

# The Teaching of Faroese as a Second Language in Compulsory Schools in the Faroe Islands through the Critical Perspectives of School Leaders and Teachers



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*Undirvísing í føroyskum sum annaðmál (FSA) í føroyska fólkaskúlanum  
sæð frá kritiska sjónarhorninum hjá lærarum og skúlaleiðslum*

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## Abstract

The aim of this qualitative study is to elicit the perspectives of teachers and school leaders on the implementation and enactment of Faroese as a second language (FSL). Data from reports and semi-structured interviews with teachers and school leaders reveal how they have implemented and enacted FSL in Faroes compulsory schools. Their perspectives are analysed using the lens of optimal second language acquisition to describe and critically study the FSL status quo in the Faroe Islands. Findings highlight that first and foremost, the duration and intensity of student exposure to learning FSL appear to pose barriers to language learning. Teachers point out their lack of efficacy in the field and the sparse supply of FSL materials. Teachers with the Master's diploma in FSL are clear that they have acquired valuable competences to teach FSL and recommend a focused approach to building competence in FSL for their colleagues and the pre-service teachers in teacher education. These results show that a significant challenge lies also in the language learning environment, e.g., the presence of Danish and English in upper secondary schools.

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### Úrtak

Endamálið við hesi kvalitativu kannningini er at varpa ljós á sjónarmið hjá lærarum og skúlaleiðarum um, hvussu undirvísing í føroyskum sum annaðmál (FSA) verður framd. Dátur frá frágreiðingum og semi-struktureraðum samrøðum við lærarar og skúlaleiðarar vísa, hvussu FSA er sett í verk í fólkkúlanum, og hvussu tað hevur hepnast. Fyri at lýsa og granska støðuna hjá FSA í Føroyum kritiskt verða teirra sjónarmið greinað við støði í, hvussu annaðmálmáltøka á bestan hátt verður framd. Niðurstøðurnar vísa, at forðingarnar hjá næmingum at læra FSA fyrst og fremst eru tíð og intensiteturin í undirvísingini. Lærarar vísa á væntandi førleikar og at ógvuliga lítið FSA-tilfar er tøkt. Lærarar við diplomútbúgvingini í FSA halda seg hava fingið týðandi førleikar í frálæru av FSA, og mæla til at arbeitt verður miðvíst við at byggja upp FSA førleikar hjá øðrum lærarum, læraralesandi og í læraraútbúgvingini. Úrslitini vísa eisini á, at ein týðandi avbjóðing eisini er í málsiga læruumhvørvinum, har enskt og danskt hava stóran leiklut í skúlaverkinum, serliga á miðnámi.

**Keywords:** Faroese as a Second Language (FSL), Second Language Acquisition, perspectives of teachers and school leaders on implementation and enactment of FSL.

**Leitorð:** Føroyskt sum annaðmál (FSA), annaðmáls máltøka, sjónarmið hjá lærarum og skúlaleiðslum í mun til at fremja føroyskt sum annaðmál í útbúgvingarskipanini í verki.

### Introduction

The current population of the Faroe Islands is 54.569<sup>5</sup> (Hagstova Føroya, 2024) and immigrants are about 17 %. Nordic citizens (Icelandic, Swedish, Norwegian and Danish) are around 9 % and non-Nordic citizens are around 8 %. It is important to note that ethnic Faroese born in Denmark are included in the Nordic numbers. These numbers indicate diversity, contribute to the country being multiethnic, multicultural and multilingual demographically and reflect what is a recent development. With increasing immigration in the Faroe Islands, the approach to education in Faroese as a second language (FSL) is crucial for Faroese society as teaching FSL is significant for immigrants as one important factor in their integration journey. Immigration has taken a fair amount of the focus politically, so arguably, teaching FSL has not been given appropriate importance, which can lead to skewed perspectives of language as just a mediator of integration and educational outcomes and not a resource per se.

The language learning environment is unique and complex in the Faroe Islands. The small size of the language with its few speakers results in limited materials in Faroese and even less in the field of Faroese as a second language. Danish and English play a role both in the educational system and society as a whole. Though Faroese is the dominant language, there is dependence on Danish

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<sup>5</sup> Retrieved 03.04.2024 from Hagstova Føroya (Statistics Faroe Islands)

in certain fields. This means that migrant students need to learn Faroese and Danish to successfully complete schooling at compulsory and higher education.

### **Aim of the Qualitative Study**

The aim is two-fold: firstly, to map the status quo regarding FSL through analysis of reports from school leaders and semi-structured interviews with school principals and teachers. Secondly, to critically analyse the implementation and enactment of FSL through the lens of optimal second language acquisition (SLA) and SLA-teaching.

### **Theoretical Underpinning**

The theoretical basis used to underpin the study are second language acquisition and SLA-teaching. SLA is a complex field, but certain factors are established as having an impact on SLA. The crucial factors are time of exposure to L2 (Hoff et al., 2011), timely and effective language interventions -these are key as language proficiency is important for educational success (Tienda & Haskins, 2011).

In terms of second language (L2) learners, variables such as intelligence, aptitude, motivation, attitude, social context, sociolinguistic aspects, and the time taken to learn a language (Ortega, 2008) influence SLA. These factors have a contextual influence on the learner (Dörnyei, 2001; Sawyer & Ranta, 2001) and have a decisive role in determining learner success.

Studying how people learn languages after their L1 is useful as it contributes to the question of when to introduce second language learning for immigrants in their journey towards integration and how teaching can be effective in SLA (Ellis, 2020). Apart from the L2, the first language (L1) should be preserved and developed given its strong link to identity and sense of self (Egert et al., 2021).

When it comes to bilingual language learning, Hoff et al. (2011) underline that it is normal for bilingually developing children to not be on par with monolingual children in the rate of acquiring each language. The proficiency level of one language of the bilingual student (usually the L2) assessed in education cannot be an indicator of ability as in the monolingual student. "A bilingual child is cognitively more able than his single-language skills reflect." (Hoff, 2011, p. 23).

FSL teaching becomes a key factor in bilingual learning and requires a concentrated and planned effort to facilitate language learning and equity of assessment. These students must have fit-for-purpose teaching as L2 learners, if they are to feel a sense of belonging and be motivated to learn. Motivation is identified as a significant learner trait situation-dependent key factor, and therefore, the kind of tasks that motivate students, the teacher's approach to student motivation and strategies of language learning are all viewed as motivating factors (Dörnyei and Skehan, 2003).

Educational policy making usually comes from outside the school, typically involving government decision-making at the strategic level. It is evident that policy has an impact on FSL teaching as FSL policy comes from a place of power, and schools are subject to national policy (Fielding, 2007). The Board of Education in the Faroe Islands creates policy to be implemented in schools in response to socio-political decision-making. The bargaining power of the schools in interpreting the policy is flexible, but implementing it is mandatory. School leaders attempt to interpret within the contextual relevance and restrictions of their schools.

The school leader focuses “institutional activity” (Ball et al., 2012, p. 44) based on the policy and conveys it to teachers through objectives/guidelines and teachers enact policy in their classrooms according to their interpretation and translation of policy. This dialectical development is by no means linear, which is why there are differences among schools as to how policy is played out (Ball, et al., 2012). Ball et al. (2012) indicate that any recently introduced policy faces resistance as it has to compete with already existing policies in the schools for resources, teacher positions and time in the curriculum. This is possibly why policies may or may not be implemented as they involve ‘sense making’ at all levels of the organisation.

Teachers have to be educated to teach a second language, and their expertise can only be built if they have a sense of self-efficacy based on their qualification as their competence affects teaching quality, and consequently, student learning outcomes (Goddard et al., 2000). Teachers should become knowledge producers instead of knowledge consumers. Knowledge production being given importance is key to encouraging teacher discourse and providing the chance for teachers to claim ownership of how they approach FSL teaching. There appears to be clear theoretical indications that policy, school leadership, teacher and teaching competences are decisive for students to learn FSL.

## **Methodology**

The case study was chosen as an appropriate framework to explore the phenomena of fit-for-purpose FSL teaching asking how and why questions (Yin, 2003). Our study is a qualitative case study set within the boundaries of a specific context in natural school settings and dual sources of data. In this form of research, the research questions develop in interaction with setting, data and analysis in conjunction with sampling, data collection and interpretation. There is no representative sampling or any claims to generalizability of findings but “... learning from others’ experiences” (Duff, 2008, p. 51). Maxwell (2005) classifies questions used to query qualitative study as questions of meaning, questions that highlight context and questions that explore processes. The perspectives of the research participants are a cogent factor in shaping a case study. In this context, while individual experience is unique and relevant, there is a common

denominator in shared experience where school leaders have to implement policy, and the teachers enact it in their classrooms.

## Data Collection

Our data are from *two* sources – firstly, *reports* on FSL teaching from 13 school leaders to the Board of Education in 2022. The reports were sourced from the Board of Education, where all schools were asked to give an account of the status of FSL in 2022. The reports offered insight into policy implementation and enactment of FSL. The reports (dated March 2022) described the organisation and teaching hours in FSL. Secondly, 14 *semi-structured interviews* with school leaders and teachers.

Regarding the *reports*, forty five compulsory schools (with students aged from 6 to 16) were asked to describe their FSA teaching approach and organisation and 13 schools responded. In the academic year, there were 343 FSL students out of 6879 students in all, which includes 5% of all students in the Faroese compulsory schools. The reports from the school principals accounts for 126 students of the 343 total number of students receiving FSL teaching. This data represents 37 % of the total amount of students receiving teaching in FSL.

Based on these reports from the school leaders, an interview guide was formulated to be used in the semi-structured interviews. The interview guide consisted of seven questions for the school principals and eight questions for the teachers. The questions were designed to elicit information on these issues: i. Organisation and implementation of FSL teaching, ii. approach to teaching FSL, iii. selection criteria for choice of FSL teachers, iv. teacher preparation for teaching FSL, v. success of FSL as observable student learning outcomes, vi. access to training courses for FSL, if such courses were helpful for teaching FSL and what would make the situation optimal for effective teaching of FSL.

The semi-structured interviews were conducted with teachers and school leaders separately and individually online. We contacted the same 13 schools, which had reported on FSL teaching. Out of the 13 schools, seven schools responded to the request for interviews accounting for a little over 50% of the target population. The interviewees represent three of the largest school areas, thereby representing a significant part of the target group. There were seven compulsory schools in the study and the interviews included one teacher and one school leader from each of these schools. The teachers are categorised as T1 – T7 in the data analysis, and the school leaders are categorised as L1 – L7 totalling 14 interviews of a little over three hours in total.

Figure 1: Overview over data collection

45 schools	Reports	Invitation	Semi-structured interviews
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>45 schools were asked to report on the FSA teaching approach and organisation to the Board of Education.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>13 schools responded with a report to the Board of Education .</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Authors invited these 13 schools to a semi-structured interview based on the reports handed to the Board of Education. Seven schools responded.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The authors conducted interviews with these seven school leaders and seven teachers amounting in total to 14 interviews.</li> </ul>

Figure 1 illustrates the overview of the data collection process with both reports and semi-structured interviews. The data allowed for a focused approach in covering the relevant issues for the study to shed light on the status regarding how FSL is taught, and how it is organised in terms of number of hours and the teaching approach in specific schools.

The semi-structured interviews with school leaders and teachers were transcribed in full length. Word for word transcription of interviewer and interviewees was undertaken without interjections, laughter, etc. Excerpts from the interviews quoted in the article have been translated into English by the authors.

The interviews were anonymized by names, school and district and any other revealing comments such as references to towns and places, which could identify the school or speaker. Given the close-knit educational community in a small-scale society as the Faroes, effort was made to prevent identification as such ethical considerations are important. Current university guidelines regarding ethics (in progress) were adhered to in the storing of data safely, seeking informed written participant consent and anonymisation of data.

## Analysis of Data

A content analysis was conducted for the reports to arrive at an overall picture of FSL in the school system. This was followed by a two-pronged approach for the data analysis to provide a framework for the thematic analysis. The analysis of the interviews was based on both analytical induction and deduction in interpreting findings and arriving at conclusions to enable “transfer of knowledge”. The interviews were first transcribed according to the interview questions, and coded both inductively and deductively using *a priori* and *post priori* codes based on literature and elicited from the data respectively. Subsequently, a second-level analysis involved a re-coding based on focused coding (Saldaña, 2010) to parse data as fully as possible within key themes for FSL learning and teaching as identified below.

Table 1. List of themes

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<b>a.</b>	<b>The number of FSL teaching hours</b>
<b>b.</b>	Teacher and teaching competences
<b>c.</b>	Student and teacher motivation
<b>d.</b>	Availability of teaching materials
<b>e.</b>	Knowledge sharing among FSL teachers
<b>f.</b>	Complex language learning dynamics
<b>g.</b>	Learning Faroese through other languages
<b>h.</b>	Coordination of FSL teaching for immigrant children – internal and external
<b>i.</b>	Informal learning of Faroese outside school
<b>j.</b>	Government funding
<b>k.</b>	Added salary for FSL teachers

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The themes have been identified in the data (in no particular order) from the semi-structured interviews as seen in Table 1. The interviews were inductively coded by themes, e.g., all extracts about teaching materials were grouped together, allocated teaching hours, etc. The transcription and thematic coding amounted to 119 pages. The key themes which belong within the scope of this article (a - g) have been analysed specifically, while for example, themes like salary, government funding, which were clear concerns, have not been included given the aims of the article.

### **Findings from the Reports**

The reports sourced from the Board of Education provided an overview of the organisation and teaching of FSL in compulsory schools and allowed insight into policy implementation and enactment not accessible elsewhere. These served as a foundation for not only designing the interview questions but offered an overview of the environment as FSL is a developing field in the islands.

### **Findings from the Interviews**

The analysis was structured by themes as displayed in Table 1. The first theme is the settings and design of FSL, which describes the organisation of FSL teaching in terms of hours, student grouping and how it fits in with the students' timetable. Other themes deal with: i. teacher and teaching competences of FSL teachers, ii. motivation of learners and teachers and knowledge sharing, iii. the language learning environment with reference to the medium of instruction, iv. the issue of Danish and English having their influence in school and in society, v. knowledge sharing of experience in the field among FSL teachers and finally, vi. the dearth of learning materials. We analyse these issues below with excerpts

and examples to highlight the various aspects. Teacher and leader responses are grouped separately, and we begin with teacher responses.

### ***Settings and Design of FSL***

In the seven schools included in our study, it is evident that the organisation of FSL teaching in terms of hours varies from school to school, how students are grouped and how it fits in with the students' timetable. As quotation 1 reveals, this could be individually or in groups organised according to age, ability and country of origin, where possible.

1. ...We have divided students into groups (...) We organise it in such a manner that we put [students] who fit together and teach them together. Otherwise, we would be unable to reach all students. They who are the weakest and almost in the same age group are taught together. They who are strong, we try to teach them together. Sometimes, [students] are not grouped according to age. (T3)

The interviews also reveal that students are required to leave their regular classes and join the combined class with FSL peers with a specific FSL teacher during school lessons - students are not taken out of Faroese and Maths classes for FSL.

In the interviews, teachers mention a change that has just been implemented on an experimental basis, which is the creation of two reception classes where only FSL students are gathered, but this does not include all FSL students in the islands, due to logistics.

2. ... all children in the municipality, from grade 6 to 10, meet at 8.00 am in the evening school and are taught Faroese from 8.00 to 10.00 am and then return to their schools. This system functions very well. (Tx<sup>6</sup>)

In some schools, if immigrant students arrive mid-school year, occasionally, they can receive extra lessons. This is only possible if the school leaders have been informed and choose this option. This is a change from the system when each student was allocated 20 hours per year.

Significantly, all the teachers are vehement that FSL teaching currently practised in cannot in any way fulfil the learning outcomes. The amount of FSL hours for a school varies considerably, and one must keep in mind that the time students get for FSL is a pivotal factor as 5-7 years are needed to learn a language (Ortega, 2008). A teacher questions how it (FSL teaching) can function when it involves at least 50 students with 8-10 nationalities sharing only 15 teaching hours a week (T4). Hoff et al. (2011) highlight the time of exposure to L2 as crucial factor for learning, and this is currently not the case in FSL teaching.

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<sup>6</sup> Anonymised to preserve teacher/school identification



A teacher states that on average, a student gets 15–20 hours per school year (T7).

3 .... Those students who have just arrived require much more teaching than the hours allocated by the school, which is two hours per group a week... I wish those students who arrive in maybe grade 6 or 7 could have intensive Faroese teaching for a time. So, they don't attend classes and cannot follow the teaching. Because majority of the teaching is in Faroese. They sit in class and don't understand a thing. [I would like] that they received the three-month or something of FSL teaching, every day for two to three hours or something like that, so they can better follow in class (T1).

Teachers are concerned about the insufficient funding and hours to ensure successful learning outcomes:

4. ... More hours... plenty more hours from the Board of Education because it always results in the schools have not enough funding to meet the needs of actually all of the students...also because one underestimates the time required to learn a new language (T2).

These calculations reveal the less than ideal conditions for fulfilling FSL outcomes: it is doubtful whether students can learn with this limited input and over the short period of exposure to Faroese. The unrealistic demands challenge the ability of teachers and school principals to do help FSL learners optimally. There is a lack of equity in that not all children are given equitable access to FSL due to contextual factors. This lack of equity can affect learning outcomes and student motivation (OECD, 2016).

### ***Teacher and Teaching Competences of FSL Teachers***

The data identifies the characteristics of teachers involved in FSL participants and draws attention to their qualifications. Analysis reveals their different backgrounds and comprise the following: (i) teachers of Faroese as L1, those who have majored in Faroese language and literature, (ii) teachers with experiential knowledge in teaching L2 SLA (the majority), (iii) teachers who have studied some courses in L2 and SLA at different levels (could range from a one-day course to diplomas), (iv) teachers who know the immigrant student language, one teacher who has studied Faroese as a specialised subject in Teacher Education and one in Danish, and finally, teachers who have a special interest in the field.

In the interviews, teachers speak of experiencing a gap between their professional skills and the demands placed on them in praxis. When teachers are asked to report as to their competence in teaching FSL, few claimed to be well-equipped, some did not feel they had the competence, while others were indecisive. It is crucial to highlight that when teachers speak of FSL teaching

going well, it is despite their awareness of the limitations of the given framework and from the perspective of their personally having done their best.

Worryingly, what the data shows is that teachers state that they have not been prepared for teaching FSL as part of teacher education:

‘... but on the part of teacher education, I don’t really feel that I had the necessary knowledge that I needed for this [FSL] teaching.’ (T1)

As stated in the literature view, research indicates that teacher pedagogical competence is crucial to their being able to function professionally (Coburn & Stein, 2006). As part of developing teaching competences in FSL, a master’s diploma course in FSL for teachers (for which an executive order is still pending) has just concluded, which some of the participants attended. This course is positively is frequently mentioned by teachers in the interview data. The teachers enrolled in the master’s diploma course feel strongly that they have become equipped to teach FSL as indicated:

5. ... of course one feels with my education a little more and more than one has somehow - some reasons ... for this which I’m doing - research has shown that it is good. Before this [FSL course], it was only, I think, a feeling that this is right or something. And something one has found ...no, this I have done completely wrongly. When one reads and so on, so it [the FSL course] has helped me in this way (T4).

6. I wasn’t fully equipped before I attended the FSL course at the university. Through that study and the teaching which we have had at the university, has made it clearer and clearer that one cannot appoint just anybody to teach FSL. One discovers that when one reads about it or attends classes about it [FSL]. I can say that there have been teachers, who have taught [FSL], who were not properly qualified. This is because no one has been qualified for this before now (T2).

As stated in the literature, teacher self-efficacy determines teaching quality (Goddard et al., 2000), and the course being viewed as competence-giving may contribute to self-efficacy.

The analysis reveal that teachers have become self-reflexive about their prior praxis as having either done things correctly or otherwise, and others comment that the master’s course is a positive development for future FSL teaching. Analysis also highlights that the teachers see the other short FSL courses as failing to meet the demands.

7. By studying FSL at the university, I’m qualifying myself for the task. Before that, I believe that I had one short course in the Courses and Materials Development Centre (NÁM), it was one day. One does not learn much in one day. I’ve haven’t had the competence... (T2).

Thus, there is a spectrum of qualifications, which are not necessarily specific to L2-teaching, and this may have significant implications for the teaching of migrant students and their development in the school environment.

### ***Lack of Teaching Materials***

Almost all teachers and leaders express their frustration over lack of suitable teaching FSL materials. They are neither designed for FSL nor age appropriate. While there are some new materials that are helpful, they are far from adequate for teaching at all levels and too few. Teacher responses indicate the overwhelming challenge that lack of materials have for teaching.

8. This shows how significant it is to have good and age-appropriate teaching materials for all levels... But, materials are lacking. It is not sufficient. But, we use what is available. I would like to add that the materials which have just been designed serve their purpose. Unfortunately, there are too few (T2).

Another teacher has more details to add regarding teaching materials.

9. We would like more materials and further development... we're lacking Faroese as a second language materials, When students join grade 7 in school, it is difficult to use materials designed for three-year olds to learn words and so on. Age-appropriate materials is crucial (T6).

### ***Motivation of Learners and Teachers***

Motivation promotes learning, and inadequate exposure to FSL, as indicated earlier, creates dissatisfaction among students as teachers identify, and this has a direct impact on learner and teacher motivation (Dörnyei and Skehan, 2003). Teachers are concerned with learner motivation:

10. To begin with, the students are interested, but soon lose motivation as the number of teaching lessons provided are too few. If it is to make a difference (T6).

A teacher explains that students lose motivation to learn Faroese as they receive too little education in it, especially when they arrive at the secondary school level (T3).

### ***The Language Learning Environment***

The analysis of data highlights significant challenges in teaching Faroese as a second language that engender certain dynamics in the learning environment. This means that the language chosen as the medium of instruction becomes a complex factor given the contextual situation, where it is not possible to teach Faroese through the students' L1.

11. I think that it is also a problem that they learn Faroese through another language. Not through their L1. So, they have to learn Faroese through English. We do not know Lx or whatever language. I think this is really troublesome. [She gives an example of teachers teaching Faroese through their Lx as it is also the student's L1]. This gives the best results, but we cannot always do this in the Faroes. Not with the limited hours given now in the school (T6).

As stated in the introduction, the significant presence of Danish in the school system and the increasing predominance of English in the society have resulted in a form of passive multilingualism. The migrant students are diverse, and for those who are of Nordic origin, Danish becomes a tool for learning Faroese and coping with the presence of Danish. More than half the teachers point out the pronounced variation in prior language student competencies. Repeatedly, teachers identify the complexity in teaching children who do not know Danish and/or English and the resultant sense of professional helplessness. Some of the students are competent in English and/or Danish allowing them to learn Faroese through these languages. As for the migrant students who know English (and not Danish), it serves as a facilitator in learning Faroese. School principals express concern about Danish in the school system as many textbooks in upper secondary schools are in Danish and can become a barrier to FSL student subsequently being able to cope at the higher level.

Further, the teachers bemoan the lack of coordination among stakeholders as a weakness that concerns teachers as expressed below:

12. The municipalities should take greater responsibility (...). They should play a role in organising interpretation and so on because they are a natural integrated part of our work. (...) I feel this is lacking (...) We could have increased cooperation with the Immigration office, because they have their fingers on the pulse. I'm sure several of these households would need help for their children's school work (e.g. Danish) and so on (T7).

The teachers are frustrated with the lack of co-ordination between the school system and other stakeholders. They fear the absence of a network of support systems might lead to individual students losing out on language and educational opportunities.

### ***Experiential Knowledge-sharing***

As outlined in literature, support and network for teachers is crucial (Coburn & Stein, 2006). Data reveals that engaging in discussions on SLA and experiential knowledge-sharing appear to be a challenge. A few teachers mention that the lack of subject knowledge of teaching of FSL makes it difficult to reach the target group. Teachers also feel isolated and wish for knowledge sharing and co-

construction of knowledge. A teacher comments, 'Right now we're working solo (T3)'. Another says:

13. ... it appears that we have to 'rediscover the wheel'. Our challenge as teachers is, though we wish the best for our students, we don't really know how to teach FSL. In fact, no one knows how exactly to do it. It's not properly organised (T6).

### ***Leader Perspectives on the Overall FSL Issues***

The school leaders have expressed their views on various aspects of FSL in their schools. The responses from school leaders indicate that the choice of teachers for FSL teaching is quite random. Majority of the school leaders acknowledge that FSL teaching in their schools does not fulfil the needs of the migrant students. One leader describes the complexity of FSL:

14. I don't think so (the FSL hours available do not meet the needs of the FSL students). We've often mentioned it to the school authorities that is useless to teach grade 8 and 9 students a few (FSL) hours a week (...). To add, it [language] is such a big part of the integration of these children. Language is key to a lot of things. Not just the Faroese language (L2).

The quotation below illustrates the challenges when it involves teacher competence and number of FSL hours available:

15. ... once we apply for FSL hours from the Board of Education, we are allocated a quota and I then ask two or three teachers to take responsibility... we tried to do it properly. Applied and everything, but it didn't come through. Possibly, funding was an issue as it is expensive. We have stated the importance very often. It is useless to teach only a few hours for children in grades 8 and 9 as it is such a crucial part of their integration. Language is to key to so many things. (L2)

The lack of teacher competences does not follow recommendations in the field that gives high priority to teachers being educated to teach SLA (Ellis, 1997, 2001; Pica, 2005). They acknowledge that only in a few cases are the teachers chosen for their specific FSL teaching competence and others differ as detailed below:

16. In the beginning, it was because it was one of our teachers with experience from abroad, where she had taught (...). So, she became the obvious choice (...) I sent her to the available courses. And asked her to join the FSL Master's diploma at the university. She is doing that now. We have emphasised that we should try to have a high standard as possible (L1).

17. So there was a woman and then she got other colleagues to join her [in teaching FSL] (L4).

18. And teachers who have a particular interest in teaching FSL (L5).

Another concern of leaders mirroring that of the teachers is the students' linguistic diversity, which poses a massive challenge to the school system as teachers cannot have competence in all the languages represented in the immigrant demographic. One of the leaders identifies that the current FSL set up is more successful for lower grade students:

19. It's [the teaching hours] sufficient if children come early, so we can get them through the school. They pass Danish and Faroese because they are able to manage. Much more needs to be done if it is to benefit students leaving school at age 16 (L2).

The school principals further suggest that a reception class might work favourably, which is yet to become common praxis.

## **Discussion of Themes with Implications for FSL Learning and Teaching**

The aims of the article were to describe the FSL status quo and analyse its implementation and enactment in the context of SLA and SLA teaching. Data shows commonality of ideas shared by teachers and leaders alike reflecting the same issues that are of concern and illustrate the drawbacks of the current FSL approach. The coding of the interview data revealed certain themes, and a picture emerges of the status of FSL, which can also be grouped thematically using organisation structure as the basis of analysis.

The analysis data identifies themes which reflect the interviewees' expectations of the strategic level i.e., the Ministry of Youth and Education as policy makers. The challenge is the absence of any educational directive for FSL, or curriculum designed to guide teachers, which is fundamental to policy making and is the clear responsibility of the strategic level as highlighted in the literature review (Coburn, 2016). Despite the missing policy, it is evident from the analysis of data that the school system has created its own models.

Schools have two clear expectations of the policy makers: availability of sufficient funding to serve all FSL students effectively and sufficient teaching hours to meet the needs of diverse students. Lack of funding for the number of teaching hours limits the amount and quality of FSL teaching on offer. Student entry level of language competence, proximity of student language to Faroese, and the challenge of having to simultaneously learn both Faroese and Danish are all challenging factors, which should be considered when funding the requisite teaching of a diverse student population. This is significant as all school principals and teachers identify insufficient allocated teaching time as

detrimental to the aims of FSL as it fails to meet the needs of the students. Given that research is clear about the time it takes to learn a language 5 - 7 years (Ortega, 2008), this seemingly token availability of formal FSL learning opportunity cannot significantly support SLA and L2 teaching. As one of the crucial factors in L2 learning is the amount and duration of exposure to L2 (Hoff et al., 2011), the limited hours for FSL become less than effective, which is why teachers focus their criticism on it. Apart from L2, little attention has been given to the preservation and development of the immigrant students' L1, which is relevant as it connects them to their home culture and identity (Egert et al., 2021).

As stated in the theoretical underpinnings, the progress in language learning of bilingual children should not be compared to monlingual children, as they make slower progress in learning a second language, which is why the length and intensity of teaching FSL is a key factor in FSL. Important factors for optimal FSL teaching identified in literature are the qualifications, competence and self-efficacy of teachers as these have a marked influence on teaching quality and student learning outcomes (Goddard et al., 2000). Teachers clearly identify that The Faculty of Education should implement FSL for its pre-service teachers. For in-service teachers, continued professional development should be provided for building teacher self efficacy in FSL to contribute to student motivation and learning.

In the light of the literature review, language proficiency contributes to educational success and interventions have to be timely and effective (Tienda & Haskins, 2011). Our analysis reveals the troubling fact that the respondents say there are students who do not receive FSL teaching at all as the lack of funding requires school leaders and teachers to select students.

Teachers would like a formally organised approach involving the local municipalities, foreign office, and child welfare authorities which may build bridges between the formal (school) and informal language learning (outside school) environments. The teachers suggest that in cooperation with parents, it would be helpful to have interpreters, help with student homework and adopt a preventive rather than a reactive approach to facilitate FSL use in various contexts.

The internal coordination of SLA within schools falls to the school principals to implement as effectively and efficiently as possible under the current circumstances. The data demonstrates that there is an information gap between school leaders and the teachers when it comes to the arrival of new immigrant students. Teachers bemoan the leaders' lack of understanding of the issues involved in teaching students FSL. Therefore, teachers feel there is little or no support from leadership to help teachers who directly deal with FSL students. It is evident in the data that the lack of communication between school leaders and teachers impacts the quality of teaching, which in turn affects teacher motivation according to Dörnyei and Skehan (2003).

An overwhelming majority of teachers complain about the lack of FSL teaching materials and claim that the principals fail to comprehend the importance of this for effective teaching. The teachers find it challenging to use the restricted time appropriately as they have to create both age and level appropriate texts for language learning (Ortega, 2008), which is time consuming given that formal frameworks such as policy and curriculum are yet to be designed or formalised.

According to the teachers, their leaders ought to provide opportunities for professional development, organise access to teaching materials, provide sufficient teaching hours and ensure a mutual understanding of what it requires to facilitate the enactment of FSL policy. Indications are that the leadership should create a platform for implementation of FSL.

Teachers are tasked with providing a suitable teaching environment for student learning of Faroese as a second language. In the data, the teachers identify several issues that hinder these students from achieving optimal learning outcomes. They cannot get the time to actually learn Faroese and succeed in the school system. In terms of SLA, as Ortega (2008) highlights:

... knowing that older children and adults can have an initial L2 learning advantage for rate over early starters, and that this advantage may last for about five years in second language environments and for even longer in foreign language settings, can also help problematize misguided attempts to mandate public schools to begin foreign language instruction in the first years of elementary education without first evaluating whether the local resources and conditions can appropriately sustain such efforts throughout the full length of schooling (p. 28).

One is forced to query whether the paucity of FSL classes can have meaningful impact and whether these kinds of classes are sustainable in the long run given the FSL teaching approach. The extremely limited materials that are available do not lend themselves to differentiated teaching and thereby impact FSL. An additional concern that teachers raise is wanting informal learning of FSL to support the formal learning environment, especially because the formal environment has significant drawbacks. A couple of teachers' voice concerns about student exposure to Faroese in the informal learning environment. They feel it is their responsibility to tell the parents the significance of their children's participation in activities after school with their peers, such as sports, to acquire Faroese both formally and informally. As research indicates, participation in various forms of activities affects language learning, the inclusion of the student, the sense of well-being and belonging that is fundamental to learning and successful completion of compulsory school (Backman et al., 2011).



## **Recommendations**

The contribution of the study lies in it being the first of its kind and is pivotal in establishing a foundation from within which the FSL framework can be analysed to provide optimum language learning and teaching and the resultant benefits to FSL student learning. The study may provide some useful insight for policy makers and the school system. If policy is lacking, the knock-on effect on teaching and learning FSL may neither be positive nor productive for the learners. The study may offer useful insight in second language acquisition in other contexts, which can be useful beyond the local settings.

Based on the findings, the recommendations are as follows: to provide optimal funding, supply of adequate learning-teaching materials, sufficient teaching hours, increasing school leaders' awareness of the challenges surrounding teaching FSL, focus on the linguistic diversity in a minoritised language environment and provide directives, which necessitate informed policy making, implementation and enactment for a uniform system for FSL all over the islands. There is a need to continue qualifying in-service teachers and pre-service teachers in FSL.

The data highlights several factors that affect the FSL environment, namely, i. the limited hours available for FSL are not student needs-centred in terms of hours and duration of exposure to Faroese, but are focused on the number of hours available each year without taking into consideration the individual learning needs, ii. teaching hours should be earmarked for individual students to cater to specific individual learning requirements, iii. attending secondary school poses challenges for students with multilingual background as it requires knowledge of Danish and/or English, where texts are often in these languages.

It is heartening to see that the Ministry of Education has taken the initiative to fund the master's FSL course, which is highly appreciated by teachers. This master's diploma in FSL has been implemented and enacted in the Faroese university as requested by the authorities, but without the formal legal framework or an executive order to qualify school teachers. Currently, there is a curriculum for FSL in the pipeline. The situation indicates the lack of a strategic approach to FSL and is a symptom of the urgency to establish FSL teaching. The executive order (Kunngerð, 2020) regarding FSL states that qualified teachers should teach FSL. But, a five-semester master's diploma in FSL course for the in-service teachers was launched in 2021 with the first FSL teachers graduated in 2024. It is a key requirement that the course continues to enable several teachers to gain the necessary competence for teaching FSL in compulsory schools.

## **Concluding remarks**

The qualitative study studies the implementation and enactment of policy on FSL. The findings indicate that there is an urgent need to rethink and reshape the approach to FSL. Teachers show interest, passion and commitment towards FSL,

which offers ideal conditions to build on and benefit even more students. This can create synergies that can positively influence the school environment. These could be rooted in the school culture, where meaningful and planned collaboration underpin problem-solving. The approach should view problem solving as a positive step to minimising, if not eradicating, barriers to learning for vulnerable students. Inclusion must be a key goal in FSL teaching as one important step towards integration and membership in the society, so as to ensure equity and social justice in education.

Current discourse<sup>7</sup> around this issue is pervasive in Faroese society among politicians, school leaders, teachers, linguists, the Immigration office and academics. The discussion includes a review of the current FSL system, its unwitting contribution to increasing the chances of English as the medium of instruction, the pitfalls of teaching in English for FSL students, creating an English medium instruction class at the gymnasium level. This is a clear indication that substantial work has to be done in FSL teaching in a manner that suits the needs of FSL students, the Faroese society and the maintaining the Faroese language and strengthening Faroese as a second language to ensure equity for all.

### **Limitations of Our Study**

We are conscious that the evidence being studied is potentially problematic as school principals are responding to the authority of the Board of Education. Formal evaluation often facilitates the implementation and enactment of policy, given the hierarchical set up which makes school principals answerable to the authority of the Board of Education. This may potentially colour the report data, but in giving voice to the school principals (planning and implementing) and to the teachers (teachers enacting through teaching, choosing materials, assessing and so on) in the semi-structured interviews may mitigate the extent to which this aspect of the evidence is coloured.

In all, 45 schools were asked to report the situation regarding FSL teaching, and 13 of the 45 schools responded despite receiving reminders. Therefore, only a third of the schools responded, which limits generalisation, although the schools that responded represented nearly 40% of the students receiving FSL teaching. Limited FSL teaching means that there are a limited number of experienced individuals who are relevant to the study, but FSL student learning conditions are well-represented.

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<sup>7</sup> <https://www.dimma.fo/grein/hvat-er-malid-enskt-undirvisingarmal-og-foroyskt-sum-annadmal>  
<https://www.setur.fo/fo/setrid/tidindi/ikki-enskt-ella-foeroyskt-men-enskt-og-foeroyskt>

It is important to note that self-reported data have to be viewed critically, but in this situation, there is no existing research based on Faroese school principals' and teachers' perspectives to benchmark our findings in this field.

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