project was conducted in Work Package 4 (WP4) to ensure its quality and effectiveness.

The evaluation comprised three data collection intervals during the 2024-2025 school year (September 2024, February 2025 and May 2025), incorporating both qualitative and quantitative methods.

## 2.1. Research Methods

This section describes the data collection methods and instruments. While the pilot project was treated like an intervention, the evaluation study is not an intervention study in conventional terms, given the absence of a control group sample. The basic principle of the evaluation still follows a pre-post design with an added mid-year interim evaluation. All 18 teachers participated in a semi-structured interview (see below), both for the pre- and the post-evaluation. Moreover, data on learners' motivation and satisfaction with their HLE were collected using simple (age appropriate) questionnaires. The interim evaluation was strictly limited to collecting information on the participating teachers' satisfaction with the project's progress and only addressed issues that could have been changed/improved mid-way through the project (e.g. communication structures in the project). Figure 1 provides an overview of the evaluation structure within YLC.
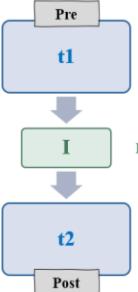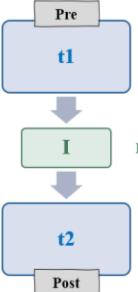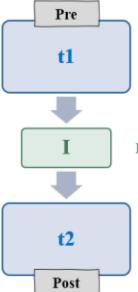
| Time Period | Teachers | Learners |
|---|---|---|
| Pilot Start<br><br>September 2024 | 18 Interviews<br><br>(in English; on-site) | Questionnaires<br>n=140<br>(9 Translations) |
| Mid-year<br><br>February 2025 | Short Online Questionnaires | |
| Pilot End<br><br>May 2025 | 18 Interviews<br><br>(in English; via ZOOM) | Questionnaires<br>n=132<br>(9 Translations) |

**Figure 1:** YLC Evaluation Structure Overview

The following subsections outline the underlying research methodology for the interviews and questionnaire data collection separately.

### 2.1.1. Interviews

All participating teachers agreed to take part in two interviews each, one at the beginning of the school year and one towards the end. In compliance with research ethics, data protection and overall good research practice, all participants received a participant information sheet, and provided their informed consent (see: information sheet and consent form for teachers in appendix A). The first round of interviews was conducted on-site, where the teachers work/reside and in person with one researcher travelling to each location in Sweden, Finland and the Netherlands. The second round of interviews was conducted via Zoom for reasons of feasibility. Methodologically, the interviews can be described as semi-structured. However, given the evaluation interest, the necessity to compare data pre to post as well as the sheer amount of interview data, the interviews followed a rather rigid structure allowing for meaningful comparisons (while, of course, allowing for additional topics and aspects to be addressed when they came up).

The interview structure naturally changed from t1 (September 2024) to t2 (May 2025). While the first interview included questions on e.g. teaching groups, training and professional development, the second interview focussed more on questions about the YLC project work. At t1, the interview manual included an icebreaker question followed by seven macro topics (1. Teaching Conditions; 2. Teacher Training and Professional Development; 3. Teaching Motivation and Lesson Planning; 4. Teaching Materials and Activities; 5. Cooperation; 6. Family Outreach; 7. Conclusion and Perspectives). Under each of these topics, a set of questions (typically comprising 4-5 questions, with one exception for topic 1, which included 16 questions) was posed to the teachers (see interview guide t1 in appendix B). Of the overall 44 questions in the interview manual, a vast majority of questions was relatively closed in nature (e.g. how many hours per week do you teach?), while only some were relatively

open (e.g. how would you improve HLT in schools in general?). Nine questions were deliberately asked in a Likert-scale-type format, asking for instance: "On a scale from 1-4, how happy are you with the reputation of your job as a HL teacher?" This question format allows for a straightforward (naturally simplified) quantification of the degree of satisfaction of each teacher under each category, as will be shown further below in the results. Moreover, this question format was used to introduce new topics in the interview, and teachers were usually asked why they responded with the respective scale points, giving each participant the opportunity to elaborate on his/her situation. For t2, the interview manual followed five macro topics (1. Working Hours; 2. YLC Pilot Activities; 3. Cooperation and Study Visits; 4. Family Outreach; 5. Project Satisfaction and Conclusions). Again, under each of these topics, a set of questions was posed to the teachers (see interview guide t2 in appendix C). The interview manual for t2 included fewer questions than for the t1 interview. Overall, 10 questions were asked in the aforementioned Likert-scale-type format, and each one was followed by the stimulus "Why?". Moreover, the interview manual included an illustration showing six areas of 'family outreach' dimensions, which were discussed separately (see interview guide t2 in appendix C).

All interviews were conducted in English. The interviewer was a highly trained L2 speaker of English with a high degree of intercultural competence and sensitivity. None of the interviewees spoke English as their L1, and had varying degrees of proficiency. In some interviews, local YLC partners joined the interview settings, functioning as interlocuters who could assist using the local majority language (i.e. Dutch, Finnish and Swedish) as well as English.

The interviews were between 27.33 and 87.05 minutes in length at t1, and between 15.52 and 47.01 minutes at t2. Each interview was audio-recorded, and later transcribed with the assistance of the offline transcription tool aTrain (Haberl et al. 2024). Following the semi-automated transcription, each transcript was carefully checked for accuracy by several researchers. Then, passages where languages other than English were used were translated into English. Following this, the transcripts were anonymised by replacing words, names and short passages, which could reveal an individual's identity, with (marked-up) general descriptions. The overall corpus of interview data is 173,728 words.

Subsequently, the interview data were analysed employing qualitative content analysis (e.g. Kuckartz & Rädiker 2022). The coding process followed a mostly deductive cycle along the main categories of the evaluation interest. The final head categories were:

| "September Interviews" t1 | "May Interviews" t2 |
|---|---|
| <ul><li>Teaching Groups</li><li>Working Hours</li><li>HLT Qualification</li><li>Type of Employment and Job Reputation</li><li>Further Education and Workshops</li><li>Teaching Motivation and Job Importance</li><li>Lesson Planning</li><li>Teaching Material</li><li>Cooperation</li><li>Family Outreach</li><li>Job Contentment</li><li>Challenges and Perspectives</li></ul> | <ul><li>Working Hours</li><li>Pilot Activities</li><li>Cooperation and Study Visits</li><li>Family Outreach</li><li>Project Contentment</li><li>Job Contentment</li><li>Job Reputation</li><li>Perspectives</li></ul> |

**Table 1:** Overview of Codes

Overall, 1,414 segments were coded using the software MAXQDA 24 (VERBI Software 2025).

### 2.1.2. Questionnaires

In addition to the teachers' perspective, the YLC evaluation was also interested in the perception of HL learners. The research design thus included a questionnaire, which was distributed to all learners attending the HL classes of the participating teachers. Given that all participants are minors, and that separate ethical constraints and data protection procedures had to be followed in the three different national contexts, the participant (sometimes participants' guardians) information and informed consent procedure followed careful steps (see: information sheet and consent form for learners in appendix D which was translated into all six HLs). Moreover, in order to avoid any potential harm to the teenage participants, the questionnaire did not include questions that are personal or relate to issues such as migration processes, and thus remained limited to some rather basic sociodemographic data. The sociodemographic information gathered included participants' age, gender, grade, heritage language, years of heritage language education, and years of residency in the country. The following part of the questionnaire (hereinafter: Part 1) included nine items on the well-being and learning atmosphere in the heritage language classroom. Each item consists of a statement (e.g. "I think mother tongue teaching is important") followed by a four-point Likert-scale

type response format (4: exactly true, 3: rather true, 2: rather not true, 1: not true at all, followed by an illustration representing each option). After this first part of the questionnaire, participants had the option to elaborate on the topic in a free text response to the stimulus "Why?". The following part (Part 2) of the questionnaire included five items (statements) on the motivation to attend HLT (e.g. "I take part in mother tongue lessons because I want to speak to my relatives") followed by a four-point Likert-scale type response format, similar to part 1. The final item on the questionnaire is an open free text in response to the stimulus "I would like to say this about my mother tongue lessons".

The questionnaire was developed in English using simple language. It was then translated into Finnish, Dutch and Swedish. In the research process, it then became clear that it would be helpful to also have versions of the instrument in Arabic, Farsi, Russian, Somali, Turkish and Ukrainian, in case participating learners preferred to respond in their heritage language. The instrument was then translated into these languages, too, which meant that it was used in ten different languages. The project capacities did not allow for pragmatic validation. It may be argued, however, that the deliberate simplicity of the questionnaires' wording is helpful for meaningful translations. The questionnaire remained the same for t1 and t2. At t1 n=140 learners responded to the questionnaire. At t2, due to some fluctuation within the learner groups, 128 of the original sample remained and 4 additional learners responded. Thus, t2 comprised of n=132 learners in total and 96.97% of participants are part of the matched sample cohort. The questionnaire can be found in appendix E.

# 3. Results

This section describes and discusses the key results of YLC's evaluation research. It begins by illustrating the findings from the pre-post qualitative study before presenting the findings from the learner questionnaire study.

## 3.1. Interviews

This section will first briefly describe the sample of participants. It then presents the findings from the evaluation interviews as outlined further above. Firstly, the quasi-quantitative data (responses from the Likert scale type questions, which were posed during the interviews) will be presented for t1. Following this, some key issues from the deductive qualitative content analysis will be raised for t1. The next section addresses t2, and proceeds from the quasi-quantitative data to the qualitative data. The final part then compares t1 and t2 findings.

### 3.1.1. Sample

The average age of the teachers in the sample is 48 years, with the youngest under 30 and the oldest over 60. The group includes seven male and eleven female teachers. Notably, all Somali teachers across the three countries are male, while all Ukrainian and Arabic teachers are female.

Seventeen of the eighteen teachers hold a tertiary education degree, with at least a Bachelor's degree. Three hold PhDs – two in Sweden and one in Finland – all obtained outside their current countries of residence (Sweden, Finland, and the Netherlands). The only teacher without tertiary education is a Somali teacher with a secondary school certificate. Overall, the Somali teachers in the sample hold the lowest formal qualifications, with just two holding Bachelor's degrees and none holding a Master's or higher. In terms of where degrees were obtained, three teachers in Sweden and three in Finland completed their higher education in the country where they now live, compared to only one teacher in the Netherlands, who holds the secondary school qualification.

HL teachers within the same school or institution were reported only in Sweden, reflecting the country's longer-standing HLE and the specific infrastructure. Some teachers also reported teaching other subjects. In Sweden, for instance, one teacher provides study guidance in the heritage language, while others are trained in psychology and sports – although it remains to be confirmed whether they teach these subjects in their HL.

Six teachers do not hold citizenship in their country of residence: one in Sweden, two in Finland, and three in the Netherlands. The teachers have lived

in their respective countries for an average of 15.4 years. This average is highest in Sweden (19 years) and lowest in Finland (11 years). The shortest reported stay is 2 years, the longest 38 years. In the Netherlands, the average is 13 years, but four out of six teachers have lived there for less than 10 years; similarly, three teachers in Finland have resided in the country for less than a decade. In contrast, all teachers in Sweden have been there for over 10 years.

Regarding teaching levels, eight teachers work across primary and secondary education, while seven teach only at the secondary level – including all teachers in the Netherlands. Three teachers teach only in primary education. The group has an average of 15 years of teaching experience, including an average of 8 years in HLE. Five teachers have less than 2 years of HLE experience, while five others have gained all their teaching experience within HLE. Eleven teachers have over 16 years of teaching experience, including two with more than 20 years. In summary, the teachers exhibit extensive overall teaching experience, with a substantial share of their teaching experience obtained in HLE.

### 3.1.2. The "September Interviews": t1

As mentioned further above, nine questions were asked in a quasi-quantitative style. The communicative setting of an interview allowed for responses such as "between 2 and 3", or "I don't know". Because of this, some responses are coded as, for instance, 2.5 and at other times no quantifiable answer was given.

The first question in this category was "On a scale from 1-4, how happy are you with your teaching hours?" (1 = "very happy"; 2 = "happy"; 3 = "unhappy"; 4 = "very unhappy"). Five teachers responded with "very happy", nine said they were "happy", one was undecided between "happy" and "unhappy", and three said they were "unhappy". Numerically, this means that the mean average on the aforementioned scale is: **1.92**. In response to the second question ("How happy are you with your job reputation?"), five teachers were "very happy", three responded "happy", six said "unhappy", and one participant indicated that s/he would be between "unhappy" and "very unhappy" (three participants gave no response). The mean score is **2.12**. The third question asked the participating teachers about their satisfaction regarding teacher training (in the context of HLT). Eight teachers reported to be "very happy", four said "happy", and two said "unhappy" (with four participants giving no answer). The mean score for this question is **1.56**. The next question in this category asked teachers, how important their work as a HL teacher is. All 18 participating teachers responded "very important" (on a four-point scale), showing a mean value of **1.00**. The fifth question was concerned with the teachers' satisfaction with teaching material in the context of HLT. Five teachers indicated that they were "very happy" with the quality and availability of teaching material, seven reported to be "happy", one was undecided between "happy" and "unhappy",

two responded "unhappy", and two said they were "very unhappy" (one gave no response). The mean average here is **2.09**. The following two questions addressed the frequency of collaboration with other HL teachers. (6. "On a scale of 1-4, how often do you work together with other HL-teachers who teach the same language as you do?"; 7. "On a scale of 1-4, how often do you work together with other HL-teachers who teach other HL than you do?"). In response to the sixth question, two participants said "very often (1)", five responded "often (2)", four participants said "sometimes (3)", and six reported "never (4)" (one interviewee gave no response). The mean average is **2.82**. In response to the seventh question, one teacher indicated "very often (1)", three said "often (2)", seven participants reported "sometimes (3)", and six said "never (4)" (one interviewee gave no response). The mean average is **3.06**. The penultimate question in this category concerned teachers' satisfaction with their connection to the learners' families. Three teachers said they were "very happy", one said s/he would be between "very happy" and "happy", seven teachers indicated "happy", one was undecided between "happy" and "unhappy", two said "unhappy", and one reported to be "very unhappy" (three respondents gave no answer). The mean average for this question is **2.07**. The concluding quasi-quantitative question asked the participating teachers for their overall job satisfaction, in response to which eight teachers indicated "very happy" and seven said "happy" with no participant indicating to be "unhappy" or "very unhappy" (three interviewees gave no response). The mean average is **1.47**.

The following parts report on interview content corresponding to the twelve head categories that emerged from the qualitative content analysis (1. Teaching Groups; 2. Working Hours; 3. HLT Qualification; 4. Job Reputation; 5. Further Education and Workshops; 6. Teaching Motivation and Job Importance; 7. Lesson Planning; 8. Teaching Material; 9. Cooperation; 10. Family Outreach; 11. Job Contentment; 12. Challenges and Perspectives). Under each category some selected interview data and findings are presented.

In terms of their *teaching groups* (Category 1), teachers reported a wide range in the number of groups with some teachers in the Netherlands having as few as one HLT group, while others taught a maximum of nine groups in Finland or up to 19 or 20 groups in Sweden. The mean average for the number of teaching groups is 7.61. The number of students per group also varies, from a single learner in the smallest groups to 28 or 30 in the largest. The mean average for the smallest group size is 7.78 and the mean average for the biggest group size is 19.11.

When specifically discussing their *working hours* (Category 2) in the interviews, most teachers expressed critique with regard to the late timing of HLT. Teachers (of all HLs, and from all three countries) described that their classes

are scheduled late in the day. While this was positive for some participants (e.g. with regard to organising their personal lives; combining HLT with another job), most participants described (sometimes relatively severe) learner fatigue, and expressed that they believe that teaching and learning would be more effective if it happened earlier during the school day. Daily commuting times reported by participants range from 10 to 60 minutes in Sweden, from 0 minutes (online classes) to 60 minutes in Finland, and from 0 minutes (online classes) to 90 minutes in the Netherlands, resulting in an overall range of 0 to 90 minutes.

Concerning their *qualification* (Category 3), all interviewees mentioned having tertiary education of some kind. The interviewees' academic backgrounds are, however, highly diverse, with some being trained in foreign language teaching, some in technical fields, and two even holding a PhD in a humanities discipline. Most participants hold certificates/diplomas from their countries of origin, and some have attended further training (sometimes academic) professional development in their countries of residence. When asked whether their degree prepared the participants in a meaningful way for their HL teaching, most interviewees expressed that their background helps them in their teaching practice "to some extent" or "in some way". Some interviewees offered ideas for improvement for a better practice in preparing HL teachers, which included contrastive language knowledge (heritage language and majority language), country specific pedagogy and information about the respective school system, practical teaching methodology, ideas for further teaching activities as well as competences in teaching (very) heterogenous learner groups.

All teachers provided answers on their *type of employment* (Category 4), but as already indicated further above (quasi-quantitative interview questions), not all teachers were overly happy with regard to their *job reputation* (Category 4). Of the teachers surveyed, nine reported working full-time, while nine were employed part-time. In terms of contractual arrangements, seven teachers held permanent positions, whereas eleven were engaged on a temporary basis. In the interviews, teachers named several reasons as to why they do not always feel appreciated in terms of their job reputation. These accounts include descriptions of feeling unwelcome in the school, patronising remarks from other subject teachers, lack of space to store teaching material, and more. Beyond this, some teachers named political circumstances (e.g. right-wing governments, but also local education authorities who discuss possibilities of reducing funding for HLT) as factors that diminish the HLT profession's reputation.

The interviewees' thoughts and descriptions of *further education, workshops and professional development* (Category 5) can be described as rather

heterogenous. While HL teachers in Sweden and Finland referred to workshops, which are organised regularly by their employing institutions, the provision of such workshops appears less standardised in the Netherlands. Many participants reported on having attended highly valuable and meaningful workshops, but a large majority also offered thoughts on how to improve further training and professional development. For instance, several teachers expressed a need for further training in heterogeneity and inclusion to be better prepared to teach in mixed-age groups (e.g. catering for very young learners), in groups with (very) diverse learner language competence, but also in groups with learners who may have special needs or psychological difficulties. Further comments with regard to the workshops included complaints that workshops tend to be too general or superficial, that there are very few practical examples on how a topic can be applied in practice, that there is no separate programme for HLT at university, and that the overall organisation of workshops could be improved.

When asked about their *individual motivation to teach HL and perceived importance of the job* as a HL teacher (Category 6), nearly all interviewees gave very positive (oftentimes quite personal answers). These accounts differed enormously and can barely be summarised or in any way generalised. One teacher explained that s/he rediscovers his/her own language through HLT, another participant reported that s/he misses his/her country of origin (and that HLT helps), another one described the general joy of teaching, a further participant, who recently escaped an armed conflict, described HLT as important for preserving identity, and yet another participant named the importance that HLs should be maintained and continued to be spoken. Other teachers described how they get energy out of their teaching, that they enjoy HLT to simply gain further teaching experience, and that they can improve as teachers. With regard to the learners, the interviewed teachers described how HLT offers social support, that it creates a safe space, where sometimes marginalised learners feel respected, and that HLT is an important tool for integration. The interviewees also named learning outcomes (e.g. knowledge of the HL alphabet, the ability to give explanations in one's HL, communication with relatives) as reasons why they consider their job important. Teachers also described long term effects, such as strengthening learners' sense of identity as well as long term effects with regard to their educational trajectories and overall academic achievement.

On the topic of *lesson planning* (Category 7), a majority of the interviewed teachers cited the learner heterogeneity as the main challenge when it comes to good lesson preparation. Two different dimensions of heterogeneity, namely age groups and language level, were mentioned by a strong majority of teachers. According to them, many classes are organised for a wide variety of

pupils including very young learners and teenagers within the same group. Moreover, learners enter HLT with very varying degrees of HL competence and literacy. As a result of this, teachers need to anticipate their learners' individual differences, and include various dimensions of differentiation/individualisation in their lesson planning. Within these phenomena, a further challenge is posed by the limited hours teachers have with their learner groups. One interviewee reported that seeing his/her group only once per week, means that s/he needs several weeks to gain a good understanding of the group. Teachers of Arabic and Persian address the difficulty of teaching a different alphabet to the learners, which causes challenges in lesson preparation. An aspect that blends into the next category, but also concerns lesson planning, is that teachers need to carefully check their teaching material. One Persian teacher noted that his/her material includes "religious aspects" and "infiltrating ideologies", and that s/he does not want to bring this into the classroom, and hence, has to make sure to carefully plan lessons, and needs to choose the teaching material selectively.

In terms of the availability and the quality of *teaching material* (Category 8), the interviewees expressed various reasons for their dissatisfaction as well as ideas for improvement. The critique expressed in the interviews includes that no material is designed for the enormously heterogeneous learner groups, that material is sometimes incoherent, that material is not age appropriate and therefore not motivating, that material is not neutral (in cultural, political and religious terms, see further above), and that material is not authentic. The aspect of availability of material also seems problematic. Several teachers report that they urgently need more material to choose from. Moreover, the interviewees expressed that it is time-consuming to gather material, for instance online, which leads to unpaid working hours, that there are no financial resources to buy teaching material, and that some HLT material is geared towards a particular country or national curriculum and hence needs substantial adaptation. Ideas for improvement include the development of more interesting teaching material as well as the provision of more (financial) resources. Some interviewees also addressed positive aspects with regard to teaching material and reported that digital access has become easier, and that there are particular library systems which sometimes help to gather material.

As shown in the quasi-quantitative data further above, the level and extent of *cooperation* between HL teachers (Category 9) appears to be particularly challenging. In the interviews, however, all teachers spoke about their situation (with regard to cooperation) in a differentiated manner. When addressing cooperation with other HL teachers of the same HL, interviewees said that they sometimes exchange teaching material and resources, that they sometimes plan lessons collaboratively, and that they exchange ideas on how to raise learners'

interest in HLT. When describing situations that concern the cooperation with other HL teachers of different HLs, interviewees expressed that they sometimes discuss more general matters (e.g. the situation of HLT in general), that they talk about issues of grading and assessing, but also exchange ideas on the general suitability of certain tasks and activities as well as learner motivation and inclusion.

Within the topic of *family outreach* (Category 10), numerous issues were raised, and discussed in a differentiated manner by the interviewed teachers. Some teachers mentioned that parents, caregivers or guardians (hereinafter: guardians) occasionally complain about their children's grades, about the organisation of HLT (e.g. enrolment procedures), and about the location of the respective HLT offer (e.g. location being far away). Guardians' ambitions and capabilities in supporting their children in the HL maintenance is described as a continuum, ranging from guardians who find themselves unable to support their children (e.g. in improving reading skills) to guardians who have high expectations and ambitions and ask teachers for recommendations on how to support their children. Teachers also reported on some guardians' expectations with regard to an overlap between the children's interests/hobbies and the contents of their HLT. Vice versa, teachers also address their own expectations towards their learners' guardians, and described how it would be advantageous if guardians took an interest in the HLT's contents and their children's language development, that the guardians provide sufficient input in the HL at home, and that they provide support in homework and language development. Among the main reasons for dissatisfaction (on the topic of family outreach and communication with guardians) were comments by guardians who have 'suggestions for improvement' (i.e. 'know better') when it comes to HLT provision, numerous late/unwanted messages, being contacted with bureaucratic issues as well as general difficulties in adequate communication. On the other hand, teachers also reported numerous positive experiences in their cooperation with guardians. For instance, it was noted that some guardians take a high interest in their children's HLT, that guardians are generally grateful and appreciative, and that guardians have a motivating influence on their children. Several teachers reported that they personally find it important to be there as a HL teacher to communicate with guardians and families, and see it as an important function of their job.

In terms of their overall *job contentment* (Category 11), teachers reported both positive and negative aspects. Among the reasons for being satisfied was the perception of importance of working as a HL teacher, the benefits that learners have from HLT, a sense of pride in terms of having an impact on children/teenagers, and also personal development and growth as well as self-efficacy. Among the reasons for dissatisfaction, teachers named systemic and

organisational issues (e.g. teaching hours, scheduling issues, learner numbers), occasional problems with learners' guardians, and occasional overall fatigue.

In the final category, overall *challenges and perspectives* (Category 12) were collected. Teachers prominently addressed certain organisational challenges again. The fact that HLT often happens in the late afternoon hours means that learners are often tired and lack motivation. This form of organisation also means that teachers work late (which is not appreciated by several teachers). It also implies that HLT is organised outside the curriculum, showing its lower status. Beyond this, the interviewees named comparatively low salaries, and further resources-related issues (e.g. equipment in classrooms, availability and funding for teaching material).

### 3.1.3. The "May Interviews": t2

As described in the methods section further above, the second interview included ten questions of the quasi-quantitative format (with four-point scales ranging from "very happy" to "very unhappy" or from "very often" to never", see interview guide in Appendix C). Six questions were identical to the first round of interviews, and four questions addressed teachers' experiences with the YLC project towards its end (which would have been meaningless at t1 as the project work was just starting).

The first of these ten quasi-quantitative questions addressed teachers' satisfaction with their working hours. Eight respondents said they were "very happy", nine said "happy", and one reported to be "unhappy" (no one chose "very unhappy"). The mean average is **1.61**. The second question of this format asked teachers how happy they were with the YLC pilot activities they tested in the HLT classes. Five teachers said they were "very happy", three respondents were undecided between "very happy" and "happy", eight reported to be "happy", two were undecided between "happy" and "unhappy", and no respondent was either "unhappy" or "very unhappy". The mean average is **1.69**. In the third question, teachers were asked how satisfied they were with the YLC monthly teacher meetings and the cooperation structures within the YLC project. Ten teachers reported to be "very happy", one between "very happy" and "happy", five said "happy" and two said between "happy" and "unhappy", with no respondent saying either "unhappy" or "very unhappy". The average mean is **1.47**. The fourth question of this type asked how often teachers cooperated with other HL teachers who teach the same language. Five teachers said "very often", two were undecided between "very often" and "often", eight said "often", one positioned him/herself between "often" and "sometimes", two said "sometimes", and no respondent reported "never". The mean average is **1.81**. The subsequent question asked about cooperation with HL teachers of other languages. For this item, no interviewee chose "very often", ten

respondents said "often", one was undecided between "often" and "sometimes", seven chose "sometimes", and no respondent said "never". The mean average is **2.42**. The sixth question asked how happy the participating teachers were with the study visits organised within YLC. Only ten interviewees responded to this question (seemingly because only ten out of the eighteen participating teachers took part in the study visit activity). Out of these ten, eight said they were "very happy" and two chose the category "happy". The mean average is **1.20**. The seventh question asked teachers how happy they were with their communication with the learners' families and guardians. In response, seven said "very happy", two were undecided between the options "very happy" and "happy", eight said "happy", and one participant was "unhappy". The mean average is **1.61**. The next question asked how happy participants were with the YLC project activities overall. Thirteen participants said "very happy", two were undecided between "very happy" and "happy", two reported to be "happy", and one participant was undecided between "happy" and "unhappy". No respondent reported to be either "unhappy" or "very unhappy". The mean average is **1.25**. The eighth question of this format addressed the teachers' overall satisfaction with their job as a HL teacher. Eleven interviewees reported to be "very happy", two were undecided between the categories "very happy" and "happy", three said "happy", one interviewee was undecided between "happy" and "unhappy", and no one reported to be either "unhappy" or "very unhappy". The mean average is **1.25**. The last quasi-quantitative question posed in the t2 interviews asked the HL teachers how happy they are with the reputation of their job. In response to which, five teachers reported to be "very happy", one said between "very happy" and "happy", one said "happy", two were undecided between "happy" and "unhappy", six said "unhappy", and two were undecided between the categories "unhappy" and "very unhappy". The mean average is **2.14**. An overview of these questions as well as all mean values for t1 and t2 can be found in Table 2 further below.

The qualitative content analysis of the t2 interview data followed 8 head categories (1. Working Hours; 2. Pilot Activities; 3. Cooperation & Study Visits; 4. Family Outreach; 5. Project Contentment; 6. Job Contentment; 7. Job Reputation; 8. Perspectives). The following parts report on the interview contents and present selected data and findings under each category.

When reflecting on their *working hours* (Category 1) during the t2 interviews at the end of the school year, many teachers again highlighted the late scheduling of HLT as a negative factor, often leading to tired students or conflicts with students' extracurricular activities. Some teachers experienced less travel between multiple schools or had late-evening classes only on some days of the week while finishing earlier on others, which helped balance their schedules.

Additional challenges such as long unpaid gaps between classes and a reduction in teaching hours due to larger group size were mentioned.

At the end of the pilot year, the participating teachers provided positive feedback on the *pilot activities* (Category 2), emphasising how they contributed to their professional development and enhanced their instructional practices. Student engagement was notably high, particularly with activities such as 'Exploring My Hometown' or 'Identity' (see project pilot and handbook for an overview of all pilot activities). Some challenges included time constraints restricting activity implementation, difficulties in using the online Moodle platform when discussing the activities within language-groups in written form, and the need to adapt certain activities to better suit specific student groups or cultural contexts (e.g. depending on the group size or the length of time spent in a respective country). Overall, however, teachers appreciated the flexibility to adapt activities, particularly those that promoted autonomy and self-discovery, and found them useful. Nearly all participating teachers also created and shared new activities with the whole group, such as picture-based opinion expression and handwritten student exchange letters, the latter fostering further intercultural exchange and connection also between students within the project. Many teachers indicated that they would continue using both the provided and newly developed activities in their future teaching.

Regarding *cooperation and study visits* (Category 3), interviewees valued the cooperation and monthly online meetings, which they considered essential for staying connected to the project, clarifying tasks, and exchanging ideas. Only some, mainly early in the project, expressed a desire for more frequent or in-depth sessions to enable richer discussions beyond the one-hour limit to get started, while most found the monthly online format convenient and sufficient. Measures to enhance communication among teachers, such as language-specific breakout rooms, were said to foster continuous collaboration and idea-sharing. As indicated by the quasi-quantitative data above, overall cooperation among teachers reportedly increased over the course of the project. Interviewees mentioned that they sometimes planned lessons collaboratively and frequently shared teaching materials. Experienced HL teachers noted that they often shared materials with newer colleagues who teach the same language. Collaboration between teachers of different languages, though initially limited at the start of the project and mostly confined to general meetings, was reported to have improved through personal connections made during study visits. Cooperation among teachers of the same language was described as particularly strong, frequently extending beyond project requirements to foster lasting professional and personal relationships, with many indicating intentions to maintain contact beyond the project's duration. Multi-day study visits in March 2024 to Sweden and the Netherlands were

highly valued by all actively participating teachers for deepening collaboration. Participants expressed strong satisfaction with the visits, emphasising the importance of in-person meetings for building connections and enhancing collaboration beyond online formats. According to the teachers, highlights included classroom observations, discussions with students about their learning experiences, sharing teaching methods, and gaining valuable insights into different education systems and HLT. Some teachers mentioned that the schedule was occasionally rushed and intense while suggesting longer visits. Because the visits were only a week apart, some interviewees recommended longer intervals between visits to better process their experiences, especially for those involved in both hosting and traveling. Overall, the visits were reported to have fostered stronger networks and ongoing communication among the YLC participants.

When talking about *family outreach* (Category 4), figure 2 provides an overview of the six areas teachers referenced:
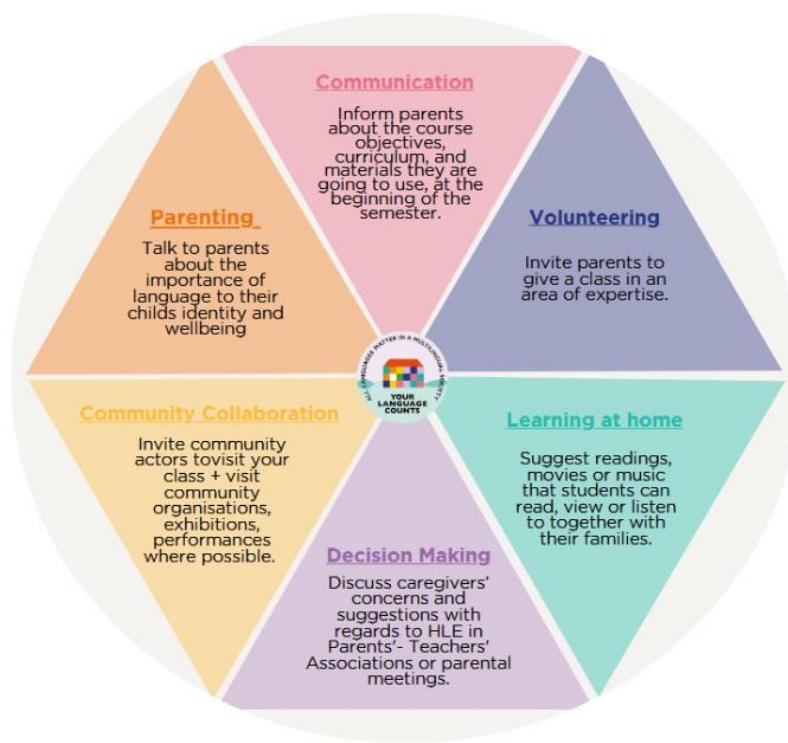


**Figure 2:** YLC Family Outreach Areas

Teachers most frequently mentioned "communication" and "learning at home" as areas they actively engaged in, while "decision-making" and "community collaboration" had not yet been put into practice in most cases. The interviews revealed that those elements of family outreach were difficult for teachers to implement – an observation that aligns with experiences reported by educators in other subject areas. Teachers generally reported efforts to maintain contact with guardians – especially by providing updates about course content and

structure. A positive outcome of the YLC project was that it inspired some teachers to explore new ways of contacting and engaging with guardians. In particular, the "learning at home" activities were highly appreciated, as they encouraged students to speak with their guardians in the HL about topics beyond everyday family matters, such as music, films, and cultural practices. These exercises not only deepened the students' use of the HL but also broadened the thematic range of HL use within families.

In some cases, parental involvement extended into the classroom, for example when guardians visited HL lessons, shared expertise from their professional fields, or simply observed the HL lesson. Participation in the YLC project further increased communication between teachers and guardians, as teachers had to explain the project's goals, its relevance for HL instruction, and its benefits for the children. This intensified contact at the beginning of the school year proved helpful for establishing sustained communication throughout the year. As a result, many guardians gained a clearer understanding of what HL education entails, its importance for language development, and the challenges surrounding its implementation. Some guardians who attended HL classes expressed surprise at the organisational shortcomings of HL provision. Somali teachers, in particular, reported regular and strong engagement with families, including the organisation of "culture days," where guardians, children, and community members come together to celebrate Somali language and culture – an example of successful community collaboration. For some teachers, such activities were facilitated by the existence of established communities (e.g. Somali or Arabic-speaking groups). However, others – especially those working with newly arrived Ukrainian families or those teaching online – faced difficulties due to the lack of a local community. Additionally, some teachers highlighted the limited availability of guardians due to demanding work schedules. Overall, teachers evaluated their family outreach efforts positively, though their priorities did not fully align with the broader model of family outreach. For most, communication with guardians emerged as the most central and achievable component. For others, the project showed them new ways in how to involve guardians and how to structure family outreach.

In terms of their overall *project contentment* (Category 5), individual challenges were initially noted by some teachers, including limited clarity and structure at the project's start and a desire for more frequent meetings. One participant also expressed disappointment that a Russian language group comprising three teachers from different countries could not be established due to a lack of students in the Netherlands (as a solution, two Arabic teachers from the Netherlands then participated, resulting in a total of 18 teachers as planned). Overall, teachers expressed a high degree of satisfaction, frequently highlighting the project's positive learning outcomes, particularly for early-

career teachers who might otherwise feel isolated. A major factor contributing to this satisfaction was the project's role in fostering a sense of community and peer support across countries, enabling the exchange of pedagogical ideas and insights into HLT. Interviewees mentioned that this cross-cultural engagement was a professionally enriching experience, broadening perspectives on educational systems in other European contexts so that some participants referred to it as being "unique" and a "milestone" to start other projects alike. One teacher indicated that the YLC project provided a positive focus amid the otherwise challenging context of heritage language teaching, particularly in light of right-wing populism and conservative governments. Many teachers reported that the pilot activities enhanced their lessons and professional practice, while the pilot document and its four perspectives served as a helpful reference point. The organisation of the project – including the monthly meetings and study visits – was also appreciated, with some participants noting its exceptional quality compared to other international projects they have previously been part of. It was further pointed out that families also regarded the project positively. Overall, various teachers reported feeling not only inspired, motivated, and encouraged but also valued and respected in their professional role through the YLC project.

When asked about their overall *job contentment (*Category 6) once again, teachers highlighted positive aspects and challenges. Some reported facing organisational difficulties, scheduling conflicts and varied student proficiency levels within the same class as well as concerns about job insecurity and political tensions. Despite these issues, interviewees emphasised that they found deep satisfaction in teaching, valuing the meaningful connections students build with their heritage language and culture, the long-term relationships they develop, and the rewarding impact of their work.

The teachers' reflections on their *job reputation* (Category 7) during the t2 interviews remained rather heterogeneous, as reflected in the quasi-quantitative data above. While some teachers expressed pride and felt valued, particularly due to appreciation from students and families who recognise their important role, many continued to report feelings of being undervalued and marginalised. Common concerns included being perceived as "second-rate teachers," encountering a lack of respect from colleagues teaching other subjects, and misunderstandings regarding the importance of mother tongue education. Additionally, several teachers again pointed to political factors, such as right-wing governments and recent funding cuts by local authorities, as contributing to the ongoing challenges facing their profession.

In the last category, further comments and suggestions for improvement in form of *perspectives* (Category 8) were outlined. Some teachers emphasised the

importance of more in-person meetings early on to build connections (e.g. a kick-off teacher meeting), noting these were more effective than online interactions. Further suggestions included expanding student exchanges across cities and countries to boost motivation and language learning. One teacher emphasised the need to adapt the project to better support "newcomers" (e.g. Ukrainian students) by tailoring teaching activities to their specific circumstances. As previously noted regarding teachers' overall high satisfaction with the YLC project, its organisation generally received widespread praise, with interviewees expressing hopes for its continuation and suggesting it as a model for future initiatives while appreciating the idea of developing a practical project handbook.

### 3.1.4. Pre-Post Observations in the Interview Data

With regard to the thoughts and opinions shared by the teachers in the interviews, it can be argued that the YLC pilot activities were perceived as meaningful. Table 2 illustrates the mean average scores of the quasi-quantitative questions that were posed to the 18 participating teachers. It should be noted that deriving descriptive statistics from the 2x18 interviews, of course, does by no means meet quality criteria of quantitative empirical research. The findings below should thus be understood only as tendencies:

| t1/t2 | Question | t1 | t2 |
|---|---|---|---|
| t1 & t2 | On a scale of 1-4, how happy are you with your teaching hours? | 1.92 | 1.61 |
| t1 & t2 | On a scale of 1-4, how happy are you with the reputation of your job as a HL teacher? | 2.12 | 2.14 |
| t1 | On a scale of 1-4, how happy are you with HL-teacher training? | 1.56 | |
| t1 | On a scale of 1-4, how important is your work as a HL-teacher in your opinion? | 1.00 | |
| t1 | On a scale of 1-4, how happy are you with HL teaching materials? | 2.09 | |
| t1 & t2 | On a scale of 1-4, how often do you work together with other HL-teachers who teach the same language as you do? | 2.82 | 1.81 |
| t1 & t2 | On a scale of 1-4, how often do you work together with other HL-teachers who teach other HL as you do? | 3.06 | 2.42 |
| t1 & t2 | On a scale of 1-4, how happy are you with connecting with your students' families? | 2.07 | 1.61 |
| t1 & t2 | On a scale of 1-4, how happy are you with your job as a HL-teacher? | 1.47 | 1.25 |
| t2 | On a scale of 1-41, how happy are you with the pilot activities that you tested? | | 1.69 |
| t2 | On a scale of 1-4, how happy are you with the monthly teacher meetings and cooperation within the project? | | 1.47 |
| t2 | On a scale of 1-4, how happy were you with the study visits? | | 1.20 |
| t2 | On a scale of 1-4, how happy are you with the YLC project overall? | | 1.25 |

**Table *2*:** Average Mean Scores of Teachers' Responses to Quasi-Quantitative Interview Questions (1 = "very happy"; 2 = "happy"; 3 = "unhappy"; 4 = "very unhappy")

It can be seen that all mean scores for questions, which were posed both in the t1 and t2 interview develop in a positive direction. Particularly in terms of cooperating with other HL teachers, the project work appears to have had a meaningful impact. Teachers' satisfaction with the YLC activities, cooperation structures, teacher meetings and study visits were all rated very positive.

## 3.2. Questionnaires

The second key aim of the evaluation was to gather data on motivation and satisfaction of learners with regard to HLE. As described above, learners who met the age and teaching context criteria of the project were asked to complete a simple questionnaire following the pre-post logic of the HL classes of the 18 participating teachers (once in Autumn 2024 and again in May 2025). The questionnaire did not change between t1 and t2. This section will first describe the sample of participants. Following this, the data for t1 and t2 will be presented separately in descriptive terms before a final section addresses differences between t1 and t2 and discusses overall impressions from the data.

### 3.2.1. Sample

The first round of questionnaires (t1) was completed by 140 learners. Out of these respondents, 45 were enrolled in HLE in the Netherlands, 60 in Finland and 35 in Sweden. Table 3 shows this stratification as well as the stratification across languages.

| | Netherlands | Finland | Sweden |
|---|---|---|---|
| Arabic | 7 | 15 | 3 |
| Persian/Farsi | 10 | 5 | 8 |
| Russian | 0 | 13 | 4 |
| Somali | 12 | 8 | 6 |
| Turkish | 4 | 8 | 9 |
| Ukrainian | 12 | 11 | 5 |
| **Subtotal** | **45** | **60** | **35** |
| **Total** | **140** | | |

**Table 3:** Stratification of Learners by Country and Language at t1

Out of the sample, 42.5% reported to be male, 56.7% female, and 0.8% diverse. The participants were between 11 and 19 years old (average 14.11). In Sweden, learners were on average 13.44 years old, in Finland 14.03, and in the Netherlands, learners were the oldest on average with a mean of 14.76. As intended in the research design, at t2 in May 2025, the sample stratification across countries and HLs remained almost the same as in t1. Table 4 shows the sample for the questionnaire data collection at t2.

|  | Netherlands | Finland | Sweden |
|---|---|---|---|
| Arabic | 6 | 15 | 1 |
| Persian/Farsi | 9 | 5 | 10 |
| Russian | 0 | 14 | 4 |
| Somali | 11 | 7 | 6 |
| Turkish | 3 | 10 | 9 |
| Ukrainian | 6 | 11 | 5 |
| **Subtotal** | **35** | **62** | **35** |
| **Total** | **132** | | |

**Table *4*:** Stratification of Learners by Country and Language at t2

The t2 sample consisted of 60.3% female learners and 39.7% male learners with an overall average age of 14.65. As described further above, 128 learners participated both at t1 and t2. In addition to these 128 participants, the t2 sample includes 4 learners, who did not participate at t1.

The following two questions concerning learners' demographic information asked participants how long they have been in HLE classes, and how long they have been living in their current country of residence. Both items evoked numerous implausible, and hence partially invalid responses. For instance, some learners responded to the question how long they had been in HLE classes with the same information as their age, which suggests the question was understood (by some) as 'how long they have been exposed to their HL'. Another example is a question on how long participants had lived in their current country of residence, where reported years exceeded their age, suggesting the question may have referred to the family's residence. Clearly implausible cases were removed from the dataset, yielding the following figures. Furthermore, the two time-related items were answered using very different time units, e.g. minutes or years. Thus, time was clustered according to a time indication that allows comparison on a metric scale (months). Tables 5 and 6 show the time in HLE for t1 and t2.

|  |  | Valid N | Mean |
|---|---|---|---|
| Netherlands | Arabic | 4 | 69.00 |
|  | Farsi | 10 | 28.80 |
|  | Russian | 0 | . |
|  | Somali | 12 | 1.50 |
|  | Turkish | 4 | 2.25 |
|  | Ukrainian | 12 | .00 |
| Finland | Arabic | 14 | 67.71 |
|  | Farsi | 5 | 66.00 |
|  | Russian | 11 | 59.27 |
|  | Somali | 8 | 69.00 |
|  | Turkish | 5 | 31.20 |
|  | Ukrainian | 10 | 15.20 |
| Sweden | Arabic | 2 | 66.00 |
|  | Farsi | 7 | 49.71 |
|  | Russian | 3 | 48.33 |
|  | Somali | 6 | 66.00 |
|  | Turkish | 9 | 46.11 |
|  | Ukrainian | 5 | 14.40 |

**Table 5:** Time in Heritage Language Education t1 in Months

|  |  | Valid N | Mean |
|---|---|---|---|
| Netherlands | Arabic | 4 | 57.25 |
|  | Farsi | 8 | 6.13 |
|  | Russian | 0 | . |
|  | Somali | 7 | 7.43 |
|  | Turkish | 1 | 7.00 |
|  | Ukrainian | 5 | 8.00 |
| Finland | Arabic | 14 | 60.00 |
|  | Farsi | 4 | 57.00 |
|  | Russian | 13 | 72.23 |
|  | Somali | 6 | 64.50 |
|  | Turkish | 9 | 24.67 |
|  | Ukrainian | 11 | 21.55 |
| Sweden | Arabic | 1 | 96.00 |
|  | Farsi | 8 | 56.00 |
|  | Russian | 3 | 62.67 |
|  | Somali | 6 | 68.00 |
|  | Turkish | 7 | 70.71 |
|  | Ukrainian | 5 | 48.00 |

**Table 6:** Time in Heritage Language Education t2 in Months

### 3.2.2. Learner Questionnaire Results t1

The first set of items in the questionnaire addressed learners' well-being or comfort in the HL classroom. Table 7 illustrates the descriptive statistics for this first scale at t1.

| | N | Minimum | Maximum | Mean | Std. Deviation |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| I like mother tongue lessons | 137 | 2.00 | 4.00 | **3.66** | .53 |
| I think mother tongue teaching is important | 137 | 2.00 | 4.00 | **3.68** | .53 |
| I enjoy the tasks and activities during lessons | 134 | 1.00 | 4.00 | **3.47** | .65 |
| I like to speak my mother tongue at school | 135 | 1.00 | 4.00 | **3.53** | .68 |
| I like to speak my mother tongue outside of school | 137 | 1.00 | 4.00 | **3.66** | .62 |
| I learn a lot in class | 137 | 1.00 | 4.00 | **3.48** | .68 |
| I am supported in learning my mother tongue | 133 | 2.00 | 4.00 | **3.67** | .53 |
| I feel comfortable at school overall | 135 | 1.00 | 4.00 | **3.65** | .58 |
| I feel comfortable in my mother tongue lessons | 140 | 2.00 | 4.00 | **3.72** | .50 |
| Comfort_mean | | | | **3.61** | .59 |

**Table 7:** Descriptive Statistics Learner Well-Being at t1

What can be seen from the data presented in Table 7 is that the mean figures for each item range between 3.47 and 3.72. On a four-point agreement response scale (1= "not true at all" to 4= "exactly true) this means that the respondents were in enormously high agreement with the items set out above. When comparing this data to studies with adults (for instance, on language attitudes) these figures are almost so high that the functionality of the instrument could be questioned. It is of course positive to note that learners feel highly comfortable in the HL classroom, that they strongly believe in the importance of their HL, and that they enjoy their HL education.

The second set of items addressed learners' motivation to participate in HLE. Table 8 presents an overview of the findings from t1.

|  | N | Minimum | Maximum | Mean | Std. Deviation |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Learning my mother tongue is important to me | 138 | 2.00 | 4.00 | **3.75** | .50 |
| My family wants me to take part | 139 | 1.00 | 4.00 | **3.68** | .60 |
| I can meet my friends | 139 | 1.00 | 4.00 | **3.26** | 1.00 |
| I want to be able to speak well with my relatives | 139 | 1.00 | 4.00 | **3.64** | .68 |
| I would like to learn more about my origins | 137 | 1.00 | 4.00 | **3.62** | .64 |
| Motivation mean |  |  |  | **3.58** | .69 |

**Table *8*:** Descriptive Statistics Learner Motivation t1

Similar to the findings on the learners' well-being presented further above, the data presented here show unusually high rates of agreement with the items. With mean figures between 3.26 and 3.75, the data show that learners appear to have extraordinarily high levels of motivation.

### 3.2.3. Learner Questionnaire Results t2

Analogically to the section above, this section presents the findings gained from the learner questionnaire at t2. Table 9 illustrates the data from the first set of items on the learners' well-being or comfort in the HL classroom.

| | N | Minimum | Maximum | Mean | Std. Deviation |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| I like mother tongue lessons | 132 | 2.00 | 4.00 | **3.61** | .60 |
| I think mother tongue teaching is important | 132 | 1.00 | 4.00 | **3.60** | .68 |
| I enjoy the tasks and activities during lessons | 131 | 1.00 | 4.00 | **3.37** | .74 |
| I like to speak my mother tongue at school | 131 | 1.00 | 4.00 | **3.44** | .72 |
| I like to speak my mother tongue outside of school | 132 | 1.00 | 4.00 | **3.75** | .54 |
| I learn a lot in class | 127 | 1.00 | 4.00 | **3.35** | .81 |
| I am supported in learning my mother tongue | 128 | 2.00 | 4.00 | **3.62** | .62 |
| I feel comfortable at school overall | 130 | 2.00 | 4.00 | **3.65** | .59 |
| I feel comfortable in my mother tongue lessons | 131 | 2.00 | 4.00 | **3.79** | .43 |
| Comfort_mean | | | | **3.58** | .64 |

**Table 9:** Descriptive Statistics Learner Well-Being at t2

The data at t2 also demonstrate high agreement of the learners regarding the item statements. The mean figures for each item range between 3.35 and 3.79 on a four-point agreement response scale (1= "not true at all" to 4= "exactly true"). Consistent with the t1 data, this means that the respondents reported an extraordinarily high degree of well-being in HLE, and consider HLE highly important.

Table 10 presents an overview of the findings from t2 on the learners' motivation to participate in HLE.

| | N | Minimum | Maximum | Mean | Std. Deviation |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Learning my mother tongue is important to me | 130 | 1.00 | 4.00 | **3.62** | .66 |
| My family wants me to take part | 130 | 1.00 | 4.00 | **3.72** | .60 |
| I can meet my friends | 130 | 1.00 | 4.00 | **3.12** | 1.08 |
| I want to be able to speak well with my relatives | 129 | 1.00 | 4.00 | **3.52** | .80 |
| I would like to learn more about my origins | 130 | 1.00 | 4.00 | **3.43** | .83 |
| Motivation mean | | | | **3.48** | .79 |

**Table 10:** Descriptive Statistics Learner Motivation t2

Again, in line with what has been shown above, learners exhibit a high degree of motivation. The mean figures range between 3.12 and 3.72.

### 3.2.4. Pre-Post Observations in the Questionnaire Data

When comparing the questionnaire data in a pre-post logic, certain developments can be seen on the descriptive level. Tables 11 and 12 show the mean data for each item, the overall mean figures as well as the standard deviation for each item (for both t1 and t2).

| | t1 | | | t2 | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | N | Mean | Std. Deviation | N | Mean | Std. Deviation |
| I like mother tongue lessons | 137 | **3.66** | .53 | 132 | **3.61** | .60 |
| I think mother tongue teaching is important | 137 | **3.68** | .53 | 132 | **3.60** | .68 |
| I enjoy the tasks and activities during lessons | 134 | **3.47** | .65 | 131 | **3.37** | .74 |
| I like to speak my mother tongue at school | 135 | **3.53** | .68 | 131 | **3.44** | .72 |
| I like to speak my mother tongue outside of school | 137 | **3.66** | .62 | 132 | **3.75** | .54 |
| I learn a lot in class | 137 | **3.48** | .68 | 127 | **3.35** | .81 |
| I am supported in learning my mother tongue | 133 | **3.67** | .53 | 128 | **3.62** | .62 |
| I feel comfortable at school overall | 135 | **3.65** | .58 | 130 | **3.65** | .59 |
| I feel comfortable in my mother tongue lessons | 140 | **3.72** | .50 | 131 | **3.79** | .43 |
| Comfort_mean | | **3.61** | .59 | | **3.58** | .64 |

**Table *11*:** Descriptive Analysis of Learner Well-Being pre-post

| | t1 | | | t2 | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | N | Mean | Std. Deviation | N | Mean | Std. Deviation |
| Learning my mother tongue is important to me | 138 | **3.75** | .50 | 130 | **3.62** | .66 |
| My family wants me to take part | 139 | **3.68** | .60 | 130 | **3.72** | .60 |
| I can meet my friends | 139 | **3.26** | 1.00 | 130 | **3.12** | 1.08 |
| I want to be able to speak well with my relatives | 139 | **3.64** | .68 | 129 | **3.52** | .80 |
| I would like to learn more about my origins | 137 | **3.62** | .64 | 130 | **3.43** | .83 |
| Motivation mean | | **3.58** | .69 | | **3.48** | .79 |

**Table *12:*** Descriptive Analysis of Learner Motivation pre-post

The data suggest a slight overall decline in both well-being and motivation on the learners' side. While the average response pattern to some items shows a positive tendency, most mean scores are lower at t2 than they were at t1. To solidify this statistically, sample t-tests were employed to check for statistically significant differences. Given that the pre-post matching of the sample was not possible in a straightforward fashion (e.g. through anonymised codes for participants), even with the highest procedural rigor, it remains unclear whether a paired t-test or an independent t-test would be the appropriate statistical procedure. While it is safe to assume that over 90% of the matched sample consist of the identical respondents, a margin of error remains. In accordance with this methodological challenge, both paired and independent t-tests were conducted to test for significant differences. In the arguably more plausible procedure, the paired t-test, only one item showed a statistically significant difference between t1 and t2. Assuming a nondirectional hypothesis (two-tailed test), the mean score for the 'motivation' item "I want to be able to speak well with my relatives" is significantly lower at t2 compared to t1 ($p < 0.05$). When employing independent t-tests, again only one item shows a significant difference between t1 and t2. The statement "I would like to learn more about my origins" is rated significantly lower ($p < 0.05$) at t2.

Neither the accumulated mean scores for each scale nor any other item show statistically significant differences in either test. Statistically speaking, this means that no significant difference can be observed in the pre-post analysis of the learner data (apart from the two exceptions named above).

Reasons for the slight decline in the figures between the beginning and the end of the school year can only be hypothesised. Possibly, learners were more enthusiastic in the beginning, and there was an 'end of school year fatigue' in

the post-test. Furthermore, having engaged intensively with topics related to their origins throughout the entire pilot year, learners may have been less motivated or less inclined to engage further with these subjects by the end of the school year. When considering the standard deviation figures (which mostly increase quite substantially between t1 and t2), one may also hypothesise that learners showed a more homogeneous (possibly 'socially desirable', possibly 'less informed') response behaviour at t1 compared to t2. Other potential reasons might include the learners' limited time and experience in the HL classroom, or may have to do with the necessary simplification of the research instrument.

To sum up, two main aspects can be seen in the learner data. First, HL learners are highly motivated and expose very high degrees of well-being in the HL classroom. This stresses the importance of catering for HL provision in a professional manner. Second, the YLC activities had little (measurable) impact on the learners' feelings towards their HLE. This may have various underlying reasons as suggested above. It is, however, not surprising that for marginalised learners, the relationship between the – also marginalised – HL teachers and students is perceived as particularly positive in a special educational space such as HLT, which differs from mainstream school contexts. Thus, the finding that well-being is particularly high in this marginalised space can be regarded as highly positive. Nevertheless, in all three countries there appears to be a clear need for improvement – especially in the Netherlands, where the provision is not embedded in the school system, but also in Sweden and Finland, as the teacher interviews have shown. One possible reason is that HLT represents the only space in which HL learners are recognised as fully multilingual subjects. By contrast, in other school subjects the HL is either not taken into account at all, or only considered in a marginal way. A closer analysis of the open-ended questions might reveal more nuanced perspectives, and additional qualitative data could provide a richer impression of learners' attitudes and experiences.

# 4. Conclusion

The YLC project proved highly effective in fostering enhanced cooperation and exchange among HL teachers across countries, while also substantially strengthening communication with families. Teachers expressed great satisfaction with the pilot activities, which they found particularly valuable given the overall challenges in accessing suitable teaching materials in HLT. The possibility to interact with HL teachers in other countries was stressed as a very positive aspect of the project. It led to capacity-building within the teachers through the network with other teachers of the same HL, but also with teachers of other HLs. The study visits were also regarded as an enriching and motivating element of the project. Not only through the study visits, but also the work in language groups, allowed teachers insights into the HL organisation in the other countries, how other teachers cope with different challenges (late teaching hours, heterogenous groups in age and language level, etc.). New-in-the-job teachers stressed how much they could profit from the teachers with extensive HL teaching experience.

Overall, teachers reported viewing their work as extraordinarily important, although they also noted challenges relating to the recognition and reputation of HLT within the wider educational system. The teachers appreciated the pilot plan with all the activities, the network building through the project and expressed the wish (and need) for further projects like this.

While no direct effects of the YLC project were observable for learners, they are highly motivated and appreciative of their teachers, experiencing a strong sense of well-being in HLT classrooms. This underlines the importance of sustaining and further developing HLT provision, as both learners and teachers are in a marginalised position in (and outside) of the school system.

In reflecting on the project, several limitations became evident. Constraints in time and resources meant that the evaluation could only be carried out to a limited depth. More nuanced analyses, particularly those incorporating learners' and guardians' perspectives, remain necessary. Furthermore, more attention is needed on younger learners, as the current sample predominantly represented students aged 12–16. In the current project, there was no differentiation between lessons that were held on site (in a school) or online. This could nevertheless be expected to have an impact on factors such as activity selection, connection with students and guardians, etc. and should be taken into consideration in future initiatives.

In light of these findings, further activities, projects and research are required to build on the achievements of YLC. The project has provided an important

foundation for future work and will continue to inspire innovative approaches to HLT.

# 5. References

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# 6. Appendix

## A Information Sheet and Consent Forms for Teachers

**Consent Form for Collection and Evaluation of Interview and Survey Data from Teachers within the EU-Project "Your Language Counts!"**

*"Your language counts!"* is an Erasmus-project which aims to promote linguistic diversity in educational contexts across Europe by supporting multilingual students with a heritage language background. The project involves six languages (Arabic, Farsi, Russian, Somali, Turkish, Ukrainian) that are taught in three countries (Finland, Sweden and the Netherlands) by 18 teachers.

*I agree* to take part in interviews and short surveys as part of the EU-project *"Your language counts!"* which will be conducted by the University of Duisburg-Essen (UDE) during the project period (September 2024 – May 2025). *I was informed* about the goal and process of the project in advance. *I agree* that transcripts of the interviews will be used for the evaluation. In order to get the transcripts, *I agree* that the audio of interviews in person and in online-interviews will be recorded.

All data, both in the transcripts and in other form, is anonymised by the team of UDE. Any information that could lead to the identification of specific persons or situations is changed or removed. The interview transcript is used for analysis purposes within research contexts only and will not be published in its entirety. In scientific publications, interviews are only quoted in excerpts. Any personal contact data is stored separately from interview data and is inaccessible to third parties.

*I hereby agree* to take part in interviews in the context of the EU-project *"Your language counts!"*. In addition, *I accept* the above-mentioned form of anonymous further processing and scientific use of the interviews conducted with me and the resulting data and information. *I am aware* that my participation in this project is voluntary and that I may withdraw my consent.

*I consent* to take part in short surveys during the project period and to give interviews. *I agree* that the audio will be recorded, transcribed, anonymised and evaluated.

_____                    _____
first and last name                                         date and signature

We kindly thank you for all your support!
If you have any questions, we are available to you via email at any time.

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# B Interview Guide t1

icebreaker question: what do you like most about teaching HL classes?

## 1. Teaching Conditions

### 2.1 Teaching Groups

- how many groups do you teach?
- how small is the smallest group you teach?
- how big is the biggest group you teach?
- how young is the youngest pupil in all your classes?
- how old is the oldest pupil in all your classes?

### 2.2 Working Hours

- how many hours per week do you teach HL classes?
- in which hours of the day do you do most of your HL teaching?
- on a scale of 1-41, how happy are you with your teaching hours? Why?
- how many hours per week do you use to plan the lessons?
- how many minutes per day do you travel to work and/or between schools?

### 2.3 Qualification as a HL-teacher

- how did you become a HL-teacher?
- how did your degree prepare you for teaching HL?
- do you have any wishes or ideas on how people can be prepared best to teach HL in the future (e.g. during university?)

### 2.4 Type of Employment

- do you work part-time or full-time?
- is your employment temporary or permanent?
- on a scale of 1-4, how happy are you with the reputation of your job as a HL teacher? Why?

## 3 Teacher Training & Further Education

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1 1 = very happy, 2=happy, 3=unhappy, 4=very unhappy

- o did you have additional teacher training for teaching HL in the past?
    - → how many hours of training have you had in the past 5 years?
    - → which topic(s) were part of the training?
- o on a scale of 1-4, how happy are you with HL-teacher training? Why?
- o are there specific topics you would like to have additional HL-teacher training on?

## 4 Teaching Motivation & Lesson Planning

- o why do you teach HL?
- o what do you think is the main goal of HLE and teaching HL?
- o on a scale of 1-42, how important is your work as a HL-teacher in your opinion? Why?
- o what is important for you when you plan your lessons?
- o how do you pay attention to different language skills of students?

## 5 Teaching Materials & Activities

- o what kind of teaching materials do you use?
- o on a scale of 1-4, how happy are you with HL teaching materials? Why?
- o would you like to add ideas for improvement or adaptation for these materials?

## 6 Cooperation

- o on a scale of 1-43, how often do you work together with other HL-teachers who teach the same language as you do? Why?
    - → what does cooperation with other HL-teachers include?
    - → would you like to work together more with other HL-teachers (in the future)?
- o on a scale of 1-4, how often do you work together with other HL-teachers who teach other HL than you do? Why?

## 7 Family Outreach

- o How do you connect with families and/or parents?

---

2 1= very important, 2=important, 3=unimportant, 4= very unimportant

3 1=very often, 2=often, 3=sometimes, 4=never

- o on a scale of 1-4, how happy are you with connecting with your students' families? Why?
- o what are issues or challenges that families talk about with you as a HL-teacher?
- o what expectations do you have of HL-students' parents and/or family members?

## Conclusion & Perspectives

- o on a scale of 1-4, how happy are you with your job as a HL-teacher? Why?
- o what are the main challenges of your job as a HL-teacher?
- o what are the main challenges your students' face in HL classes?
- o what are the main challenges of teaching HL in your local context?
- o how would you improve teaching HL in schools in general?
- o would you like to add anything to our interview?
- o did we forget an important topic or question?

# C Interview Guide t2

## 1    Teaching Hours

- o    on a scale of 1-4, how happy are you with your teaching hours? Why?

## 2    Pilot Activities

- o    on a scale of 1-44, how happy are you with the pilot activities that you tested? Why?
- o    did you like creating your own activity and sharing it with the other teachers? Why?

## 3    Cooperation & Study Visits

- o    on a scale of 1-4, how happy are you with the monthly teacher meetings and cooperation within the project? Why?
- o    on a scale of 1-45, how often do you work together with other HL-teachers who teach the *same HL*? Why?
- o    on a scale of 1-4, how often do you work together with other HL-teachers who teach *other HL*? Why?
- o    on a scale of 1-4, how happy were you with the study visits? Why?

## 4    Family Outreach

*[show sheet with 6 family outreach areas from the pilot]*



- o    have you done any ⌐          ⌐s from the pilot in the last few                                                                                         months?

    → e.g., volunteering: inviting parents to class?

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4 1=very happy, 2=happy, 3=unhappy, 4=very unhappy

5 1=very often, 2=often, 3=sometimes, 4=never

- on a scale of 1-4, how happy are you with communicating with your students' families and parents? Why?

## 5    Conclusion: Overall Project Satisfaction & Perspectives

- on a scale of 1-4, how happy are you with the YLC project overall? Why?
- on a scale of 1-4, how happy are you with your job as a HL-teacher? Why?
- on a scale of 1-4, how happy are you with the reputation of your job as a HL teacher? Why?
- is there anything else you want to say about the YLC project?
- did we forget an important topic or question that you want to add?

# D Information Sheet and Consent Forms for Learners

### "Your Language Counts!" – Erasmus-Project about Heritage Language Education

"*Your language counts!*" is an Erasmus-project which aims to promote linguistic diversity in educational contexts across Europe by supporting multilingual students with a heritage language background.

The project involves six languages (Arabic, Farsi, Russian, Somali, Turkish, Ukrainian) that are taught in three countries (Finland, Sweden and the Netherlands) by 18 teachers.

We are not only interested in the teachers' perspective, but also in what students themselves think about their heritage language classes. For this, students' data will be collected using **very short** questionnaires during the project period (September 2024 - May 2025).

All information about the child and the results of the surveys will be treated strictly confidential and will only be evaluated and published anonymously. The data given will only be used for research contexts.

We kindly request your support and ask you to fill out and sign this consent form for your child to take part in this project.

> We kindly thank you for your support!
> If you have any questions, we are available to you via email at any time.
>
> Prof. Dr. Tobias Schroedler       and       Clarissa Diekmann
> tobias.schroedler@uni-due.de                 clarissa.diekmann@uni-due.de

### Consent Form for Participation in the Erasmus-Project "Your Language Counts!"

*I hereby declare* that I have been informed about the Erasmus-project "Your language counts!" which promotes heritage language education. I have also been informed that all information and data about my child will be treated strictly confidential and will only be evaluated and used in research anonymously. *I am aware* that my participation in this project is completely voluntary and that I may withdraw my consent at any time.

*I agree* that my child _____ (first and last name of the child), born on _____._____._____ (date of birth) may take part in the survey as part of the Erasmus-project "Your language counts!" on heritage language education.

_____

Place, date and signature of the child's parent or legal guardian

_____

Place, date and signature of the child

# E Learner Questionnaire

## Mother tongue education from the students' perspective

This questionnaire is part of the "Your language counts!" project at your school which focuses on mother tongue teaching in three countries in Europe. We would like to find out more about your opinion of the lessons and your reasons for your participation.

Thank you very much for answering the questions. Your participation in this survey is voluntary. Your answers will remain anonymous and will only be used for scientific purposes.

### Personal information:

age: _____ years        class: _____        gender:  O male O female O diverse

What is your mother tongue / which language does your teacher teach?_____

How long have you been attending mother tongue classes?_____

Since when do you live in Finland? _____

### Questionnaire:

You are going to read several statements. Please choose how much you agree with each statement. Please tick one option per statement only (☒ / ☑)

| | Your opinion | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | exactly true | rather true | rather not true | not true at all |
| 1. I like mother tongue lessons | | | | |
| 2. I think mother tongue teaching is important | | | | |
| 3. I enjoy the tasks and activities during lessons | | | | |
| 4. I like to speak my mother tongue at school | | | | |
| 5. I like to speak my mother tongue outside of school | | | | |
| 6. I learn a lot in class | | | | |
| 7. I am supported in learning my mother tongue | | | | |
| 8. I feel comfortable at school overall | | | | |
| 9. I feel comfortable in my mother tongue lessons | | | | |

**Question 9: Why?**
_____
_____

| I take part in mother tongue lessons because … | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 10. learning my mother tongue is important to me | | | | |
| 11. my family wants me to take part | | | | |
| 12. I can meet my friends | | | | |
| 13. I want to be able to speak well with my relatives | | | | |
| 14. I would like to learn more about my origins | | | | |

### I would like to say this about my mother tongue lessons:

_____
_____
_____

**Thank you for your participation!** 😊