



The Danish National Centre for Foreign Languages

Final conference of the
DIGI-LINGO project
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With links....

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The Danish National Center for Foreign Languages



- Government initiative as part of *Strategy for the Strengthening of Foreign Languages in the Education System*
- Two aims:
 - More students should become better at more languages (LOTE)
 - Language programs should be relevant and of high quality
- 6 years
- 100 m. DKK (~15 m €)

Agenda



- Languages in the Danish educational system
 - When and what
- Language challenges
 - A shortage of language teachers – The Danish situation
 - Loss of language programs
 - A lack of motivation for languages among students
 - Possible solutions?

When and what?

Languages in the Danish educational system

- Primary/lower secondary:

Grades	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	Total
English	30	30	60	60	90	90	90	90	90	630
German/ French					60	60	90	90	90	390

French?



- To have – or not to have....
- Not obligatory for schools to offer
- Mainly offered in and around Copenhagen and a city phenomenon
- Consequences for the next level(s)



Upper secondary (10th – 12th grade)

Several lines: E.g. general, business, technical: General:



Year	English	AND	German/French (Continued)	OR	French/Spanish (Beginners)*
12	125 hours (C1)		125 hours (B2)		325 hours (B1)
11	220 hours (B2)		200 hours (B1)		
10					

* Can also be Chinese, Italian/Russian

- Latin is an extra option

Getting very language competent?



- Decline in number of students who choose to opt for the highest level
- Also in English – a steady decline
- Decline in dedicated languages lines

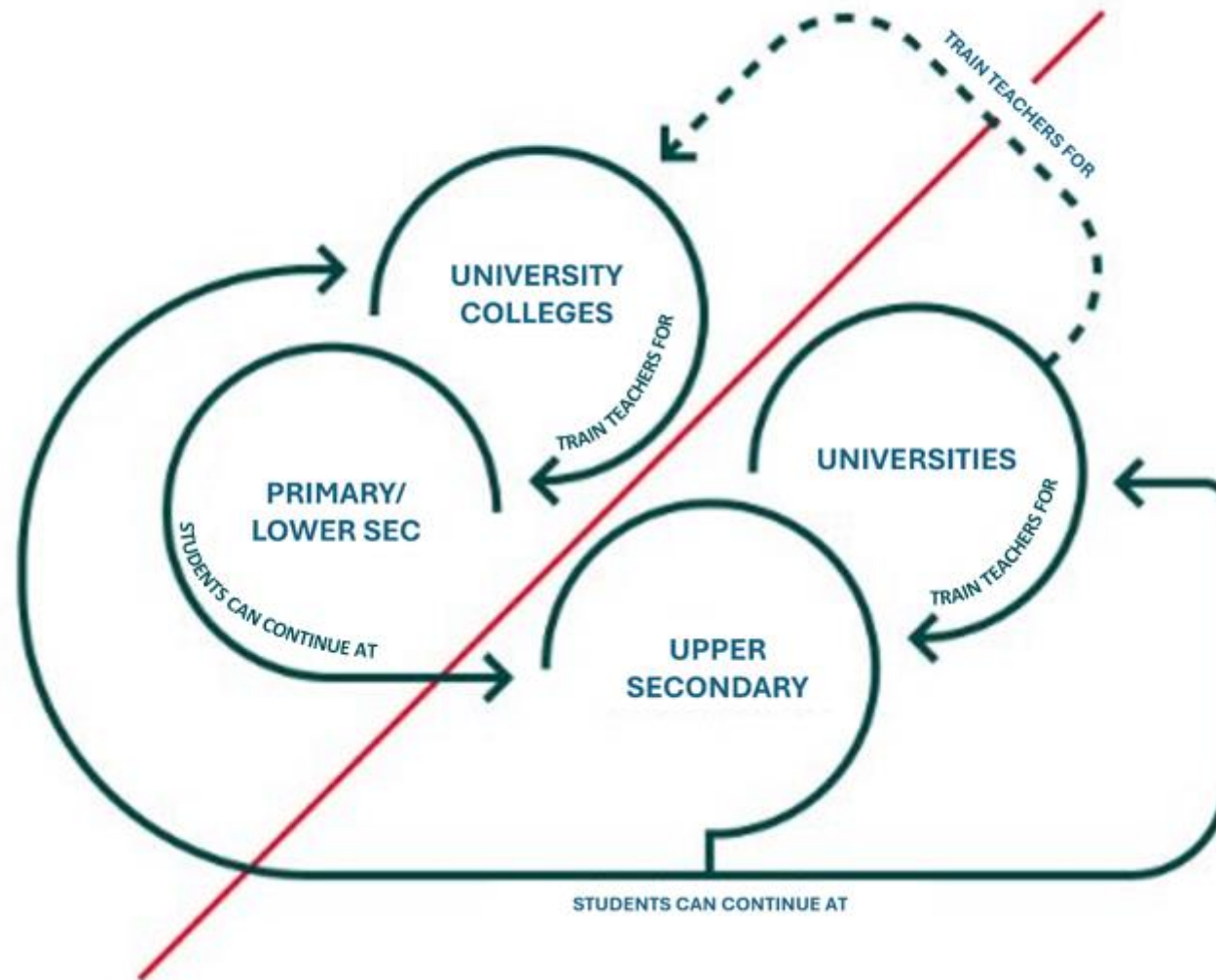




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Tertiary level

TEACHER EDUCATION PROGRAMS



EPINION



- Primary/lower secondary
 - Lack of German teachers
 - Notably **not** French teachers*
 - Some teachers although trained teachers, have not necessarily trained in English/German/French
- Upper secondary
 - Lack of German, French and Italian teachers
 - Teachers always hold university MA's or BA's



* French not required

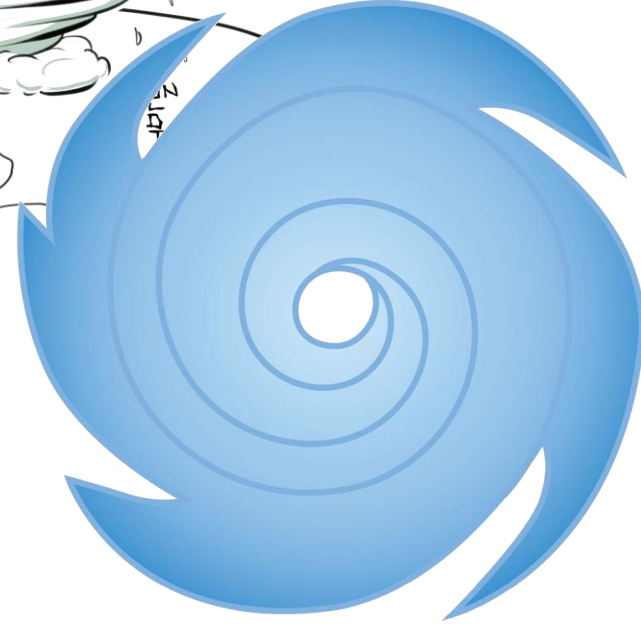
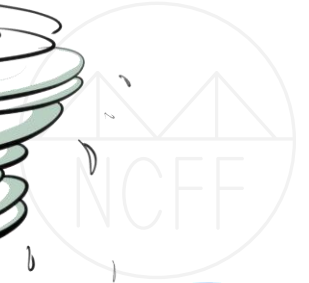
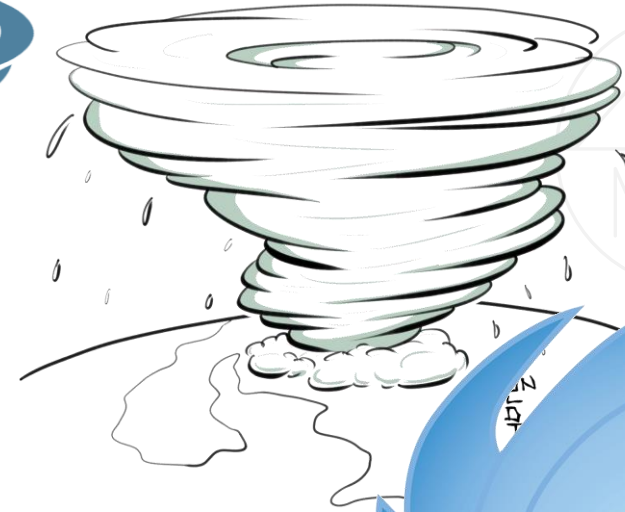
Loss of language programs



- Over ten years 34 BA programs in or with languages have closed
- Most recently
 - Copenhagen Business School – Asian languages – combination studies
 - Aarhus University (proposal) – Asian, Russian and Arabic area studies
- Number of BA program applicants continues to drop
- Small MA cohorts – in some cases 2-4 students in a year

Winds of change....

- Primary/lower secondary
 - Upper secondary
 - University colleges
 - Universities
-
- Not necessarily good for languages!





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How?

Basis of foreign language teaching in Denmark

- Communicative approach to language learning and teaching
- Functional view of grammar
- Language as a tool to get things done in the world
- Language use as the basis of language learning
- The language is both the means and the end
- Hypothesis testing
- Communicative tasks as central activities
- System when needed and as a function, not as a starting point

Against this backdrop....

- What do the students say about languages?
 - Primary & Lower secondary -
- IMPORTANT:
- **They want to learn languages!**
 - The younger, the more open



“I have tried that if you weren’t really able to speak their language, then you didn’t know what to do, but if you can understand it, then it’s much better. If other people can understand you, then it’s much better to be able to talk to each other” (student, 3rd grade)

Background and data



- Major qualitative study of student barriers and motivation
- More than 1,000 students from 6 municipalities (distributed)
 - 230 focus group interviews (45 minutes)
 - 3rd, 6th, 8th grades and years 1,2,and 3 of high school
 - “Alternative” data collection instruments for 3rd and 6th grade, standard interview guides for the older students
- Half the interviews transcribed
 - Data saturation

Methods: Younger vs. older students



- Pictures etc. vs. more traditional questions surrounding themes:
- Relevancy – home languages – foreign languages – possibilities – attitudes of others
- Motivation – Wish to learn
- Teaching – subject hierarchies
- The lessons – Good lesson, good language teachers, wishes and desires, expectations, involvement, oracy/oral participation
- Structural barriers – choice of languages, “un-choices”, grades, exams
- Transitions

Student: I listen to Russian.

Interviewer: *You listen to music in Russian?*

Student: Yes, and music in Arabic and music in English. And sometimes – it's only sometimes – when I'm bored, I listen to music in Spanish. Only when I'm really, really bored. (Student, 3rd grade)

I think that in a world that is increasingly digital and people speak more English together, I think English is actually more important as a school subject than Danish (Student, 8th grade)

Interviewer: Are other languages than English important?

Student: Well, that's the language I have used the most outside of school. German I've only ever used in school. (Student, 12th grade)





Student: I know a little Russian and a little German and a little English and a little Italian and a little Spanish and some Danish and some Chinese and some French (...)

Interviewer: *you know some words or...?*

Student: Yes.

Interviewer: *You've just heard them?*

Student: I know some words in Chinese – I can count to ten and say water melon and cucumber. And in Russian, I can say yes and no, and in German, I can also count to ten, and in English, I can say a lot of things. And in Spanish, I can say Spain, and in Italian, I know things because I'm good at playing the violin, and then you know things like mezzoforte and forte.

(Student, 3rd grade)

Why do we need foreign languages? (when we speak English)

"No, I don't really understand why it is that we need to learn German. I don't quite understand what it is that we need it for, like, because you just learn it at school, and then, when you finally need to speak some German or something else, then you would probably have forgotten it all."
(Student, 8th grade)

"Well, you rarely meet someone whose favorite subject is French or German. Unless they have parents who come from there, and therefore it is super easy for them. I really think it is rare to meet someone who says, 'Oh, I really love German', [or] 'I just have to learn French!'
(Student, 11th grade)

Why do we need foreign languages? (when we speak English)



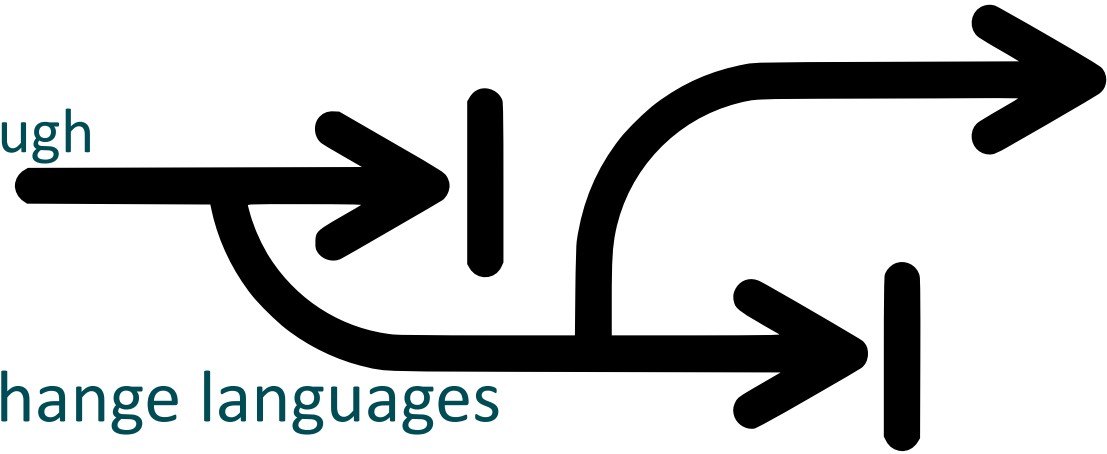
“Well, more like bigger jobs in international countries [sic] and so on. You know, it’s cool if you can come in for a job interview abroad and then know their language, since that sort of shows that you are committed, and then it’s a little showy, somehow, to be able to just say, ‘I am fluent in German, and I am fluent in French’. ”

(Student, 8th grade)



Choices between 9th & 10th gr.

- Some choose to **continue** with their 2nd FL
 - because they like their choice
 - to become better (not start over)
 - to get off with “only 2 years”
- Some **change**
 - because they think they aren’t competent enough
 - because they are fed up
 - because they want a fresh start
- Some end up with extra hours when they change languages



Year	English	AND	German/French (Continued)	OR	French/Spanish (Beginners)*
3	125 hours (C1)		125 hours (B2)		
2	220 hours (B2)		200 hours (B1)		
1					325 hours (B1)

Student interests and motivations



- They want to learn languages
- But oral skills – want to use language to talk to and understand others
- They want authentic language encounters
- They want encouragement
- They want to experience progression
- They want grammar that makes sense to them

Student barriers



- Found in many areas related to motivation
- Learning environment
 - Social relations
 - Class sizes and class makeup
 - Insecurity
- Learning processes
 - Exposure
 - Proficiency expectations
- Meta-communication

Learning environment

- “Safe” environment – doubly vulnerable
 - Foreign language anxiety
- Large classes give too little time to speak
- “Mixed” classes reduce willingness to speak



Well, there's also this thing that when you don't know how to speak a language and there's only one teacher for 30 students who can't speak the language, that results in very little help per lesson compared to what one could wish for. (Student, 12th grade)

Student 1: Well, I think it might have been more reassuring to be able to learn a new language with your homeroom group.

Student 2: That would have felt safer. When we are in our German class, I only talk to the people from my own class. Half of the others are not people you want to make mistakes in front of.
(Students, 10th grade)

Learning processes



- Exposure and lack thereof

Student 1: ... it has always been much easier to learn English over the years, also when you get older because e.g. at work, someone speaks English, and you watch movies in English and songs and so on. You're surrounded by it everywhere, whereas it's rare if there's a German pop song on the radio.

Student 2: Or that you have a Spanish playlist. (Students, 11th grade)

I feel that if you are to get better at a language, you need to invest time in it at home, watching videos, listening to and speaking German. I don't think very many of us did that to get better at German. I don't feel it's enough to just have the lessons, you need to spend some time yourself on learning it, and English is just everywhere, so it's easier to learn that than to learn German, for example. (Student, 12th grade)

Exposure



Well, I think there is a difference, but also because of the language because many of us are comfortable with English because it is so much more present in our society; we watch English-language TV all the time, so I think many of us are more comfortable with, also because in our homeroom class, we know people a little better than in our mixed French group, where there's a tendency for everyone to be more reluctant. (Student, 11th grade)

Learning processes



1. Confidence
2. Fluency
3. Accuracy



Oracy, grammar and errors?



communicating. In French, we mostly
owed to talk to each other (...) in
communicate a whole lot, and that's
... together in English



better. In Germ



Oracy



- *So what do you miss?*
- More oral activities. It doesn't have to be a lot, it could just be that in a lesson of 90 minutes, you could dedicate 30 minutes to oral activities, or maybe half of the lesson and then [...] maybe 15 minutes to do a presentation, just a quick one, it doesn't have to be a 30-minute presentation, it could just be 3 minutes per person so that you just got to practice the pronunciation of different words.

(Student, 10th grade)

"I wish there was more time to talk to each other in French classes, but there isn't really...." (Student, 12th grade)

Oracy



“There needs to be more of a focus on being able to *speak* the language. As it is right now, I can tell you all about adjective declensions, but I would not be able to hold a conversation or buy a packet of cigarettes in Berlin.

It just seems a little.... Also because we’re not even going to sit a written exam, it’s an oral exam we have to take, but we don’t really practice oral language in class, for when we speak – right now we were going over the movie we went to see yesterday, and then we had to talk about right-wing extremism [in class], and I just can’t do that in German.” (Student, 11th grade)

Grammar



- *It [grammar] takes up a lot of time?*
- Yes, because we have to know it before we can go on to something else, so our teacher always has a focus on us learning our grammar.

(Student, 8th grade)

“It can be really tedious to have to spend 70 minutes looking at a whiteboard, and our teacher is just drawing triangles and squares”

(Student, 10th grade)

The teacher told his students a story.

Susan gave John the books.

Grammar



“Well, I can certainly say that in Spanish, it’s very much about grammar and rules, and when it is a new language for you, it is really, really difficult to just have only that, because personally, I don’t feel I have much of a vocabulary in Spanish, and then it’s just difficult to remember the rules when you don’t have anything to apply them to.”
(Student, 12th grade)

“Well, it’s like the foundation for being able to speak, somehow. I mean, if you know your grammar, then you can also speak reasonably well, but obviously, the grammar will also be off. I mean, he expects you to know all sorts of different diphthongs.” (Student, 12th grade)

Errors



Interviewer: *Do you feel motivated to say something in class?*

Student 1: In English classes I do, yes, but not so much in German, but that's also because I'm afraid of saying something wrong.

Student 2: I agree. In English, you get that "Aaah, almost there" , but with German it's more, "You're wrong."- My teacher is really, "No, you're just wrong". There I'm a little more reluctant. (Students, 11th grade)

I know that feeling; if I'm a little nervous in English class, it's because I'm thinking, "Aah, I ought to be able to do this" – that you ought to know how to pronounce something. Then you'd better not because the others know how to say it. (Student, 11th grade)

Proficiency expectations



- English is the measuring stick!
 - Confidence, fluency (and ok, some accuracy, then)

I feel that when you realized that you wouldn't become fluent in one year, you were a little, like, f***! (Student, 11th grade - French)

Student 1: When you were little, and you finally learned English, and you could understand what people were saying, that was super cool. We'll experience the same with Spanish, just when we get a little older.

Student 2: ...I watch many more English-language series than Danish ones, and I understand everything they say – but I also understand Spanish series – just with subtitles... (Students, 10th grade)

Meta-communication



- Seems to be a lack of communication about
 - Levels and the competence and usefulness of various levels
 - Communication strategies
 - The language learning process
 - Learning strategies
 - The differences between process of learning English and other languages
 - The need to speak
 - The need to make errors
 - The role of writing for oral language acquisition
- We just teach!

Language in the world vs. language in schools



- Language in schools is perceived as negative because:
 - Too much of a focus on grammar
 - Too much of a focus on reading texts and on writing
 - Too much of a focus on correctness
 - Too little oral communication – and that's what they want
 - Too little fun, variation, and 'alternative' teaching
- And because
 - Everything is measured by the standard of English, it becomes much too difficult
 - There is too large a large gap between student competences/expectations and the demands they are met with, **the project of learning other/more languages is bound to fail**

Language in the world



“There’s also the thing about learning language in the real world and in school. Here, you know, it’s very important not to make grammar mistakes, but if you just went to for instance Argentina and spoke Spanish and stayed with a Spanish family, they would be able to understand you even though you made grammar mistakes. But here, in high school, if you make grammar mistakes, maybe the teacher understands what you are saying, but it would be, like, a mistake.”

(Student, year 3 of HS)

Language in the world



"You also get a feeling of success when you can make a sentence and actually say something. I'm thinking, if you went to Spain, they would also be able to get the gist, and if you could say something that was just close to [what you wanted to say], then maybe it wouldn't be 100 % correct every time. Just talking. And that's where I feel that in our Spanish lessons, there is too much of a focus on us having to be 100 % correct every time we speak, and that's sort of... You could also just practice speaking the language

(Student, year 3 of HS)

Overall finding – simplified: Language is fun when...



- *How about Spanish? – What's that like?*
- That's actually OK fun. We listen to music and produce videos and do dialogs where for instance I'm a waiter, and there are two who have to order food, and then we have to learn to do it in Spanish.

(Student, 10th grade)

"For instance, we have had oral presentations, individually, one-on-one with the teacher or been working with a partner, having to describe words without saying them and only using German, and it's those oral activities, I think that's where you get the good things. (Student, 11th grade)

Solutions? Or perhaps just points that warrant attention

- Systemic challenges: Teachers may be pulled at by many conflicting demands:
 - Their training
 - The legal requirements
 - The materials available
 - Exams
 - Apprenticeship of observation
- Big changes may warrant more professional development
- Bringing the students' two perceptions of language *closer* to each other?
- Remembering that most need a use-based language as an additional competence in their future lives.

Possible contributions of DIGILINGO

to some of the challenges - on the basis of somewhat skimpy knowledge 😊



- Alignment:
 - The virtual exchanges = authentic language encounters
 - Student involvement in the design/choices to be made
 - General guidelines:
 - “In practical terms, when pupils believe in their ability to succeed, set clear goals, employ effective language strategies, monitor progress diligently, analyse successes and failures, and learn from them, their language acquisition improves significantly.”
 - -> Confidence! Strategic focus. Meta-communication
 - Intercultural (communicative) competence – what we all want, but.... Language is access!
- Techno stress
 - Tech and AI
- Hope your work will be implemented in participating and other schools!

The BIG question



- WHAT SHOULD FOREIGN LANGUAGE SUBJECTS BE AND CONTAIN???
- We need a basic curriculum discussion at ALL levels of the education system – and we need alignment
 - In terms of content
 - In terms of view of language and language learning
 - In terms of view of interculturality



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Thank you for listening

Feel free to write and stay in touch!

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Links – In Danish - Use google translate



- Center website: www.ncff.dk – tips and tricks, news, newsletter
- Knowledge resources: <https://viden.ncff.dk>
 - If you want to take a look at the student perspective study, it's here:
 - <https://viden.ncff.dk/NcffSearch?search=elevperspektiver> – short and long version
 - We also have written short teacher-directed FL pedagogical “booklets”:
 - <https://viden.ncff.dk/NcffSearch?search=pixi>
 - They have headlines like: Intercultural communicative competence, Task-based teaching and learning, Communicative language teaching, Oracity, Vocabulary acquisition, Functional grammar, Multi-/plurilingualism