



Exploring learner engagement in the language classroom

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The current state of language education in Finland has attracted a lot of attention and concern since reports have highlighted a negative trend where fewer and fewer students choose to study optional languages in school (Pyykkö, 2017; Finnish National Agency for Education, 2019). The reasons behind this negative trend are complex, and oftentimes it is up to individual teachers to try and raise an interest in language learning and develop the same (Vaarala et al., 2021). A survey answered by 130 teachers involved in language education in different schools throughout the Swedish speaking parts of Finland highlighted challenges concerning how to create and sustain engagement for language learning while catering for the needs of pupils in classrooms where proficiency levels, interests and prerequisites largely vary (Bendtsen et al., 2023).

The project *KalejdoSPRÅK 2023–2025* aims to develop models for an inclusive and holistic language education for all. In the current study, we explore episodes where learner engagement is either present or not present in the classroom, in order to identify and better understand contextual, inter- and intrapersonal factors that shape, change and maintain pupils' engagement. We see engagement as an important prerequisite for and outcome of meaningful learning, and engagement is realized in the form of active physical, cognitive and emotional participation (Reschly & Christenson, 2022).

Data was obtained from three different classrooms in grades 3–6 and consist of classroom observations, focus group interviews with pupils and teacher-researcher discussions. While connecting to the contextual frame we present and discuss ongoing findings in the form of brief episodes where pupils show engagement. We pinpoint factors that contribute to both engagement and lack of engagement.

Keywords: Learner engagement, Language education, Classroom research

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