

Informal in formal: discourses of informal learning in the national core curriculum for  
Finnish general upper secondary education

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## 1 Introduction

English is all around us. When one opens the television in Finland, there is a fairly good chance of seeing yet another rerun of the American sitcom *Friends* or the latest turns of the never-ending British classic, *Emmerdale* – not dubbed into Finnish but in their original language. Going to a restaurant, especially in the bigger cities, it is not self-evident that the menu or service is in Finnish, as many workers in the service industry are immigrants, and using English in menus or decor is just as common. The Internet, games, music – English truly is all around us.

Finland's language education policy has laid the groundwork for open and positive attitudes towards English (Cf. Leppänen et al. 2011). Nevertheless, the growing presence of English has been the cause of many debates – what is the position of Finnish as a language for science, should service be provided in domestic languages, how are the English-speaking inhabitants integrated into Finnish society and so on. There is one sector, however, that can only benefit from the presence of English in the society, namely, learning English.

English has a 100-year-history as a school subject in the Finnish education system. It is by far the most popular foreign language studied at Finnish schools: in 2019, 90 per cent of pupils in basic education studied English as a foreign language according to advanced syllabus (EDUFI, 2019). The goals and contents for education sectors as a whole are defined in legislation, and in the national core curricula (henceforth referred to as NCC). In addition, the NCC contains goals and contents for each subject. Presumably due to its popularity, English as a foreign language has its own section in the core curriculum for general upper secondary education, whereas other foreign languages are more generic in nature, and not language specific.

Learning is not restricted to formal education, schools and classrooms. All the places we visit, all the people we meet, all the culture we consume provide us a possibility to learn

as a byproduct. Many kinds of activities open a window for **informal learning**. Both formal education and informal learning contribute to the development of language proficiency.

The overall aim of this thesis is to examine how the growing presence of English in the society, and thus the growing possibilities for informal learning have impacted the national core curriculum for general upper secondary education in Finland. The phenomenon is approached through expert interviews from members of the working group responsible for drafting the section of foreign languages in the NCC 2019. These interviews provide insight on the motives and aspirations behind the updated NCC, as well as background information to examine how the discourses present in the NCC were formed, and what they aim to achieve. The interviews are analysed in connection to the NCC 2019, in particular the chapter for foreign languages and more specifically the chapter for English (advanced syllabus). However, also the chapters that are common for all subjects, such as learning environments and assessment will be explored. The thesis deals with the interface of informal and formal learning: how a phenomenon present in the society and learners' everyday lives impacts the education system. It regards the NCC 2019 as social action and aims to explore how the different practices of foreign language education take informal learning into account.

Studying a foreign language consists of developing both language proficiency and cultural understanding. Taking the surrounding society and its events and phenomena into consideration when designing teaching is particularly fruitful for foreign languages, as there are no boundaries to the context where a language is presented. This thesis aims to examine how the affordances and authentic learning environments provided by the role of English in the society are present in the goals and contents for foreign languages and English, in particular. The common chapters of the core curriculum are norms for upper secondary schools as a whole, but they also regulate each subject. Therefore, it is worth examining how these norms and guidelines regulate or encourage taking the possibilities of informal learning into account. How, for instance, are the learning environments determined and how applicable are they for teaching English?

The national core curriculum for general upper secondary education in Finland was renewed in 2019. At the moment municipalities and other providers of education are drafting their local curricula based on the NCC. Starting from autumn 2021 general upper secondary schools in Finland will take into use new goals and contents for different subjects, including English as a foreign language. This is an excellent moment to inspect how the renewed core curriculum takes informal learning into account, and possibly give some suggestions how the topic could be taken into consideration when drafting the local curricula and, later on, designing teaching.

Education is the cornerstone of a functioning society. Learning and developing new information and knowledge is a tool to build a better future, both on the individual and societal level. In addition, it is valuable in itself. The education system and teachers have a great responsibility in educating and equipping learners with the necessary skills to operate in society, in addition to further developing it. My interest in education comes from working a decade in student organisations advocating for students' rights and bringing their views to public discussions and political decision-making. This led me to choose a topic that has to do with the education sector despite not at the moment pursuing a career as a teacher. I have worked as the education policy adviser in the Union of Upper Secondary School Students in Finland and through this been involved in the process of drafting the current and future NCC from a stakeholder's point of view. It is extremely intriguing to shift my attention now to examine more closely the discourses related to learning and foreign language education in terms of English.

After this introductory chapter, I will briefly describe the role of English in Finland, and the historical developments, which have led to the current situation. Chapter 3 will present some key theoretical topics through previous research. Topics such as learning, learner motivation, informal learning and curriculum design will be covered. Chapter 4 will focus on the research approach, describing the material used in the analysis, namely, the expert interviews from members of the working group in charge of the NCC 2019 sections on

foreign languages. I will also explain how I have made connections with the interviews and the National Core Curriculum 2019. In addition, Chapter 4 will include a description of the methodological framework of the thesis, namely, mediated discourse analysis (MDA) and its practical application nexus analysis. Chapter 5 will provide an analysis of the research material and present the main findings of the thesis. Lastly, the conclusions and suggestions for further research are presented in Chapter 6.

## 2 English in Finland

In order to perceive the possibilities for informal learning, it is necessary to understand the position a foreign language has in the surrounding society. This chapter aims to describe the current status of English in Finland, as well as the historical developments which have led to the strong position and presence English has in today's Finland. The role of English in the education system will be inspected in particular.

Leppänen et al. (2011) describe how the presence of English in Finland has grown steadily from the beginning of the 20th century. They label the period from 1920 to 1940 as decades when English came to Finland. English was established as a core subject in secondary school for girls in 1918, granting it a status as a voluntary language that could be studied instead of French. Thus, as a school subject, English has a 100-year-history in the Finnish education system. According to Battarbee (2002), the influence of English in popular culture started to be observable during these decades. In post-war Finland, from 1940 to 1960, the popularity of studying English at school increased, and especially in larger cities English replaced German as the most popular foreign language. The demands of international commerce began to require the knowledge of English, and the changed political situation also began to open Finland more towards the western world. This development was enhanced by the spread of American popular culture, music and films, which incorporated English in the everyday lives of Finns.

Media has significantly influenced the attitudes of Finns towards English. Finnish television broadcasts began in 1955. At first the English programmes were dubbed to Finnish, but already in the 1960s dubbing was replaced with Finnish subtitles along with the original audio. Artistic, ideological or practical – whatever the reason to stop dubbing was, it ensured that English has since then been a part of the everyday life of Finns, which has supported English language education significantly as Leppänen et al. (2011) note: “These various media have undoubtedly enhanced Finns’ language awareness and shaped their attitudes towards English considerably.” (p. 20)

Leppänen et al. (2011) continue to describe the time-span of English in Finland by explaining that in the 1960s studying foreign languages became more common, studying began earlier (3rd grade), and English strengthened its position by becoming the most studied foreign language: in 1967 - 1988 74 per cent of students studied English as a foreign language. Travelling became more popular further adding to the need of learning English. Anglo-American popular culture, especially pop and rock music, continued to strengthen its popularity. The 1970s saw the establishment of Finnish comprehensive school system. All students were required to study at least one foreign language in addition to the two domestic languages. By now the firm position of English meant that in most cases that foreign language would be English. English words, phrases and idioms began being increasingly present in, e.g. youth media, advertisements and Finnish popular music in the 1970s and 1980s.

In the 1990s Finland affirmed its European relations – and need for international communications – by joining the European Union. Although the national languages of member states are all official EU languages, in practice English is often used as a lingua franca. The 1990s also saw the increase of English-based education: the first International Baccalaureate schools were founded, and teaching in English became more common in comprehensive, secondary and tertiary education despite the official languages continuing to be Finnish or Swedish. In the 2000s the economic and cultural globalisation combined with the swift development of ICT and global networks continued to promote the position of English and the need to develop language proficiency. Furthermore, the increasing immigration began laying foundations for a more multilingual society, where English is used as a lingua franca.

Leppänen et al. (2011) remind that the significance of English in Finland is and has been due to several factors, including modernisation, urbanisation, technologisation, and internationalisation, which all have affected a vast spectrum of fields of society. Nowadays English continues to be a language of, e.g. trade, science, and popular culture. Despite the recent attempts to diversify the language reserve of Finland, English has maintained its strong position in foreign language education: in 2019 90 per cent of pupils in basic



education studied English according to an advanced syllabus, i.e. in most cases as their first foreign language (EDUFI, 2019). It is worth noting that these numbers have been achieved without English ever being a compulsory subject in Finnish schools. One explanation for the popularity of studying English as a foreign language could be the motivation of pupils to learn the language that surrounds them in society – be it media, culture or various networks. Practical reasons also apply as English is often the only option for an advanced syllabus level foreign language due to the resources of the education provider. With scarce resources the education providers most likely tend to invest in the language seen most relevant for any reason. The strong position of English in foreign language education does not appear merely in the statistics on the students' choices. English is the only foreign language that has its own section in the current NCC. Before the update of 2015, the contents and objectives of all foreign languages were described as one entity, which could then be applied to different languages, depending on which would be taught according to each syllabus. In the NCC 2015, however, English was excluded from the general section of foreign languages and received its own particular contents and objectives.

The presence of English can be observed almost anywhere. Leppänen et al. (2011) map the “linguistic landscape” of Finland in terms of English, i.e. how and where do we encounter English within our physical environment (p. 66). The questionnaire results show that – media excluded – the most dominant places to see or hear English were the street, shops and stores, place of work, and restaurants and cafés (p. 68). Exposure to English is inevitable, as these are places we visit every day. Leppänen et al. (2011) also state that “the highly systematized language policies adopted in Finland have played a crucial role in how Finns view foreign languages, and especially English” (p. 22) – this means that the choices made in the Finnish education system has led to a positive attitude towards English, and in addition equipped Finns with a generally high proficiency of English. Indeed, Finns rank among the countries with highest proficiency in English: in 2019 Finland placed seventh out of a hundred countries ranked by EF Education First, which evaluated the Finns' English proficiency being ‘very high’ (Education First, 2019).

The position of English in Finland is a popular topic, which is raised in the media frequently. Quite often the articles paint a picture of English as a threat to the national languages – it either corrupts the national languages with frequent loans, or entirely reduces the possibilities of using national languages in certain domains (Cf. Wallius, 2019). In 2018 the Finnish Language Board gave a statement urging for a national language strategy that would aim to safeguard the use and position of the national languages, Finnish and Swedish, against the threat posed by English. The statement coincided with the government initiative of an English-language matriculation examination, which the then Minister of Education, Sanni Grahn-Laasonen saw as a response to the added demand on English-based secondary education, in addition to a means to support the increasingly international operational environment (Hiilanen & Paakkanen, 2018). After much debate, the initiative did not progress to legislation (STT-HS, 2019) and has not been reintroduced since.

### 3 Theoretical background: approaches to learning

The term ‘informal learning’ was first introduced by Malcolm Knowles in his book *Informal Adult Education* (1950). Knowles based his ideas on the works of, e.g. Eduard Lindeman and John Dewey (Henry, 2011: 154). The former argued (1929) that adult education should not be based on external authority, and that there is an inherent relationship between learning and living. Dewey, like Lindeman, emphasised the central role of personal experience in learning (Cf. Dewey 1938). While Knowles focused on adult education, since then, many researchers in the field of foreign language acquisition have paid attention to informal or non-instructed learning, or learning out-of-classroom in general – this chapter presents some of this research. The development and generalisation of technology in the 21st century has brought new affordances to learning languages. These affordances shape formal education and its learning environments, but also expand the possibilities of learning in one’s leisure time. For instance, the role of games in the English proficiency of boys in particular has been discussed in both research and media (Cf. Sundqvist 2009, YLE Uutiset 2011). In Finland, some key affordances for informal learning date back to the 1960s – the introduction of television and subtitled English programmes with the original audio tracks brought the English language to the everyday lives of the Finnish public. This chapter introduces these central themes – approaches to learning, the concept of informal learning, and affordances – through previous research. In addition, an overview on curriculum design and the Finnish NCC will be given.

#### 3.1 Sociocultural and ecological approach to learning

According to Kumpulainen and Mutanen (1999) the views on learning have recently focused on its “social and situated nature regarding the construction of knowledge as an interpersonal and intrapersonal process” (p. 451). They further elaborate this to mean that learning takes place “as the result of the individual’s active involvement and

participation in situated social practices”, rather than as a process of transmitting knowledge. This concept – the sociocultural theory – is rooted in the thinking of Lev Vygotsky. According to John-Steiner and Mahn (1996), Vygotsky and his colleagues developed the basis for sociocultural theory in the 1920s and 1930s. However, at that time this multifaceted theory did not gain much popularity. It was not until the late 1950s and the early 1960s that his work began to emerge again, and since then has been influential especially in the Western countries (p. 191-192). Indeed, the sociocultural approach can be observed in the Finnish NCC, as well, as described in section 3.4.

Vygotsky argued (1978) that internalising “socially rooted and historically developed activities” is the distinguishing feature of human psychology (p. 57). Vygotsky describes three processes of transformation that lead to this internalisation: Firstly, an operation that initially represented an external activity is reconstructed and begins to occur internally. Vygotsky notes that particularly important is the transformation of sign-using activity. Secondly, an interpersonal process is transformed into an intrapersonal process. He explains that all functions in a child’s cultural development appear first on a social level, and after that on an individual level. Lastly, Vygotsky notes that the process from interpersonal to intrapersonal is “the result of a long series of developmental events”. The processes take time and continue to exist and to change before “definitively turning inward” (p. 56-57). Therefore, according to Vygotsky, it is the social community and its culture, which defines the thinking and learning of an individual, i.e. the thinking and learning of an individual is based on social interaction. Byrnes (2006) notes that education should be regarded as a privileged environment for such interaction (p. 8).

Mediation is a key concept in the sociocultural theory (Cf. Wertsch, 1991; van Lier, 2004). Ellis (2003, as cited in van Lier, 2004) describes three dimensions of mediation: through tools and artifacts; through interaction; and through the use of signs. Further elaborated in the context of language learning, mediation involves “(1) mediation by others in social interaction, (2) mediation by self through private speech, and (3) mediation by artifacts (e.g. tasks and technology)” (p. 12). Van Lier (2004) explains that in the Vygotskian

sociocultural perspective, language learning is mediated by all the semiotic resources available in the learning environment – however, this availability is not passive in nature, but rather “actively brought in and created, shared and used under guidance from the teacher and other learners” (p. 97).

The aforementioned Leo van Lier (2004) further developed the sociocultural approach from an ecological perspective in an attempt to create an integrated and holistic view on language and education. Van Lier stresses that the ecological approach to language learning is not a method or a full theory, but rather a way of thinking and acting, which aims to take into account the “inseparable connection between language and education” (p. 3). Hill et al. (2004) define ecological approach as being “concerned with understanding the complexities involved in the relationships of whole organisms, individually and as interactive groups, with their total environment” (p. 1). Van Lier (2010) explains that in the ecological approach, key principles are “the creation of ecologically valid contexts, relationships, agency, motivation and identity” while taking into account the environmental setting, or ecosystem, where the learning process is happening (p. 3-4). Defining characteristics of the ecological approach include relationships or relations, context, patterns, emergence, quality, value, critical perspective, variability, diversity, and agency or activity (Cf. van Lier, 2004; 2010). The following will describe these characteristics briefly (for a more detailed description, see van Lier, 2004).

Whereas ecology studies relationships among elements in an environment or ecosystem, similarly according to ecological linguistics, language should not be seen as a collection of objects, but as a system of relations between people and the world (van Lier 2004: 4-5). Van Lier (2010) notes that the opportunities to establish relationships in the world – be it physical, social or symbolic worlds – are numerous, and they are made possible due to a variety of affordances<sup>1</sup>, which provide grounds for activity (p. 4). Johnson (2001, as

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<sup>1</sup> The term affordance was first coined by James J. Gibson in 1966. Gibson (1979) gives the following often cited definition: “The affordances of the environment are what it offers the animal, what it provides or furnishes, either for good or ill. The verb to afford is found in the dictionary, the noun affordance is not. I have made it up. I mean by it something that refers to both the environment and the animal in a way that no existing term does. It implies the complementarity of the animal and the environment.”

cited in van Lier, 2004) explains emergence as the reorganising of relatively simple organisms or elements into more complex and intelligent systems. Van Lier (2010) refers to language as a pattern of patterns, and a system of systems, preferring these concepts over terms such as rules and structures. The learning of these patterns is not a gradual process, but rather an emergence.

In ecology, according to van Lier's (2004) words, context is "the heart of the matter" (p. 5). By this he means that context is not merely something supplementary to be taken into account, but instead, while surrounding a language it also defines it, and at the same time the language defines the context. While acknowledging the difficulty of defining quality, van Lier (2010) proposes that the focus of quality in education should be on the educational experience, learning opportunities and the wellbeing of the learners, instead of merely fulfilling the standards set for education (p. 4). The ecological approach recognises the meaning of values as an integral part of all activities, practices and research – according to ecological linguistics these are all value-laden, value-driven, and value producing (van Lier 2004, p. 6). Van Lier continues to note that this view differs greatly from the nowadays dominant view of the utter autonomy of science. Van Lier (2004) argues that if a view stressing context, quality and values is adopted, then inevitably the perspective on language learning is a critical one (p. 6). The critical perspective demands constant evaluation of the educational practices: if these practices do not promote the objectives and principles set, it is necessary to refocus them.

Due to the heterogeneity of learners, van Lier (2004) argues that equal treatment is a "doubtful pedagogical practice" (p. 7). Instead, a skilled teacher takes these differences into account, understanding the learners and their needs. In addition to the classroom level, van Lier notes that educational policies also create variabilities among schools and learners, even manufacturing inequalities between them. The diversity of both learners and teachers – and of people in a society, in general – is regarded as a value in the ecological approach. Van Lier (2004) notes that this applies to the contents of educational practices, too: the learners should not be presented with a generalisation of a language, but rather be exposed to language and learning activities, which showcase the diversity

of the language. Lastly, agency is a central concept of the ecological approach. Van Lier (2010) argues that in order for making significant progress and creating a basis for lifelong learning, learners need to employ agency. Furthermore, van Lier (2010) sees autonomy and motivation as a product or a manifestation of a person's agency. He describes (2004) how learners form a community of practice, learning through various activities, which are "socially produced, but appropriated and made one's own" (Bakhtin, 1981, as cited in van Lier, 2004, p. 8).

In sum, van Lier (2004) sees the ecological approach as an up-to-date extended version of Vygotsky's sociocultural theory. Teachers are encouraged to see their students as whole persons, who are given responsibility and control of their own learning. The ecological approach rejects the distinction of learning and using a language. Quite the contrary, van Lier (2004) explains that the "skill-getting and skill-using distinction should be seen as dynamic interplay" (p. 223). Van Lier (2004) stresses the need to promote a quality-based pedagogy, which focuses on the assisted use of language and situated nature of language learning, "taking the learner's developing skills and interests as the true driving-force of the curriculum" (p. 224).

### 3.2 Informal learning

Beyond the classroom has been a popular catchphrase when questioning the educational institutions' monopoly to learning, and acknowledging the learning that happens in our everyday lives. To describe this phenomenon there are several terms, which Benson (2011) lists when introducing the field in a collection of articles on the topic: learning can be 'out-of-class', 'out-of-school', 'after-school', 'extracurricular' or 'extramural'; 'non-formal' or 'informal'; 'self-instructed', 'non-instructed' or 'naturalistic'; 'independent', self-directed' or 'autonomous'. According to Benson (2011) these different terms all have a slightly different point of view on the phenomenon. He argues that compared to these terms 'language learning beyond the classroom' is the most inclusive, as it covers all the

distinct dimensions of learning, namely, location, formality, pedagogy, and locus of control.

The dimension of location underlines the setting of learning, either the physical environment (e.g. 'out-of-class') or the temporal circumstances (e.g. 'after-school'). Benson (2011) notes that this approach usually implies that the learning is supplementary to classroom learning and teaching. He remarks that this focus does not take into consideration the variety of school activities, which can elicit learning despite not actually happening in a language class. Non-formal and informal learning contrast learning with the learning taking place through formal teaching and education. Benson (2011) explains that formality can be interpreted as the degree of independence, i.e. the extent to which learning is independent of organised courses leading to formal qualifications. The dimension of pedagogy has to do with the role of instruction in the learning process. Learning happening without the instructions of a teacher can take place either with or without intention. The former can be described as self-instructed, while the latter is what Benson (2011) refers to as naturalistic. Lastly, the locus of control looks for the authority on making major decisions concerning the learning. Benson (2011) points out that while there may be a certain degree of learner autonomy in a classroom, learning in a non-classroom setting often requires the learner to make many decisions about their learning.

Despite Benson arguing that the terms presented earlier do not take into consideration the full complexity of the phenomenon, for the purpose of this thesis I have chosen to use the term 'informal learning'. The main reason for this is the intent to highlight the contrast with formal education, as the interest of this thesis is to examine how the normative document, NCC 2019, recognises and makes use of the possibilities for learning presented by the presence of English in the society and the students' everyday lives. Indeed, informal learning is often determined in contrast to formal learning. Marsick and Watkins, for example, determine informal learning as follows:

"Formal learning is typically institutionally-sponsored, classroom-based, and highly structured. Informal learning, a category that includes incidental learning, may occur in



institutions, but it is not typically classroom-based or highly structured, and control of learning rests primarily in the hands of the learner. ... Informal learning can be deliberately encouraged by an organization or it can take place despite an environment not highly conducive to learning.” (1990, p. 12)

Incidental learning mentioned in this definition can in turn be defined as learning that is “not premeditated, deliberate, or intentional and that is acquired as a result of some other, possibly unrelated, mental activity” (APA Dictionary of Psychology). Due to the frequent presence of English in the everyday lives of Finns, focus on incidental learning would be extremely interesting. However, as the research material has to do with the practices of formal education and how NCC 2019 understands learning and learning environments, it is necessary to include the possibility of deliberate encouragement to utilise the possibilities of learning in the everyday lives of the students. Therefore, for the purpose of this thesis, I will rely on the term informal learning with the definition suggested by Marsick and Watkins, but will examine separately whether the phenomenon of incidental learning occurs in the research material.

After recognising the phenomenon, it becomes necessary to explore its relevance. Can informal learning provide support to achieving the objectives set for learning in formal education? Sundqvist (2011) analysed the role of extramural language learning in developing language proficiency in her doctoral thesis. Her findings show that in Sweden engaging in spare time activities in English clearly affects young people’s English proficiency in terms of oral proficiency and the size of vocabulary. Furthermore, the type of the activities engaged in affect the significance of the impact on proficiency: Sundqvist (2011) argues that activities requiring the learners to be active or productive, such as playing video games or reading books, promote learning more than activities, which allow for a more passive role, such as listening to music or watching a movie. Sundqvist also notes that informal learning is not immune to the possible inequalities or segregations of a society. Thus, factors such as socioeconomic background and gender need to be considered when analysing the field. In addition, Sundqvist (2011) points out that not all teenagers engage in English language activities in their spare time. Therefore, it cannot

be assumed that out-of-school activities complement the in-school activities for every learner. Despite these findings and the clear correlation, Sundqvist (2011) remarks that establishing cause and effect is difficult when it comes to informal learning: “For example, do learners become more proficient as a result of their extramural English, or do they become engaged in more extramural English because of their higher proficiency?” (p. 117)

Secondly, the relevance of informal learning can be examined from the point of view of the affordances or learning strategies it promotes, and whether these could be utilised in formal education. Lankshear and Knobel (1997, as cited in Kuure, 2011) argue that there is a discrepancy between practices of learning in and outside the school. In their later research, Lankshear and Knobel (2011) have continued to advocate for keeping the learning occurring in schools “optimally connected to life trajectories beyond classrooms” (p. 254), and especially in terms of social learning. In her research on bringing practices of informal learning to an instructed language classroom, Pihkala-Posti (2020) has focused on the experience of authenticity by introducing communicative situations via, e.g. online gaming. Pihkala-Posti (2020) argues the following:

When used in a pedagogically meaningful way, they offer opportunities for dialogue, collaboration and sharing and can support the building of an enthusiastic learning atmosphere and community. Learner agency and a positive language learner identity can be encouraged. (p. 165)

According to Pihkala-Posti (2020), most students welcomed the possibility for an authentic communication context. Interestingly, the student feedback Pihkala-Posti collected indicates that approximately one third of the students regarded playing games as entertainment and a spare time activity not appropriate for school, and would have preferred “textbook and grammar oriented traditional teaching” (p. 158). Indeed, according to Luukka et al. (2008) the idea of informal learning outside the traditional classroom is not very obvious to Finnish students. They state that making use of students’ practices in language learning outside the school is a challenge for, e.g. curriculum design and developing evaluation culture. One model for dealing with this challenge in curriculum

design is Reinders' (2011) description on the necessary characteristics of materials designed to develop autonomous learning skills. He determines six stages, which should be executed in order to promote autonomous learning skills: identifying learner needs, learners setting their own goals, planning learning, selecting materials, selecting learning strategies, and practice.

It seems that informal learning has been a fairly recent trend in researching the Finnish education system and learning. In 2008, Luukka et al. executed an extensive survey on what kinds of texts and media surround Finnish upper level comprehensive school students and their teachers, what languages they use for different purposes, and, furthermore, how has the teaching of languages – both Finnish and foreign languages – reacted and responded to the challenges and possibilities offered by the contemporary information society. Their findings show that the media pupils use in their spheres of lives, especially at home, are extremely versatile. Based on the survey, multilingualism is especially present in the boys' use of media, English being the most common foreign language. However, the textual and media landscapes of spare time and school do not seem to meet, neither in content nor practice. Luukka et al. (2008) express a concern of the practices of school and spare time becoming so differentiated that instead of completing each other, they become completely separate. According to them, a worst-case scenario would be “a situation where actors (pupils and teachers) do not understand each other's points of view on how and where languages and textual skills are learnt and needed” (p. 239). Therefore, they stress the necessity of teachers being aware of the media and text landscape of their pupils, and making use of them in their teaching. The findings of the survey indicate that, in general, the language teaching in the upper comprehensive school continues to adopt a “same size fits all” thinking, which highlights the teacher-led practices and linear learning within the classroom walls instead of shared expertise and responsibility – including the students' expertise and responsibilities (p. 234).

Then again, the 2009 evaluation on general upper secondary education pedagogy by the Finnish Education Evaluation Council barely recognises the topic of informal learning. The evaluators observe that learning environments and pedagogic operational environments can be understood broadly, i.e. taking into account the society surrounding the school, and note that this indeed seems to be the direction the general upper secondary school has been taking ever since the NCC 1994. They argue that learning is no longer tied to buildings, but instead individual learners develop their proficiency “in a versatile manner with the components the surrounding world has to offer”. Therefore, it seems peculiar that the evaluation does not pay hardly any attention to this theme. Then again, as the evaluation is based on teacher and student questionnaires, it is possible that the respondents themselves did not raise informal learning as a relevant topic to be discussed – this would indicate there being a discrepancy between the objectives of the NCC (1994 & 2003) and the actual pedagogic approach observed by the teachers and students.

Kuure (2011) conducted a case study on the multimodal out-of-school learning practices of Finnish English learners who make use of technology in their everyday lives. Her results indicate that online computer games, as well as the activities related to these games, provide affordances for language learning to youngsters. Kuure (2011) points out that language learning is not necessarily an objective as such, but it is a tool for the gamers to build social relationships and to engage in collaboration and problem solving (p. 35). She refers to research on how games foster learners’ motivation (Cf. Gee 2008) and how the learners make use of the affordances offered by the games (Cf. Piirainen-Marsh and Tainio, 2009). Kuure notes that the context the games provide help the special vocabulary and concepts become relevant for the learner. Indeed, the gamification of learning has been strongly present in the discussions on educational policies in the 2010s, and, e.g. EDUFI has provided funding for projects that develop games for learning (Cf. Tekstiilitehdas 2019). In her study Kuure (2011) describes the complex networks of a general upper secondary school student, a great deal of which is upheld in virtual contexts, and continues to note that the technology-rich world of today challenges schools

and teachers in developing curricula that takes into account the reality of the learner outside the school (p. 44); the language learning scenarios and learning environments are rapidly changing, and Kuure suggests that the resources provided by the out-of-school activities of children and adolescents ought to be recognised when designing language-learning.

Lastly, Riekki explored the complexity of change in the field of foreign language education in her doctoral thesis 2016. The ethnographic study focused on analysing various learning and teaching situations, while offering possibilities for new practices. Her findings show that achieving change in formal education or teacher education is difficult. She points out that while school is an important site for learning, it is necessary to acknowledge that learning cannot be restricted to a place. Formal instructional institutions do not have a monopoly on providing a platform for learning, as a great deal of learning takes place beyond the classrooms. Riekki (2016) notes the especially strong role of technology, which she sees as an “effective tool enabling fast, real-time interaction and opening new resources for learning”. However, she explains that these technological affordances are not equally available for all learners due to the schools’ resources or the teachers’ lack of skills in using ICT in a pedagogically meaningful way (p. 152). Riekki (2016) argues that due to the possibilities the learners have in regard to technical devices and networks in their free time, they might in fact be better equipped to use technology than their teachers.

The focus of Riekki’s research is on comprehensive education. In general upper secondary school, the availability of devices is most likely not a similar problem: since the digitalisation of the matriculation examination since 2016, a personal laptop has been a requirement for all students. Indeed, when The Finnish Education Evaluation Centre (FINEEC, 2020) surveyed the effects of the restrictions related to the COVID-19 pandemic on the schools and the equality of learning, 96 % of students responded having sufficient equipment for remote studying. However, 16 % responded lacking necessary studying skills to cope with the situation – the summary does not reveal whether these skills include the use of technology. Furthermore, according to a survey by the Student

Union of Upper Secondary School Students in Finland (2020), approximately half of the upper secondary school students evaluated that their teachers had sufficient skills to execute remote teaching via electronic platforms, whereas approximately 25 % of the students disagreed with the statement, thus supporting Riekkö's (2016) observation of the teachers' lack of skills in using ICT in a pedagogically meaningful way.

### 3.3 Assessment

Assessment is a powerful tool. It can be executed in many forms, e.g. standardised tests and other examinations, oral or practical productions, portfolios or projects. Gipps (1999) explains that within the sociocultural framework assessment is seen as interactive, dynamic, and collaborative, i.e. assessment is "embedded in the social and cultural life of the classroom (p. 378), the focus of assessment being in the process of learning. She argues that assessment is a social activity, and in order to understand it, it is necessary to consider the social, cultural, economic, and political contexts. Assessment is typically divided into summative and formative assessment. Pollari (2017) summarises that the purpose of formative assessment is to support learning, teaching and studying, while summative assessment aims to measure and report learning outcomes, while reminding that in real life the distinction is not always very clear-cut. Pollari (2017) also presents a third type of assessment some scholars use, namely, diagnostic assessment. In the context of foreign language education, diagnostic assessment has to do with identifying "learners' weaknesses and deficiencies, as well as their strengths, in the targeted language domains and provide useful diagnostic feedback and guidance for remedial learning and instruction" (Lee, 2015, as cited in Pollari 2017, p. 24). As Pollari continues to observe, this definition is quite close to the purpose of formative assessment.

Pollari (2017) examined how students of English as a foreign language in the Finnish upper secondary school experience assessment. Her findings indicate that while most students were quite satisfied with the assessment, a significant minority found the assessment disempowering. There were several factors contributing to this experience,

such as insufficient or unhelpful feedback, possibly overshadowed by grades, and assessment-based anxiety or stress. Pollari (2017) notes that the way students react to assessment is very individual – even the alternative assessment methods targeted to promote student agency were poorly received by some. Leach et al. argue that some students resist a process that is meant to be empowering, as empowerment is not the same for everyone (2001, as cited in Pollari, 2017, p. 98). Therefore, Pollari (2017) stresses the importance of offering a wide range of assessment methods to “cater for different assessment purposes as well as for students’ different learning strategies, needs and personalities” (p. 5). Enforcing student agency in assessment is another area for development, as Pollari (2017) notes that “the test-taker has remained far more often than not an object of assessment, rather than an active agent” (p. 210), despite the concept of agency in assessment being present in the NCC, according to Pollari’s analysis. Pollari (2017) argues that while the NCC has included both the concepts of ‘assessment of learning’ and ‘assessment for learning’ since 2003, the former has thus far been a dominant function. She notes that assessment culture is slow to change due to it being “steeped in the values, beliefs and attitudes of the surrounding society” (p. 57); assessment practices are cultural practices with a tradition, in addition to being the more evident educational practices. In the succeeding NCC’s the focus of ‘assessment for learning’ has become more underlined – Pollari says that the effects of this change remain to be seen.

Based on previous research, Pollari (2017) presumes that in foreign language education corrective feedback is the most common form of feedback. She continues to express a worry that if feedback is limited to correcting errors, and little else, it does not build the confidence of the learners. Indeed, her findings show that students call for individual and guiding teacher feedback that would help them to enhance their learning process as well as improving their future performances. However, Pollari (2017) also found that there is a significant difference between empowered and disempowered students in terms of engaging in self-feedback, which she explains as “getting feedback from the learning situation itself, as well as knowing one’s own strengths and weaknesses” (p. 106). Pollari

then argues it is necessary to support the development of skills used in reflection, and provide students with guidance in the process of self-assessment and self-feedback. Key activities include setting objectives and being made aware of the criteria for good work.

Returning to the sociocultural framework and Vygotsky's ideas of the role of tools and external supports in learning, Gipps (1999) notes the contradiction of traditional assessment with this view. She argues that traditional assessment which "denies the pupil the use of external tools, reduces its usefulness and ecological validity" (p. 375). Gipps (1999) calls for assessment practices allowing the use of a variety of external tools in order for the learner to achieve the best performance, instead of a typical performance. This approach is called dynamic assessment, and it aims to investigate the learning and thinking process, and ways it could be enhanced (Lunt & Daniels, 1994, as cited in Gipps, 1999). The purpose is similar to the idea of 'assessment for learning' discussed in Pollari (2017). According to Gipps (1999), there are many ways to include the sociocultural perspective of assessing the learning process in the social setting. One of them is the use of portfolios, which "can be used to reflect the processes of learning and their development over time" (Gipps, 1999, p. 377). Gipps adds that in order to meet the demands of the sociocultural perspective, the portfolios should then reflect the social setting in which the learning took place. Pollari (2017) too explored the applicability of portfolios as a tool of assessment. She found that portfolios offered a break from the test-orientated assessment culture and enforced student agency in assessment.

### 3.4 Aspects of curriculum design

Salminen (2018) argues that "a school is not a school without a curriculum" (p. 11). Wiles (2009) says that curriculum development is an "essential function of school leadership". Notions such as these seem to be common in research focused on curriculum and curriculum design: curriculum is seen as the backbone of educational practices, and the topic is extensively researched from different aspects. Wiles (2009) notes the lack of consensus among experts on a single definition for the term 'curriculum'. He continues to



describe four distinct approaches to the term: subject matter, a set of school experiences, a plan tied to goals and related objectives, and finally, drawn from outcomes or results. Salminen (2018) points out that instead of a straightforward and univocal definition the concept of curriculum is generally understood through different levels. Thijs & van den Akker (2009), for instance, favour determining five levels for curriculum based on the level of its application, described in Table 1. The focus of this thesis is on the macro-level, i.e. the national level of curriculum, in addition to considering its expected effects on the levels below that.

Table 1. *Five levels for curriculum according to Thijs & van den Akker (2009)*

Level	Description	Examples
SUPRA	International	Common European Framework of References for Languages
MACRO	System, national	Core objects, attainment levels, examination programmes
MESO	School, institute	School programme, educational programme
MICRO	Classroom, teacher	Teaching plan, instructional materials, module, course, textbooks
NANO	Pupil, individual	Personal plan for learning, individual course of learning

Wiles (2009) emphasizes that curriculum design is always value-laden, as it requires making choices on what is intended to be learnt during education. Although in their 2014 article Blin and Jalkanen focus on designing learning at the classroom level, the motivation they give to rethinking and redesigning of learning environments seems applicable on the macro-level of educational policy and designing core curricula: “As the world changes, language teaching is facing growing pressures to rethink and redesign language learning environments to respond to the demands of the ‘knowledge society’.” (p. 147) It is left for the reader to interpret what are the changes referred to here: On one hand, for instance, the knowledge society has created a great number of new affordances

to be utilised in language learning. On the other hand, the knowledge society can also lead to shifts in the set of values prevailing. Thus, the set of values guiding the curriculum design are also challenged.

Thijs & van den Akker (2009) state that curriculum design can begin with any component they have identified as aspects of curriculum: rationale, aims and objectives, content, learning activities, teacher role, materials and resources, grouping, location, time and assessment. Mikan (2013), who defines a curriculum as a “framework for the planning and implementation of educational programmes”, stresses that curriculum design begins with identifying the target group. Salminen (2019) refers to previous research and notes that the form and manner of writing can significantly impact the way the curriculum is interpreted. She stresses that the educational system in Finland places great trust on educated teachers, as they are required not only to interpret and execute, but also further develop the curriculum.

According to Luukka et al. (2008), the foreign language education in Finland is strongly governed by national and school-specific curricula, in addition to textbooks and national tests and examinations (p. 98). Vitikka et al. (2016) give the Finnish NCC two central roles: On one hand, it is an administrative document for the purpose of steering educational institutions. On the other hand, it is a tool designed to support the pedagogical development of teachers. Thus, the core curriculum provides means to enable and manage educational change (p. 83). While this section has focused on the process and guiding principles of creating the curricula, it should be noted that this process is merely the first step of enforcing educational change. As Skinnari and Nikula (2017) point out, “no new curriculum becomes a vivid reality without teachers as agents of change” (p. 224). In addition, they argue that implementing the ideas of a curriculum renewal is a community effort (p. 242). Riekkö (2016) makes similar observations while noting that the historical bodies of individual participants of formal education – be them teachers or parents – have a central role in creating change: Riekkö explains that change can be initiated by one individual, but unlearning old traditions requires introducing change to the community as a whole. As a result, changing these old traditions, e.g. conventions, agreements and

practices, is slow, despite the core curricula emphasizing “change within the entire learning culture” (p. 168). Vitikka et al. (2016) summarise the three ideas the current Finnish curriculum system is based on according to The Finnish National Agency for Education (EDUFI), the external authority in charge of the national core curricula: management by goals set in legislation and core curricula, autonomy of local education providers and recognition of teachers as experts developing different approaches to schoolwork. The following paragraphs will provide more insight on the process of creating national core curricula in Finland, in addition to highlighting recent changes in foreign language education.

General upper secondary schools in Finland provide general education for both the youth (16 to 18 years) and adults. In youth education the syllabus for the 3-year programme includes a minimum of 75 courses. The basic requirement for enrollment is the 9-year comprehensive education. Secondary education is decreed by legislation and national core curricula. The national core curriculum for general upper secondary education is prepared and approved by EDUFI. The usual timespan for these curricula are ten years – exceptions, however, have taken place. The national core curriculum includes contents, goals, guidelines for evaluation and descriptions of different aspects of education for both the educational structure as a whole and for individual subjects. The curricula are formed in cooperation with different stakeholders, such as representatives of education providers, teachers and students.

Education providers base their individual curricula on the national core curriculum. The local curriculum is expanded with local practices in terms of e.g. evaluation, independent studying, cooperation with other education providers and additional courses provided. Like the national core curriculum, the local curriculum is also formed in cooperation with stakeholders, after which it is approved by the education provider – by the local education committee when the education provider is a municipality (83 % of general upper secondary schools) or other governing body such as the board of trustees when the provider is private. Salminen (2018) says that the purpose of local curricula is to express,

clarify and execute objectives that are seen important both nationally and locally. Together the NCC and the local curriculum are meant to ensure the quality of teaching and education.

The current national core curriculum for upper secondary school was approved in 2015, which led to the implementation of new curricula in the beginning of school year 2016-2017. Due to delays in the political handling of Government Decree on Lesson Hour Distribution, which serves as a basis for the curriculum, the process as a whole was extremely hasty. Narrow timetable only allowed a moderate update to the national core curriculum and no major changes were made. This was one of the reasons why the Finnish government decided on a reform for upper secondary education in April 2017. The *Uusi lukio* (“New General Upper Secondary Education”) reform led to new legislation for general upper secondary education, which in turn led to a need to update the core curriculum as well.

The process to renew the national core curriculum began after major changes were made to the legislation decreeing general upper secondary education in 2018. The work progressed in subject-specific working groups and their collective seminars. The NCC was approved in 2019. Education providers are currently drafting their own curricula, which will be implemented gradually in the beginning of the autumn term 2021. According to its preface, the goal of the new core curriculum is to support the students’ wellbeing, strengthen their preparedness for further education and working life, and to support the students’ individual needs and learning. The most profound changes on a practical level were the introduction of transversal competences and a new modular structure of study units.

Transversal competences are a tool to integrate general upper secondary education. According to Lehtikoinen (2019), EDUFI’s Head of Unit of General upper secondary education and basic education in the arts, transversal competences aim to promote the mission of general upper secondary education, which has to do with general knowledge

and abilities, as well as creating a profound and caring approach to the society and its phenomena. The transversal competences determined in the NCC include knowledge and abilities in well-being, interaction, interdisciplinarity and creativity, as well as in societal, ethical, environmental, global and cultural topics. According to the NCC, the students develop their knowledge and abilities in transversal competences in each subject and study unit. They are also a part of assessment of each study unit.

The new modular structure introduced in the NCC 2019 is intended to promote the integration of different subjects. Whereas in the current NCC 2015 the subjects are divided into distinct and commensurate courses, the new unit, or module, can vary from one to three study credits. The education provider has the authority to decide how the teaching is organised into study units, which can comprise of one or several modules. It is noteworthy that already in the current NCC 2015 foreign language education takes integration to different subjects into account (p. 110) by noting that subject boundaries can be crossed during any courses. However, the level of ambition is significantly lower than in the updated version, where EDUFI provides a more detailed description of the practices of combining different modules, for instance, in terms of assessment: if the study unit consists of several modules from the same subjects, the student will receive one grade, whereas if the study unit consists of modules from different subjects, the assessment is executed for each of the subjects.

The goal of assessment in foreign language education stated in the NCC 2019 is to support the development of the student as an agent or a user of a foreign language. The NCC 2019 explicitly states that diverse assessment and encouraging feedback support the student's self-efficacy and strengthen their study motivation. The assessment is directed at skills related to communication, interpreting and producing texts, as well as cultural and linguistic diversity (p. 178). Studying skills, such as developing studying strategies and other methods of working that enhance learning, are also a part of the assessment. A key instrument to be used in assessment is the proficiency level scale for a developing language (FINSS), which is a Finnish application of the Common European

Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). CEFR is an international standard for language ability, which according to the Council of Europe provides tools “for the development of language curricula, programmes of teaching and learning, textbooks and assessment instruments”. According to Hildén and Takala (2007) FINSS follows the principles of CEFR but is designed for young learners. For instance, the levels determined in CEFR were further subdivided in order to register smaller advances in proficiency, relevant in the school context. In addition, the levels of CEFR describing the highest proficiency were omitted, since such proficiency was rarely achieved through school studies. It is noteworthy that the expected level of proficiency for English is higher than for other foreign languages of equal syllabus: for English the objective level is B2.1, first stage of independent proficiency, while for other foreign languages the objective level for A syllabus is B1.2, fluent basic proficiency.

The NCC 2019 regards learning as the outcome of the student performing in an active and goal-orientated way: They interpret, analyse and evaluate data and information presented to them in various forms, based on their previous knowledge and experience. They also develop solutions and create new entities by connecting knowledge and skills in a new way. The purpose is to provide guidance and constructive feedback to strengthen the student’s self-confidence and ability to set their own objectives. There are many features in the NCC 2019 which can be connected to both sociocultural and ecological approaches to learning. Firstly, the NCC 2019 emphasizes the social nature of learning, as learning is seen to happen in interaction with other students, teachers, experts and communities in various environments. The principles of mediation, central to socio-cultural theory, is explicitly highlighted in language education. The notions of values as an integral part of all activities is recognised in the NCC 2019: the value base of the core curriculum has its own chapter, describing the various elements it consists of, such as democracy, human rights, equality, and caring, among others. The NCC 2019 decrees that the value base is further elaborated in the local curricula to consider all relevant topics for each upper secondary school.

This thesis does not attempt to give an overall explanation or analysis of how the updated NCC 2019 guides and supports the utilising of informal learning in teaching English. Rather, it is a first glimpse on how these themes occur in the updated NCC 2019, and what has been the motivation behind them. Thus, the aim of the thesis is to clarify what is expected of the teachers and students alike in terms of modern language teaching and learning. As the education providers are at the very moment creating their local curricula and teachers are planning how to adopt the new norms to their teaching and the learning environments provided, the goal is to provide useful observations on how informal learning could be addressed in this work.

## 4 Research approach

This chapter describes the material used in the analysis and the methods used to gather it, along with an account on research ethics. In addition, the chapter will present the main methodology utilised in the analysis, namely, mediated discourse analysis (MDA). The primary source material of the research consists of two expert interviews, which are then examined parallel to the national core curriculum (2019) for foreign languages and advanced syllabus English in general upper secondary education. Connecting the interviews and the NCC 2019 will on one hand provide insight on the motives and aspirations behind the NCC, and on the other hand, offers a possibility to examine the NCC 2019 in connection to social action.

### 4.1 Expert interviews

Two expert interviews were conducted in order to perceive a broader view on the current and future trends of learning English in general upper secondary schools. The interviewees were selected based on their participation in the curriculum process: both interviewees were members in a working group, which was in charge of drafting the sections concerning foreign languages. Both of them also have an extensive background in teaching English and developing foreign language teaching. Their profiles differed slightly, thus ensuring that the interviewees would represent the reality of a classroom, in addition to the perspective of policy development.

The main objective of the interviews was to understand the reasoning behind the contents and goals set in the NCC, and what the interviewees see as the future trends of language learning and teaching. Informal learning was not explicitly discussed. This was a conscious decision when drafting a preliminary list of questions for the interviews, as it was of interest to observe how the theme would present itself without much prompt. However, the interviewees were aware of the topic of the study, which may have



influenced their answering. The questions prepared for each interview differed slightly according to the profile of the interviewee. The questions were mainly open-ended and were not executed very rigorously – new questions arose as the interview progressed, and on some occasions the interviewer presented some remarks.

The interviews were executed via individual videoconferences, which were recorded (audio) and then transcribed for further use. Informed consent was obtained from the interviewees. In line with good research ethics the consent was voluntary, and the form used was adapted so it gave an explicit and specific understanding of the research in question, and how the research data would be discussed (anonymously) and preserved (destroyed after completion of research).

As the English translation of the national core curriculum was not yet published, Finnish version available on the Finnish National Agency for Education's (EDUFI) website was used as the source material. Due to this, there may be some discrepancies in the translations compared to the official translation of EDUFI. Section 3.4 describes the position, contents and process of the NCC in more detail.

#### 4.2 Mediated Discourse Analysis

The main methodological framework of this thesis is mediated discourse analysis (MDA), developed by Ron Scollon in the turn of the 21st century; the term mediated discourse analysis was first used in Scollon's work "Mediated Discourse: the Nexus of Practice" in 2001. The main goal of MDA is to display links between actions and discourses, while proposing that social action is mediated. Scollon (2001a) explains that MDA is a framework to examine questions such as the following: What is the action going on here? What is the role of discourse in this action? Who produces it, why is it used, and what are the motives behind it? Wohlwend (2014) summarises the purpose of MDA as an attempt "to locate and make visible the nexus of practice", which she defines as a mesh of everyday practices and shared meanings acting either as a binding force for communities,

or producing exclusionary effects. According to Wohlrwend, MDA aims to show how these practices are formed of multiple mediated actions, which are afforded by available materials, identities and discourses. Lastly, Wohlrwend notes that MDA reveals how changes in everyday actions can lead to social change in a community's nexus of practice.

S. Scollon and de Saint-Georges (2011) analyse that from a theoretical point of view, MDA has a strong interdisciplinary orientation: They explain it having roots in interactional sociolinguistics, conversation analysis, anthropological linguistics or the ethnography of communication, critical discourse analysis, practice theory, mediated action and activity theory, social semiotics, multimodal discourse analysis and cultural geography. Scollon (2001a, p. 1) himself notes that there is “nothing very new or different about MDA”: He says it is a “program of linkages among other well-established theoretical and methodological approaches”, and “virtually all of the theoretical elements have been proposed and developed in the work of others”. S. Scollon and de Saint-Georges (2011) argue that this combining of frameworks has to do with an attempt to face the complexity of social issues. Indeed, Scollon (2001a, p. 1) explains that MDA is a “position which seeks to keep all of this complexity alive”, aiming for analyses which do not presuppose which actions and discourses are relevant in any given studied case. Jones and Norris (2005) stress that MDA questions the approach where the meaning of a text can be “read” from studying the text alone – instead MDA proposes beginning with action and examining texts as mediational means. Likewise, Wohlrwend (2014) argues that the action orientation of MDA is what distinguishes it from other types of critical discourse analysis.

#### 4.2.1 Key concepts of MDA

Scollon (2001a) lists five concepts central to MDA: mediated action, mediational means, site of engagement, practice, and nexus of practice. In MDA, instead of a discourse or a text, the unit of analysis is mediated action. Scollon gives credit to Wertsch's sociocultural approach to human action as mediated action. Wertsch (1991) sees mediational means

inherently related to action, and argues that disciplines focusing on language and other sign systems in isolation from the mediational means remain at an abstract level of sign systems, rather than exploring human action. Wertsch (1991) in turn refers to the insights of Vygotsky and Bakhtin, whose thoughts on, e.g. the diversity of mediational means (Vygotsky), the social dimension of action, and mediation of human activity by signs (Bakhtin) are in the foundations of his proposals. Scollon reasons that applying the idea of mediated action highlights “the unresolvable dialectic between action and the material means which mediate all social action” (2001a, p. 3).

With mediational means Scollon (2001a) refers to the elements or material objects through which the action is mediated. He clarifies that these means also include the materiality of the social actors, for instance their bodies, dress and movements (p. 4). Scollon and de Saint-Georges (2011) add that mediational means have both inherent affordances and constraints, meaning that certain actions are enabled better than others. In addition, they note that in order for the mediational means to be useful, the individual will have had to internalise their usage at some point of their lives. In addition to mediational means, Scollon and Scollon (2004) use terms like ‘cultural tools’, ‘communicative modes’, ‘semiotic resources’, and ‘resource’ to describe the concept. Wertsch (1991) uses a tool kit analogy to describe the array of mediational means a person has to choose from in any given occasion; Scollon (2001a) describes mediational means as polyvocal, intertextual and interdiscursive.

Site of engagement is the social space where the mediated action occurs (Scollon, 2001). It is a unique moment in life where practices and mediational means come together to make a mediated action the focus of attention (Wohlwend, 2014) or as Scollon himself described (2001, p. 4) “a real-time window that is opened through an intersection of social practices and mediational means (cultural tools)”. These practices Scollon (2001b, p. 149) defines as “a historical accumulation within the habitus/historical body of the social actor of mediated actions taken over his or her life (experience) and which are recognizable to other social actors as ‘the same’ social action.” Put simply, practice in MDA is “recurring

actions usually learned by participating in the everyday social life of a specific community” (S. Scollon and de Saint-Georges, 2011). Scollon (2001b, p. 149) stresses that “practice predates the social actor”. This means that we usually learn the practices of our society, instead of creating new practices on our own.

Finally, nexus of practice is a term Scollon (2001a, p. 5) uses to describe the linking of practices to other practices. These practices can be either discursive or non-discursive, but over time they will form a nexus of practice. Scollon (2001a) explains that the nexus of practice is formed one mediated action at a time, and it is never “finished” as new mediated actions keep completing it. Scollon (2001a) states that the structure is fairly loose and notes that most practices can be linked to a variety of practices in different sites of engagement and among different participants. Therefore, nexus of practice should not be regarded as a regular pattern, but instead “as a network which itself is the basis of the identities we produce and claim through our social actions” (Scollon, 2001a, p. 142). This nexus of practice is what MDA attempts to locate and make visible (Wohlwend, 2014).

#### 4.2.2 Nexus analysis and zone of identification

Scollon and Scollon (2004) developed nexus analysis as the practical research procedure of MDA. At times, these terms are even used interchangeably (Kuure et al. 2016, p. 74). Nexus analysis has three main tasks or phases: engaging, navigating, and changing the nexus of practice. The first phase, engaging the nexus of practice, has to do with identifying the researcher’s relation to the examined community. Scollon and Scollon (2004) state that nexus analysis cannot be done from a distance, but instead the researcher should be regarded as a recognised participant of the nexus. The researcher establishes the social issue to be examined, discovers the social actions and actors, and recognises the exact moments to study. Secondly, navigating the nexus of practice has to do with getting a broader sense of how a social action is influenced by semiotic and discursive cycles. The goal is to study how the social action is connected to other events in the nexus. Lastly, changing the nexus of practice, returns to the goal of MDA argued

by Jones and Norris (2005): promoting social change. This is achieved when the researcher, as the participant of the examined community, recognises the actions they can take in the nexus of practice at hand in order to transform discourses and actions into new discourses and practices.

Jones and Norris (2005) argue that due to the nature of research in mediated discourse analysis being always participatory, it is crucial for the researcher to recognise their own interests and biases. Through careful consideration of one's own interests, a researcher becomes aware of their own priorities, which must then be set aside, and focus attention to the actions, tools and discourses that are "central to the lived experiences of the participants". This is called forming a zone of identification in relation to the studied topic. As mentioned in the introduction to this thesis I have been involved in the process of drafting both the current and the updated NCC from a stakeholder's point of view through my work as the education policy adviser in the Union of Upper Secondary School Students in Finland (SLL). This means that I have participated in the process with an agenda set by my employer. It should be noted, however, that the focus of my work has not been in individual subjects, but rather general upper secondary education and its practices as a whole. Having worked in student organisations for a decade has also led to a strong emphasis on student-centered learning and student participation in general: involving students in the design of the learning process, reacting to student feedback, and providing students the opportunity to explore topics that interest them. Furthermore, my own historical body as a learner of English as a foreign language in the Finnish education system according to the NCC 1994 has most likely provided me with some notions of the topic, some of them probably fairly unconsciously formed. Thus, the attempt is to solely focus on the themes and interests highlighted by the interviewees, while entering my zone of identification, i.e. acknowledging the experiences and interests that may influence my priorities as a researcher, either consciously or unconsciously.

According to Tapio (2013) nexus analysis quite often tends to inspect fairly mundane social actions. However, the analysis of these situations can then be linked to broader

social issues, as nexus analysis operates on two levels: “the micro-analysis of unfolding moments of social interactions” and “broader socio-political-cultural analysis of the relationships among social groups and power interest in the society” (Scollon & Scollon 2004, p. 8). As the main driving force for this thesis was to examine how the changes in the society are considered in the education system, choosing a methodological approach which at its core promotes social change felt only natural. The theoretical approach of MDA can also be used as a tool to examine the complexity at play in promoting educational change. Tapio (2013) says that when applying MDA, “a researcher will analyse the interactional event in question as a nexus of discourses; in other words, looking beyond the situated practice from several viewpoints made available through the analysis of other data collected”. The interviews and the NCC 2019 in itself will provide the opportunity to examine the theme from various points of view: the teacher’s, the learner’s and the education provider’s, for instance. While NCC is by definition a macro-level policy document, MDA and nexus analysis will provide a possibility to consider its manifestations at the micro-level, in any given classroom.

## 5 Analysis and findings: discourses of informal learning in curriculum design

This chapter describes how certain themes and concepts related to informal learning manifest in the expert interviews and the NCC 2019. The analysis focuses on how these topics are discussed in the research material, and what kind of implications these discourses have on the NCC 2019. Both explicit and implicit manifestations will be examined. Special attention will be placed on how the many affordances of informal learning are recognised and discussed, and how they are taken into consideration when determining the learning environments for language education. The analysis will explore how the goals and contents set in the NCC 2019 are linked to the topics the experts view as the challenges and phenomena concerning language learning today, especially in relation to informal learning. The analysis is divided into two main themes, which were identified from the material as having an interface with the research topic: Firstly, in section 5.1, the impact of informal learning on pedagogic choices that have to do with, e.g. learner motivation and learning environments. Secondly, in section 5.2, the recognition of assessment of language proficiency. Lastly, an analysis of the capacity for change the NCC 2019 provides is presented in section 5.3.

### 5.1 The impact of informal learning on pedagogic choices

This section explores different aspects of learning and teaching, which the presence of English in the society affects. In general, the aim is to depict the roles of the teacher and the learner provided by the research material, especially in terms of recognising and utilising the affordances present in the learners' everyday lives.

### 5.1.1 Learner motivation: agency and individuality

Fostering motivation through enforcing student agency is characteristic of the ecological approach to learning; learners need to employ agency in order to create a basis for lifelong learning (Cf. van Lier 2010). Whereas Leppänen et al. (2011) described how the growing possibilities for using English created a need, and thus motivation, to study English, today's possibilities for informal learning can also have an opposite effect. Interviewee A notes the importance of responding to the needs and objectives of the learners in order to maintain and inspire motivation:

(1)

A: "Silloin se näytti, että motivaatio oli tosissaan kadoksissa, joilla oli tapahtunut sitä oppimista paljon koulun ulkopuolella. ... Jos kouluopetuksessa ei pystytä tarpeeksi hyvin tuomaan opiskelijalle niitä tavoitteita esiin – opiskelijallahan on ihan omat tavoitteensa. Opiskelijoiden tavoitteet ovat englannin kielen suhteen muuttuneet eli heille on ykköstavoitteena puhetaitojen saavuttaminen ihan selkeästi."

A: "Then it looked like motivation truly was lost for them, who had learned a great deal outside school. ... If the teaching at school cannot present the objectives for students well enough – after all, the students have their own objectives. The students' objectives have changed in terms of English, i.e. their number one objective clearly is to gain oral skills."

This observation is similar to the remarks of Luukka et al. (2008) who expressed concerns over the practices of school and spare time becoming so differentiated that instead of completing each other, they become completely separate. Understanding the students' own objectives and taking them into account is linked to maintaining the relevance of education from the learner's point of view. The need to strengthen the learners' motivation is explicitly expressed in the section concerning assessment in foreign language teaching. According to the NCC 2019, versatile assessment and encouraging feedback support the student's self-efficacy and strengthen study motivation (p. 177). It is noteworthy that this section is mutual for all foreign languages. Implicitly this formulation does not seem to take into account the phenomenon mentioned by interviewee A: the lack of motivation due to the student's language proficiency **exceeding** the expected level. The premise



stated in the section devoted to advanced syllabus of English emphasises that the compulsory modules take the student's own language skills as the basis of developing language learning skills and communicative strategies (p. 180). Interviewee B highlights that this is meant to ensure that the teaching takes into consideration the learners' individual needs:

(2)

B: "On turhaa opettaa kolmannen persoonan ässää ihmiselle, joka lukee jo filosofiaa englanniksi, ja päinvastoin. Se pitää vaan hajauttaa."

B: "It is pointless to teach the third person singular 's' to a person, who already reads philosophy in English, and vice versa. It just needs to be differentiated."

Subchapter 5.2.1 on recognition of prior learning will return to these discourses on individuality. The NCC 2019 also introduces a new tool, the language profile, which aims to strengthen the idea of acknowledging the learners' individual strengths and areas for development. This can also be interpreted as an attempt to take into account the students' own objectives, and therefore, sources for motivation. Language profile will be more closely examined in subchapter 5.2.2.

### 5.1.2 Learning environments and materials: authenticity and context

The general description of the learning environment and teaching methods for upper secondary school focuses mainly on the physical environment and tools provided by the education provider. The description encourages schools to offer opportunities for learning in cooperation with other education institutions and, e.g. different kinds of organisations and local businesses. While the need to develop versatile learning environments is underlined, utilising for instance the social resources or the leisure time activities of the students is not mentioned. When it comes to foreign language teaching, the explicit notion of "building bridges to the students' language use in the leisure time", which is in the

current NCC 2015 (p. 107) has been removed from the updated version. Instead, making use of diverse learning environments is mentioned in several individual module descriptions for English: The compulsory module *ENA3 English language and culture as a tool of creative expression*, for instance, states that students are guided to utilise their “other studies, learning environments and sphere of life” during the module (p. 182).

Interviewee A strongly stresses the need to utilise a diverse set of affordances. She wishes to challenge the traditional textbook-bound approach in language education:

(3)

A: ... mutta haluaisin kuitenkin että se uusi opetussuunnitelma koettaisiin enemmän niin, että oppikirja on yksi materiaalien joukossa, ei se pääasiallinen lähde, eikä opettaja ole tiedon jakaja tai antaja, vaan opiskelijat hakevat enemmän sitä tietoa. ... Toki jos ajatellaan sitä koulun ulkopuolella opittua ja sen tuomista luokkahuoneeseen, niin sitä on tapahtunut tietenkin jo pitkään, ja nimenomaan taas englannin suhteen. Valitettavasti se on ollut aika – on oikeastaan tuotu niitä välineitä, jonka kautta oppiminen on tapahtunut enemmänkin, mutta nythän ihan selkeästi – ja uuden opetussuunnitelman mukaankin – se on enemmän pedagoginen ratkaisu eli informaali oppiminen ymmärretään pedagogisena ilmiönä. Luokkahuoneessa olisi yhä enemmän niitä elementtejä, että ei opiskella niinkään paljon sitä kieltä, vaan käytetään sitä kieltä oppimisen välineenä.

A: “... but I would like to see the new curriculum seen more so, that the textbook is one among the materials, not the primary source, and the teacher is not a distributor or giver of information, but instead students search for information themselves more. ... Sure if we think about learning outside the school, and bringing it to the class-room, that has been happening for a long time already, and especially in terms of English. Unfortunately it has been pretty – really it has been about the equipment, through which learning has taken place more, but now clearly – and according to the new curriculum – it is more a pedagogic solution, so informal learning is understood as a pedagogic phenomenon. In the classroom, there would be more elements of not studying the language as such, but using it as a tool of learning.”

While the concept of utilising a variety of affordances is evident in this kind of thinking, the theme is not expressed as explicitly in the NCC 2019. This approach resonates with van Lier’s (2004) demand to avoid presenting the learner with a generalisation of a language, but rather have them exposed to language and learning activities, which

showcase the diversity of the language. Accordingly, the objective set for foreign language teaching is that the student “gets to experience a variety of study and language usage environments in the target language” (p. 177). It is up to the teacher to decide how this objective is reached, but the surrounding world being full of opportunities for authentic linguistic environments, creating artificial circumstances within a classroom would be impractical. Furthermore, the stated objective of the first compulsory module *ENA1 Study skills and building of language identity* is to diversify the students’ strategies of studying languages. It should be noted that these strategies might already be quite diverse. Thus, alongside developing these strategies, it would be useful to recognise the existing ones, taking into consideration Luukka’s (2008) observation of the difficulty Finnish students had in perceiving the idea of informal learning outside the traditional classroom.

Creative use of these affordances would also offer an opportunity to cover current issues in language teaching – a wish often expressed by the students. For instance, in a video by the Education Division of the city of Helsinki (Helsingin kasvatus ja koulutus, 2017), an upper secondary school student comments that consecutive courses ought not to be copies of each other, but instead teaching should ‘live in the moment’, taking into consideration the surrounding world and topical issues, as well as the composition of the group. As Pihkala-Posti (2020) observed, most students will welcome the possibility for an authentic communicative situation, and when used in a pedagogically meaningful way they can “support the building of an enthusiastic learning atmosphere and community”, while encouraging learner agency and a positive language learner identity.

Interviewee A discusses the exposure to different kinds of contexts not merely as affordances to be utilised in teaching, but as an overall approach to teaching and studying languages by arguing that learning languages should happen as a by-product of different kinds of activities where language is used:

(4)

A: “Jos ymmärretään vielä se, että kieltä ei opiskella oppikirjoista vaan kielitaitoja opitaan käyttämällä sitä eri tilanteissa ja konteksteissa, eli kielitaitoja opitaan niin kuin oheistuotteina, enemmän omaksuen kuin opiskellen, niin tämä on se aika suuri juttu joka on siellä opetussuunnitelmassa. Tai ainakin mahdollisestaan sellainen – toki se on aina sitten kiinni jokaisesta itsestään, että miten siihen tarttuu.”

A: “And if it would then be understood that one doesn’t study a language out of textbooks, but language skills are learnt by using it in different situations and contexts, meaning language skills are learnt in a way as by-products, more adopting than studying, this is the pretty big thing in the curriculum. Or at least it is made possible - it is up to the teacher then to decide how it is utilised.”

Riekkö (2016) makes similar observations about foreign language education suggesting that language learning and teaching should be seen as a phenomenon requiring cooperation among the learners, teachers, and experts of other disciplines, “as an action, which reaches beyond classroom and schools” (p. 171). This concept is in line with van Lier’s (2004) ecological notion on context being “the heart of the matter”, meaning that context and language define each other.

Spring 2020 saw a radical change of a global scale to the ways different spheres of lives were organised due to the spread of the coronavirus COVID-19. COVID-19 has prompted the governments to push for limitations and practices, which aim to minimize physical contact. In the education sector in Finland, this meant the closing of schools and moving to remote studying and teaching, which utilised various digital platforms. The rapidly changed situation required a great deal of flexibility from both students and teachers, along with other education officials. In general upper secondary education, the remote studying began on March 16th after the government together with the president had declared a state of emergency. The decreed closing of schools lasted until May 13th, after which a recommendation to continue remote studying in secondary education was announced. Most education providers decided to continue organising teaching remotely until the end of the spring term; thus, the duration of remote teaching was altogether 11 weeks. As the interviews were held during the government-decreed restrictions, it was

expected that this theme would arise in the discussions. Both interviewees expressed that the situation is far from ideal, but it has had a silver lining in regard to the development of learning environments:

(5)

A: “Opettajat ovat joutuneet – monet opettajat ovat sitä toki jo paljon aiemminkin tehneet, mutta nekin jotka eivät ole, niin hekin ovat nyt joutuneet – olosuhteiden pakosta ajattelemaan tätä oppimisympäristöä huomattavasti laajemmin ja käyttämään siihen semmoisia menetelmiä, joita he eivät ole aikaisemmin käyttäneet.”

A: “Due to circumstances, teachers have been forced to – sure, many teachers have done it much earlier already, but now those who haven’t have also been forced to – think the learning environment in a much broader sense and use such methods they haven’t used before.”

Interviewee B continues to elaborate that the most crucial change has happened in the mindset re-thinking one’s way of organising teaching has required:

(6)

B: “Mutta jos sen positiivisen haluaa tästä irrottaa, niin kyllä huikeita, huisia harppauksia on otettu – ei niinkään tekniikassa, kyllä siinäkin, mutta siinä ajattelutavassa, mitä on monipuolinen arviointi, miten sitä pitää toteuttaa. Ja joku kokeen asema lukiossa, sitä joudutaan ihan uudelleenarvioimaan kokonaan. Ja tähän perusteet on mun käsittääkseni viimeiset 20 vuotta jo vähän pyrkinyt.”

B: “But if one would like to highlight the positive thing here, then tremendous, terrific leaps have been taken – not so much in terms of technology, though in that too, but in the way of thinking; what is versatile assessment, how should it be executed? And e.g. the position of an examination in the upper secondary school, that needs to be re-evaluated entirely. And this is, to my understanding, something the core curriculum has aimed for the past 20 years.”

Thus far, during the autumn term 2020, instead of a country-wide recommendation, remote studying has been employed regionally where deemed necessary depending on

the local incidence rate of the virus or as a cautionary measure to ensure the execution of the matriculation examination. Early research and questionnaires (FINEEC, 2020) indicate that the sudden transition to remote teaching and studying has not been easy. Indeed, the Finnish government even decided to allocate 17 million euros to “even out the effects of the exceptional circumstances” as according to a release by the Ministry of Education (September 16th, 2020) a learning gap was created during the remote study period. However, it can be assumed that the positive effects discussed by the interviewees focused more on the development of language education in the long term.

## 5.2 Recognition and assessment of language proficiency

As Pollari (2017) defines, the purpose of assessment is, on one hand, to support learning, teaching and studying, and on the other hand, to measure and report learning outcomes. These two approaches, respectively, distinguish formative assessment and summative assessment. This dual nature of assessment continues to be present in the NCC 2019 (p. 45). One of the most central changes in regard to assessment has to do with the new modular structure the NCC 2019 introduces. Whereas until now the grading has been executed for each course at its end, the NCC 2019 determines that when a study unit is composed of several modules from the same subject and syllabus, only one grade is given (p. 46). Interviewee A sees the new modular structure and its effect on assessment procedures as a possibility to develop more long-term assessment focusing on skills rather than knowledge:

(7)

A: “Kuitenkin vain opintojaksoja arvioidaan eli opintojaksojen sisällä pystyisit käymään läpi eripituisia moduuleja ja tarkoitus – minä ainakin ajattelen – hyvä tulos olisi, ettei olisi jatkuvasti sitä kirjojen testaamista, mitä on luettu ja arvosanojen antamista. Koska kieli on kuitenkin taito, ja muutamassa viikossa kielitaito ei hirvittävästi muutu minun ymmärtääkseni \*nauru\*. Katson sen ihan turhaksi, jatkuvan numeron annon ja testaamisen. Me ollaan testattu pikkasen väriä asioita, ja jos ruvettaisiin sitten testaamaan vaan sellaisia pitempiä opintojaksoja, niin se voisi olla enemmän sen

taitojen kehittymisen testausta siinä tapauksessa. Tämän näen moduulien mahdollisuutena, mutta toki tämä on opetuksen järjestäjän käsissä täysin.”

A: “However only study units are assessed, so you could include modules of different length within a study unit, and the point - this is how I see it - a good outcome would be that there wouldn't be continuous testing of books, what has been read, and giving of grades. Because language, after all, is a skill, and language proficiency to my understanding doesn't greatly change in a couple of weeks \*laughter\*. I think it's completely pointless, continuous grading and testing. The focus of testing has been somewhat wrong, and if we would then begin to test kind of longer study units, the testing could then focus more on the development of skills. This I see as a potential brought by the modules, but of course this is completely in the hands of the education provider.”

Another significant change in the assessment has to do with the target of assessment. Whereas the current NCC 2015 states that the targets of assessment are the knowledge and skills of the student, the NCC 2019 adds a third element: also effort is taken into consideration in the assessment (p. 46).

The following subchapters explore the discourses of assessment in regard to informal learning. Pollari (2017) suggested four aspects of assessment in need of further development: “variety in assessment methods and purposes, the anxiety that assessment may cause, feedback and its role, and agency in the assessment process” (p. 104). The discourses will be compared to these recognised areas for development.

### 5.2.1 The effects of informal learning on English skills and RPL

When discussing the effects of informal learning to the language skills of students today, three distinct themes arose in the interviews: the level of English proficiency, the differentiation of skills between the students, and the application of different registers. Both interviewees note how the overall language proficiency has strengthened – likewise, both continue to add how this has created a distinct skills' gap between the student body, i.e. those students who use English in their spare time have managed to strengthen their

language skills, thus providing them an increasing head start compared to their peers who are not as engaged in English activities:

(8)

A: "Kyllähän englannin kielen taidot ovat kohentuneet kovasti. Mutta toisaalta myöskin eriytyneet, kiulu, juopa opiskelijoiden välillä on kasvanut. Ennen kaikkea se näkyy englannissa."

A: "English skills have really improved a great deal. But then again, they have also differentiated, the gap, the chasm between students has increased. Above all this can be seen in English."

Interviewee B adds that the general upper secondary school has been slow to react to this phenomenon:

(9)

B: "Toki englantia porskuttaa hyvin, mutta englannissakin on se ongelma, että siellä on vähän kahtia jakautunutta se osaaminen, ja lukio perinteisenä opinahjona ei ole hirveän hyvin pystynyt vastaamaan siihen englannin kahtia- ei se ole kahtiajakautunut, se on kakskyttyräinen se englannin osaamisprofiili, siellä on niitä jotka informaalin oppimisen myötä – näin voi kai sanoa – vetää jo sellaisia sfäärejä siinä englannissa, että se kouluoppiminen laahaa perässä."

B: "Sure, English is doing well, but it too is showing a problem, the skills are a little polarised, and the upper secondary school as a traditional seat of learning has not been able to respond very well to this polarisation - actually it is not polarisation, the skills profile in English is two-humped: there are those who due to informal learning - supposedly this can be said - are achieving such high spheres in English, that the school learning is trailing well behind."

One solution suggested by the interviewees and the NCC 2019 is a strong emphasis on individual learning paths. For instance, the general objectives for foreign language education state that the student should be able to recognise their own strengths and areas of development as language learners. Individual and flexible learning paths, and the



guidance and support they require, are also mentioned in the preface of the NCC 2019 as an overall means to achieve the objectives set for the general upper secondary education reform. The concept of individuality can also be noted in the wording of the NCC 2019: Education legislation and curricula are usually formulated in third person singular when referring to the students. This is interesting when considered that the learning approach of Finnish education system stresses the social nature of learning as described in section 3.4. Whatever the reason for the use of third person singular is – possibly to stress the rights and responsibilities of each individual – it is interesting to consider its implications on how individual learning paths are taken into account in language education. As Salminen (2018) suggested, the form and manner of writing can impact the way the curriculum is interpreted. Thus, it could be argued that the use of third person singular in the NCC provides an implicit encouragement to support teaching that enables an individual approach to language learning.

In addition to being exposed to English in their spare time, another key factor influencing the general upper secondary school students' starting level in English is, of course, the basis provided by comprehensive education. Interviewee B predicts that by the time those pupils who are now starting their comprehensive education are entering the general upper secondary school, the ever-strengthening starting level of English must be taken into account more vigorously:

(10)

A: "...mutta toisaalta perusopetuksessa tulee nyt kaksi vuosiviikkotuntia enemmän kielenopetusta, ja tottakai se on varmaan 85 % enemmän englantia, mitä siellä enemmän opiskellaan – kun ne oppilaat alkaa tulla lukioon, niin meidän pitää varmaan katsoa ihan uudelleen tää kokonaisuus, että mistä tässä on oikeastaan kyse."

A: ...but then again, in comprehensive education they are adding two weekly lessons per year to language teaching, and of course it will probably mean something like 85 % of English, which will be studied more – when those pupils are starting to enter upper

secondary school we will probably have to reanalyse this (language teaching) as a whole, what it is actually all about.”

Recognition of prior learning (RPL) is a tool provided by the current education legislation to take into account the student’s existing competences. In general, if a student has already mastered the contents and objectives of a study unit, they would then be exempted from this study unit. Interviewee B interestingly argues that this approach is not necessarily valid in English as a foreign language education:

(11)

B: “Mutta se ajatus osaamisen tunnistamisesta ja tunnustamisesta pitää ottaa tosissaan, mutta just enkun kohdalla, kun lukiokoulutuksen tehtävä on oman kielitaidon parantaminen, niin silloin tunnistamisen ja tunnustamisen pitäisi johtaa siihen, että ei niinkään anneta opintoja anteeksi, vaan katsotaan mitä jo osaat ja sitten pistetään sut parantamaan omaa osaamistasi.”

B: “But the idea of recognising and acknowledging must be taken seriously, but in terms of English, as the objective of upper secondary education is to improve one’s own language proficiency, the end result of recognition should lead to not so much to exemption from studies, as to seeing what you already can, and then make you improve your own proficiency.”

As mentioned, the notion of register is another area of language proficiency the interviewees say has been affected by the increase of informal learning. This is presumably due to the nature of the sites of informal learning: quite often they have to do with popular culture or networks formed around a mutual interest or hobby. Thus, the register used is fairly casual.

(12)

A: “Tässä ihan selvästi näkyy, ikävä kyllä taas, että puhekielinen informaali oppiminen on siirtynyt sinne kieleen, että ei sitä rekisteriä oikein tunnisteta. Presidentille kirjoitetaan kirje että ‘hei Sauli, hello Sauli how are you’, että se on yleistä.”

A: “It is clearly shown, regrettably, that the colloquial informal learning has been adopted in the language, that the register really isn’t recognised. Writing a letter to the president ‘hello Sauli, how are you’, that is quite common.”

Interviewee A says that the attempt has been to react to this challenge in the NCC 2019. Indeed, the concept and application of different registers is a frequently mentioned objective of foreign language education in the NCC 2019. For example, the overall mission of foreign languages instructs that the student should develop their language proficiency from an everyday language towards a more academic language proficiency during their studies. In addition, the student will become experienced in broad linguistic usage in different contexts. The objectives and contents set for English continue to elaborate the teaching of different registers in nearly every module. For instance, *ENA2 English as a global language* includes learning about styles of communication in different media, and *ENA6 English in further education and working life* describes how “the student develops their skills to express themselves in formal contexts as well”. The application of different registers has also been a recurring theme in the matriculation examination: instead of merely providing a topic for an essay, the assignments that have to do with production quite often describe a specific context or audience for the essay (see, e.g. YLE Abitreenit 2019; 2020).

Being able to use the appropriate register is also connected to the concept of mediation or constructive interaction, as the term is explained in the NCC 2019. Mediation is the particular focus of module *ENA2 English as a global language*. It is also noteworthy that the general objectives of foreign language education in terms of cultural and linguistic diversity stress that in a global world the goal is not to attain exemplary native-level language proficiency, but to create constructive interaction and mutual understanding. It can be expected that this approach would resonate in those students who are motivated to develop their language skills in order to operate in various international networks outside school.

## 5.2.2 Language profile

Language profile is a new concept in general upper secondary education. As mentioned earlier in 5.1.1, language profile is designed to be a tool for the student to become aware of their strengths and personal areas for development. In addition, the NCC 2019 refers to it as a tool to strengthen the basis for continuous language learning created in comprehensive education. Students are supposed to explore themselves as users, persons with skills and learners of languages – the profile will include all the languages the student studies or otherwise has knowledge in, including their native language. The goal is to recognise all language skills and all features of language proficiency, such as different registers. The compilation of language profile is included in the first compulsory module *ENA1 Study skills and building of language identity*. It will later be updated during the last compulsory module *ENA6 English in further education and working life* from the point of view of future needs of the student. In addition to these two check-points, the purpose is to update the language profile as the learning process progresses. Though it is not explicitly mentioned in the NCC 2019, based on the interviews, the language profile is a significant opportunity to make informal learning visible. The website to support the implementation of the language profile, currently under construction, indeed, explicitly describes its role in building a bridge between formal education and informal learning: “Language learning skills in the language profile are approached by considering one’s own strengths and areas of development as a language learner and by making visible the links between language skills acquired at school and outside school.” (Kieliprofiili, n.d.) Interviewee A notes that the profile is also a possibility to form an overall picture of language learning:

(13)

A: “Kun lukion kielen opetus on vanhastaan kuitenkin aika sirpaleista, niin nyt olisi sellainen kokonaisvaltainen käsitys siitä tapahtumasta, että se on jatkuva prosessi. Se alkaa jostakin, ja se ei pääty koskaan, vaan sitä tehdään ja se kehittyy. ... Ja tässä kieliprofiilissahan tulee nimenomaan tämä informaali oppiminen, sehän siinä nyt kartoitetaan myös.”

A: “As the language teaching in upper secondary school is traditionally quite fragmented, now there would be an overall conception of the act, that it is a continuous process. It begins somewhere, and it never ends, but instead it’s done, and it develops. ... And, in this language profile, in particular the informal learning, it will be mapped too.”

The language profile has four sections: mapping of language skills, description of language learning skills and strategies, samples of language skills, and certificates of language skills. The NCC 2019 does not give a detailed description of the structure or contents of the language profile, which leaves much room for local consideration. However, EDUFI is at the moment producing guidelines and support material for teachers to integrate the language profile in their teaching. The intention is to produce examples of possible forms or different segments of the language profile. EDUFI will also create a certificate design for an oral examination, which can be attached to the language profile. In addition, EDUFI will provide information on possible collaboration projects it is going to start or fund in order to unify the practices related to the language profile. It seems that the material is designed to illustrate what the language profile can be, rather than providing ready models. Thus, the teachers will have a possibility to further develop the concept. It is significant to note that while the NCC 2019 leaves a great deal of freedom for the teacher in its implementation, it indeed is a norm, and as such a compulsory element of foreign language education in general upper secondary education. In contrast, the European Language Portfolio (*kielisalkku*, ‘language briefcase’) with a fairly similar motivation in comprehensive education is optional.

Lastly, the NCC 2019 requires that during the last compulsory modules attention is paid to strengthen the skills the student can make use of in order to continue developing his or her language proficiency independently in the future. The language profile can also be a tool for this:

(14)

B: "Tämä kieliprofiili ajatellaan, että jos on sellainen työkalu, millä opiskelija pystyy todentamaan ja näyttämään osaamistaan, niin tottakai sitä voi hyödyntää ihan missä vaan ja myöskin lukion jälkeen. Sitten sille ei loppua näy, missä kaikkialla sitä kieliprofiilia voidaan hyödyntää, jos siitä saadaan kunnan työkalu ja se hyväksytään, ja sitähän tässä ollaan nyt rakentamassa."

B: "The idea of the language profile is, that if there is a tool, the student can use to prove and display his or her skills, then of course it could be utilised anywhere and after upper secondary education too. There really is no end to it, where the language profile could be used, if we can build a proper tool out of it, and if it is accepted, and that is what we're doing at the moment."

According to Reinders' (2011) description on the necessary characteristics of materials designed to develop autonomous learning skills, the language profile indeed seems to be a promising tool. The first stage to foster learning has to do with identifying learning needs. To support autonomous learning the learner must identify his or her personal areas for development. After that the learners must set their own goals for learning – Reinders (2011) notes that these can be relatively flexible, as they often are connected to the circumstances and spheres of life of the learner at any given time. Both these stages are central approaches in the language profile, and in the premise of foreign language education of the NCC 2019 in general. The next stages, planning learning, selecting materials and selecting learning strategies, are key elements of language learning skills and strategies, which according to EDUFI website can be one segment of the language profile, and which is explicitly described as a relevant reflection in order to support the language learning strategies needed in "life after upper secondary school". The sixth learning stage Reinders lists is practice. In teacher-directed learning this would mean, for instance, different kinds of exercises and activities provided by the teacher. In autonomous learning the main source for practice is language use, which Reinders (2011) calls implementation. Whereas it is fairly evident that the focus of the language profile is in recognising learners' language skills and providing a tool for personal development, it is not clear whether it as such encourages language use. However, the objectives set for foreign language education as a whole strongly emphasise the role of encouraging the

use of language (p. 176-177). Moreover, the first module is designed to make the student accustomed to studying using the target language, English, as much as possible. If the language profile is adopted as the main tool for creating foundations for language learning after formal education, this aspect would need to be taken into account. The last learning stages are monitoring progress, and assessment and revision, which according to Reinders (2011) require skills of self-monitoring and self-assessment from the learner. According to EDUFI guidelines this again is an explicitly mentioned role for the language profile: “The language profile is, first and foremost, a self-assessment tool, which the student is responsible for.” It would therefore seem that the language profile, in addition to the general emphases of the NCC 2019, would indeed provide good readiness for autonomous learning during and after upper secondary education. This could then strengthen the understanding of how learning can take place outside formal education, which is a concept Finnish learners of language are not very familiar with (Cf. Luukka, 2008).

It is worth noticing that the guidelines EDUFI has thus far published on the language profile, strongly emphasise the learner’s responsibility in developing their language skills both during and after general upper secondary education. This is consistent with the general description of the studying methods in the NCC 2019: “The teaching and studying methods in upper secondary school are designed to promote the student’s active working and development of collaboration skills. The student is guided to plan their studying, to assess their working skills and to take responsibility for their own learning.” (p. 20) However, it should be noted that the teacher will continue to have an important role in designing the learning process.

As mentioned, a support website for the implementation of the language profile is currently under construction. At the time of writing this, the website is an extensive collection of various exercises designed to support the local development of the language profile. Interestingly, the section targeted for the students containing the exercises are in Finnish. This would seem to be in contrast with the module *ENA1 Study skills and building*

*of language identity*, during which the language profile is first introduced – after all, one purpose of this module is to familiarise the student with language learning that uses the target language, namely, English, as much as possible (p. 180).

### 5.2.3 The effects of informal learning on assessment

According to the NCC 2019, in foreign language education the assessment and other feedback is targeted at the command of skills and central contents required by the syllabus (p. 178). The proficiency level scale for a developing language (FINSS) can be used as a support for the assessment process, when applicable. FINSS sets the objectives for language learning in terms of interaction skills, interpretative skills and productive skills, and is based on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). For advanced syllabus of English, the objective for all these aspects is set as B2.1, which is described as the basic level of independent language proficiency (p. 377). It is noteworthy that for other foreign languages the objective level for equivalent advanced syllabus is lower for each aspect of assessment. These differing principles of the expected learning outcomes were discussed with interviewee B, who said that this discrepancy between languages was discussed in the curriculum process:

(15)

B: “Se on tosi kaksteräinen miekka kyllä. Sitä puhuttiin jonkin verran meidän ryhmissä, no englannista ei kyllä käytännössä puhuttu, mutta tuotiin sitäkin näkemystä esiin, että onko se oikein, että kun tiedetään, että kouluissa on tällanen tuntimäärä, jota pystytään A-kielenä opiskelemaan, niin onko se oikein, että tavoitetaso on tavallaan korkeampi, kuin se ehkä jonkinlaisena teorian tasolla oleva maksimi, jota siellä koulussa voidaan oppia.”

B: “It really is a double-edged sword. It was discussed in our groups to some extent, well not about English in practice, but that view was also brought forward, if it’s fair, knowing the lessons hours for A syllabus, so is it fair, that the objective level is in a way higher, than maybe the theoretical maximum, which can be achieved at school.”



Thus, it seems evident that the substantial possibilities for informal learning of English compared to other foreign languages has led to an educational policy requiring a higher proficiency of English although this is not explicitly mentioned in the NCC 2019 itself. Interviewee B further elaborates the significance of learning outside the school when reaching for the highest grades in the matriculation examination:

(16)

B: “Ja nyt on minun mielipiteestäni vain kyse, ehkä aika educated guess, kun olen niitä opiskelijoitakin aika pitkään nähnyt koulussa, mutta sanoisin että enkun laudaturia et saa kyllä pelkällä kouluosaamisella.”

B: “And now this is only my opinion, maybe more of an educated guess, but based on seeing the students for quite some time in school, but I’d say that one doesn’t get a laudatur (highest grade) in English based on school teaching only.”

The choice of words, *pelkkä kouluosaaminen*, ‘mere school knowledge’ reveals that in foreign language education informal and formal learning complement each other. Pollari (2017) discovered that there is a significant minority of students who find the assessment in English as a foreign language education disempowering for different reasons. What happens to one’s sense of empowerment if the objectives of a subject cannot be achieved during the lesson hours allocated for the subject in formal education? Should the objectives consider the informal learning raising the starting level of the students, or be set according to the lesson hours of formal education? Interviewee B argued that lowering the objectives would not be expedient:

(17)

B: “Mutta jos sitä (tavoitetaso) sitten laskettaisiin, niin ei sekään ole ihan hyvä, koska silloin annettaisiin mahdollisuus sille, että oikeasti koulussa ei tarttiskaan oppia mitään. Eli tavoitteiden pitää aina olla ehkä hiukan haastavampia kuin mitä se todellisuus saattaisi olla.”

B: “But if it (objective level) would then be lowered, that wouldn’t be good either, because then we’d leave open the possibility of not being required to learn anything at school. So the objectives must always be maybe a little bit more challenging than what the reality might be.”

Interviewee B continues to note that the previously discussed language profile (5.2.2) is intended to offer a parallel opportunity to demonstrate the kind of language skills that otherwise are not necessarily recognised in assessment or matriculation examination. This could be interpreted as a way to strengthen the sense of empowerment, which other features of assessment could possibly weaken. As Pollari (2017) explained, there is a significant difference between empowered and disempowered students in terms of engaging in self-feedback – she argued that developing the students’ skills used in reflection, self-assessment and self-feedback would then be necessary in order to support their sense of empowerment. As mentioned, the EDUFI guidelines for the language profile stress its function as a self-assessment tool. Thus, it would seem that the language profile could prove useful from the point of view of empowering the students in the assessment process, as well.

### 5.3 Core curriculum and capacity for change

The previous sections aimed to give an account of the intersecting practices producing the site of engagement, or the real-life moment, in which the NCC 2019 operates. The nexus of practice in regard to foreign language education is a complex network. On one hand, there is the macro-level educational policy, including making legislation and designing the NCC. The curriculum design in teacher education, and the practices of educating new language teachers can be regarded equally central. On the other hand, there is the micro-level reality of the classroom, the practices of organising the teaching and facilitating individual lessons, for instance. All these mentioned practices in turn have links to practices such as assessment procedures, developing learning environments and fostering student motivation to name a few. These practices were also the ones that were highlighted in the research material.

Wiles (2009) argued that curriculum design is always value-laden, as it requires making choices on what is intended to be learnt during education. To make these choices the participants of a curriculum process must analyse and decide what is important at a given moment in time and space. Thus, the NCC 2019 is a product of its time: this means that it takes into account the surrounding society and circumstances. The interviewees described, for instance, how the assessment of language skills has adjusted due to the possibilities of learning English outside formal education. Similar choices probably would not have been relevant if the position of English in the Finnish society were different, less dominant. The discourses in the interviews and in the NCC 2019 itself are also shaped by the background and history of the previous curriculum processes, and those of comprehensive education, which forms the formal basis for foreign language education in general upper secondary education.

When evaluating the role of the NCC 2019 in changing the nexus of practice – foreign language education – it is relevant to return to the central roles of a core curriculum. As Vitikka et al. (2016) determined, the national core curriculum provides means to enable and manage educational change (p. 83). This function of the NCC 2019 – enabling and managing change – was also noted by interviewee B:

(18)

B: “Oikeastaan ajattelen, että kyllähän me sinne ollaan rakennettu sellaiset ansat, että siellä on pakko jotain miettiä. When there’s a will there’s a way, kyllä aina saadaan systeemit toimimaan sellaisella minimitasolla, jos niin halutaan. Mutta pakko siellä on ottaa kantaa näihin velvoitteisiin, mitkä sinne perusteisiin on kirjattu.”

B: “Actually I think that we have built the traps in there, so it is necessary to think about something. ‘When there’s a will there’s a way’, there’s always a way to get the systems working at a minimum level, when desired. But they are required to take a stand on these obligations, which have been written in the core curriculum.”

Thus, the NCC 2019 forms the basis for promoting change in regards to the themes examined in this thesis. The next step is to engage teachers as agents of this change,

which Skinnari and Nikula (2017) argue to be a prerequisite for ensuring the implementation of the ideas of a curriculum renewal.

## 6 Discussion and conclusion

This thesis dealt with the interface of informal and formal learning exploring how a phenomenon present in the society and learners' everyday life impacts the education system. Specifically, the goal was to examine how the presence of English in, for instance, media, culture and networks have been taken into account in the goals and contents of the core curriculum for foreign languages and especially advanced syllabus of English in general upper secondary education. Mediated discourse analysis and nexus analysis was employed when exploring the discourses of the most recent national core curriculum through the document itself and two expert interviews. While the focus of this study was on the macro-level of curriculum and curriculum design, the discussion of the findings aimed to consider the implications the NCC 2019 would have when designing teaching and learning in the micro-level of the classroom. While navigating the nexus of curriculum design from the perspective of informal learning it became evident that the consequences of learning English outside formal education lead to both benefits and challenges. Furthermore, both the benefits and the challenges must be recognised and acknowledged in the process of curriculum design. Based on the expert interviews this has been the case in terms of NCC 2019. This conclusory chapter summarises the topics that were raised in the analysis of the research material and suggests topics for future research to further understand the phenomenon and discourses of informal learning in formal education.

Based on the expert interviews, the benefits of informal learning can be seen in particular in the level of language proficiency: the use of English during the students' spare time has a positive impact on the starting level of the students. Previous research indicates that also the quality of activities where informal learning takes place has an effect on the achieved proficiency (Cf. Sundqvist, 2011). The core curriculum has reacted to the strengthening of language proficiency. In particular, the positive effect of informal learning on the level of proficiency can be observed in the level of expected learning outcomes

and the assessment procedures: the expected level of proficiency for advanced syllabus English is higher compared to other advanced syllabus of foreign languages despite the lesson hours per year being equal. The expert interviews indicate that this is due to the possibility students have to complement their formal education of English as a foreign language with the acquiring of language skills from extracurricular, or informal use of English. While the strengthening of language proficiency as a whole can be seen as a positive phenomenon, it can be debated whether it is fair to set expectations higher than the syllabus alone would allow. As Pollari (2017) said, many students find assessment disempowering for different reasons. It is worth contemplating how these students will experience assessment, when the demands are not set exclusively according to learning made possible in formal education. This might be one of the reasons the NCC 2019 introduces a new aspect of studying languages as an assessment criterion. Whereas the current NCC 2015 states that the targets of assessment are the knowledge and skills of the student, the NCC 2019 adds a third element: also effort is taken into consideration in the assessment.

The interviewees explained that due to some students engaging more with extracurricular use of English than others, the language proficiency of the students has polarised. Due to this, the NCC 2019 and the experts emphasise that the fundamental principle of the core curriculum for English as a foreign language is that each student develops their language proficiency from their own premise. Individual learning paths and the social nature of learning co-exist as discourses in the curriculum design, as the learning approach of the NCC 2019 stresses that learning takes place in interaction with others. The concept of individuality can also be noted in the wording of the NCC 2019, as education legislation and curricula are usually formulated in third person singular when referring to the students. Salminen (2018) suggested that the form and manner of writing can impact the way the curriculum is interpreted. Will the use of third person singular in the NCC provide an implicit encouragement to pedagogic choices that enable an individual approach to language learning? It is important, however, to maintain a balance between these approaches.

Based on the interviews, a key instrument to enforcing individual learning paths is the introduction of the new language profile, which is intended to be a tool for the student to become aware of their strengths and personal areas for development. When compiling their personal language profiles, the students are supposed to explore themselves as users, persons with skills and learners of languages. The profile will include all the languages the student studies or otherwise has knowledge in, including their native language. The goal is to recognise all language skills and all features of language proficiency, such as different registers. The interviewees recognised its potential in making informal learning of English visible. The website created as support material for the implementation of language profile states: “The language profile approaches language learning skills by discussing strengths and points of development as a language learner, and making connections to language skills acquired inside and outside of school.” While the language profile is expected to consist of four sections – mapping of language skills, description of language learning skills and strategies, samples of language skills, and certificates of language skills – the exact execution is not decreed leaving the teacher a great deal of opportunities to further develop the concept. Based on Reinders’ (2016) description of characteristics for materials designed to develop autonomous learning skills, the language profile indeed seems to be a promising tool, thus strengthening the skills and mindset for learning outside formal education during and after secondary education.

It was presumed in the introductory chapter that taking the surrounding society and its events and phenomena into consideration when designing teaching would be particularly fruitful for foreign languages, as there are no boundaries to the context where a language is presented. Indeed, the traditional approach with a strong emphasis on text-books was questioned in the interviews, and the significance of context was stressed: learning a language should happen as a by-product of other activities, which is a view closely linked to van Lier’s (2004) notions on the ecological approach to learning. Findings by Pihkala-Posti (2020) support the use of authentic communicative situations in foreign language

education: she argues that when used in a pedagogically meaningful way they can “support the building of an enthusiastic learning atmosphere and community”. In addition, this approach encourages learner agency, which in turn is linked to motivation, as argued by van Lier (2010). Interestingly, making use of authentic communicative situations and the learners’ extracurricular use of English is not explicitly mentioned in the NCC 2019, neither in the common chapters describing the learning environments, nor the chapters on foreign languages. Instead, the NCC 2019 strongly emphasises the significance of diverse learning and language usage environments in general, leaving much room for consideration for the teacher when designing local curriculum and teaching. The interviews coincided with the exceptional circumstances due to the COVID-19 pandemic: restrictions set by the government to prevent the spreading of the virus required the schools to transfer to distance learning. While the situation was far from ideal the interviewees saw, in the long term, possibilities to expand the concept of learning environments – not merely in terms of using technology but adopting a mindset for re-thinking how teaching is organised.

Based on the interviews, informal learning due to extracurricular use of English has also led to certain challenges: both expert interviewees mentioned the inability to recognise and use appropriate registers, and the use of fairly colloquial language regardless of the situation, presumably due to the casual sites of informal learning. The NCC 2019 aims to take this widely recognised phenomenon into account, as the concept and application of different registers is a frequently mentioned objective of foreign language education in the NCC 2019: the student should develop their language proficiency from an everyday language towards a more academic language proficiency during their studies, and nearly every module continues to elaborate on the use of different registers. Understanding and applying appropriate register has to do with the concept of mediation, which the interviewees discussed as a crucial approach in foreign language education. The NCC 2019 defines mediation as constructive interaction, emphasizing the significance of understanding cultural and linguistic diversity. Interestingly, this emphasis has changed the paradigm of foreign language education altogether: instead of pursuing an exemplary



native-level language proficiency, the NCC 2019 stresses creating constructive interaction and mutual understanding.

The analysis revealed that many of the themes that have to do with informal learning were considered in the drafting process. Some of these considerations can be read in the NCC 2019 explicitly, while some are expressed implicitly, leaving room for interpretations for the teacher. It is worth considering how this affects the desired action in teaching. The Finnish education system has a strong tradition of providing teachers with much freedom to plan their teaching, choosing the learning environments and teaching methods, for instance. This can be one of the reasons why the NCC 2019 at times avoids extensive and precise wordings. Based on the interviews, attention should be focused on the development of the language profile, which seems to be intended to serve as a solution for many of the challenges facing foreign language education. The goal should be in creating a tool that will genuinely support the learning process, instead of a compulsory formality.

The validity of the findings in this thesis can be analysed from various points of view. Firstly, a wider sample of interviewees involved in the curriculum process could have deepened the analysis. However, the two experts interviewed represented different approaches and positions, thus ensuring that the interviews were not one-sided. As members of the curriculum design group they were core participants in the process, thus ensuring the significance of their views. Despite their different roles similar discourses presented in their separate interviews, indicating that the observations and concerns presented are relevant in foreign language education. The analysis, and especially connecting the research method and the material, would have benefitted from a more careful consideration of the focus and contents of the interviews. As discussed earlier this thesis did not aim to provide a thorough and overall analysis of the phenomenon in general upper secondary education. The nexus of curriculum design and learning is an extremely complex one. Most crucially, as Skinnari and Nikula (2017) argued, “no new curriculum becomes a livid reality without teachers as agents of change” (p. 224). Thus,

simply analysing the discourses present in the document and its drafting process does not allow for all-encompassing explanations or conclusions. Therefore, this thesis should be regarded as a first glimpse on the topic, providing one description of how informal learning is presented and taken into account in the NCC 2019, both as a document and as a process.

Analysing the research material evoked some suggestions for further research. Firstly, the interviewees noted that the choices made in recent education policies most likely will lead to an ever-strengthening starting level of language proficiency, which then continues to challenge curriculum design in the future. It will be interesting to observe how the curriculum and its objectives are developed once the pupils now beginning in comprehensive education enter upper secondary education. It would also be an interesting topic for future research: what are the mechanisms and structures required for the development of the core curricula as a whole, ensuring a continuum from comprehensive education to secondary education? If the polarisation recognised by the interviewees continues to deepen, the equation will be a challenging one. Secondly, it was noted in the interviews that students have their own objectives when it comes to acquiring language skills, and quite often nowadays these objectives have to do with oral skills. As mentioned earlier the overall goal of language proficiency in the core curricula has shifted from exemplary native-level language proficiency to creating constructive interaction as an English as a lingua franca speaker. It would be interesting to investigate how this resonates with those students who are motivated to develop their language skills in order to operate in various international networks outside school. Will this approach better correspond with their own objectives? Lastly, perhaps quite self-evidently, new possibilities for research will open once the NCC 2019 has been adopted in general upper secondary education in 2021, and the renewed policies are implemented.

The overall aim of this thesis was to observe how the surrounding society, its affordances and changes affect formal education. Through exploring previous research and the research material, it became evident that school cannot be, should not be and is not

isolated from the society. The impact of the presence of English can be observed in the NCC 2019 in various forms, be it the expected learning outcomes, making use of authentic learning environments, or the need to emphasise appropriate register. As there seems to be no indication that the position of English as a lingua franca would be weakening in the future, it will be interesting to see how formal foreign language education will keep up with the growing possibilities for informal learning.

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