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Language Policy as a Channel of Inclusion for Researchers in the Internationalized University

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Abstract

Internationalization has increased diversity in Finnish universities, yet the meaningful inclusion of international faculty remains challenging. This study examines how institutional language policies shape the professional integration of international researchers, highlighting tensions between national language protection and internationalization rationales. Through interviews and document analysis, the findings reveal structural barriers limiting participation, including unclear expectations, inadequate support, and the perceived low professional value of national languages. The study critiques a narrow approach to diversity, arguing for comprehensive support systems—like peer networks and workplace-based language opportunities—and policy reform that fosters genuine inclusion. Framing language policy as a negotiated space shaped by habitus, community, and power, the study calls for institutional changes prioritizing collaboration and engagement with linguistic diversity.

Keywords

English lingua franca; inclusion; international scholars; internationalization; language policy; national language

1. Introduction

Universities worldwide seek to attract top researchers to enhance academic excellence and global visibility. Studies of faculty mobility, however, underscore the importance of inclusive practices and institutional support to ensure their success and the enrichment of the academic environment (Altbach & Yudkevich, 2017; Rumbley & de Wit, 2016; Yudkevich et al., 2016). Language policy, as I argue in this article, is one of the most critical areas of inclusion. Particularly in non-English-speaking countries, it shapes the conditions for international scholars' participation in academic and institutional life, either facilitating their integration or reinforcing exclusionary structures.

International scholars contribute to the linguistic diversity of universities, yet this does not always lead to multilingualism on an institutional level. Instead, as Lindström and Sylvin (2014) point out, their presence often leads to an increased reliance on English as a lingua franca. In the Nordic context, this shift has sparked concerns about the declining role of national languages in higher education, leading to debates on language protection (Bolton & Kuteeva, 2012; T. Saarinen & Rontu, 2018).

This perspective reinforces a binary view of language use, juxtaposing national languages and English while overlooking the broader linguistic diversity within the academic community. It also portrays international faculty, particularly in language policy, as a problem to manage, not a valuable contribution. For instance, limited proficiency in national languages among internationally recruited researchers (Lindström & Sylvin, 2014) is framed as a problem, rather than an opportunity to examine systemic barriers to language learning. As a result, diversity is often reduced to the inconvenience of accommodating English, instead of prompting deeper engagement with structural challenges that limit equitable participation.

From the perspective of habitus, universities interpret national and international influences, pursuing the standardization and legitimation of language practices. These ongoing processes create specific conditions that govern language expression and shape the perception of individuals within the academic environment (Bourdieu, 1991).

The tension between national language protection policies, specifically those for Finnish and Swedish, and the push for internationalization—which often defaults to English—mirrors the conflict Rutherford (1990) described. Rutherford noted how language policies frequently aim for linguistic homogeneity, while cross-border mobility fosters hybrid identities and multilingual practices. Globalization not only promotes these diverse identities but also challenges equality, positioning policy as a potential mechanism for justice. Within the Nordic countries, and particularly in Finland, university language policy faces a fundamental challenge: defining its purpose while also determining who belongs to the university's linguistic community.

Kuteeva et al. (2020) emphasize that multilingual realities within universities are often more complex than official policies acknowledge. T. Saarinen and Rontu (2018) similarly highlight a gap between policy and practice, showing how the University of Jyväskylä presents its language policy as rooted in a traditionally Finnish identity; this approach clashes with community perspectives and the country's constitutional bilingualism. Likewise, at Aalto, T. Saarinen and Rontu (2018, p. 115) observe that while official documents promote national languages, practical situations favour English. Furthermore, the parallel use of Swedish and Finnish, often suggested as a policy tool, is discussed theoretically but rarely implemented in practice.

Conversely, Soler (2020) critiques image-making strategies that promote English at the expense of national languages to showcase universities as international. While English indeed plays a central role in university practices due to its high communicative potential (de Swaan, 2001), this does not negate the complex interplay of other languages within the university. These studies consistently highlight that university language policy remains an evolving and contested field with undefined objectives and scope. Consequently, the full complexity of the university's multilingual community remains underexplored and insufficiently addressed in policy and practice.

The internationalization of universities, which has resulted in increased diversity and multilingualism, faces a challenge. This challenge concerns whether genuine inclusion can be fostered, particularly through its language policy, or if institutions will continue to rely on symbolic acknowledgment. As Ahmed (2012) critiques, institutional diversity policies frequently signal inclusion without enacting structural change. Similarly, Finnish university language policies articulate support for Finnish and Swedish and mention internationalization, but often fail to outline clear strategies for including international staff. This dynamic creates hierarchies: Even with the growing use of English, Finnish-speaking faculty often retain power, while non-native speakers or non-speakers of Finnish face systemic exclusion. This highlights that language learning isn't merely an individual effort; it's deeply embedded in institutional power structures.

The absence of specific language skills and understanding of implied rules can disempower individuals, hindering effective action and upholding sanctions of the field. Habitus involves stable dispositions that not only predict social standing (Wacquant, 2014) but also allows for agency and adaptation to new and challenging contexts. In language policy, however, the influence of actors varies according to their power, resulting in decision-making shaped by dominant discourses that perpetuate linguistic, economic, ethnic, and social hierarchies (Ball, 2006).

A narrow approach to diversity in language policy—for instance, merely offering language courses without addressing deeper structural barriers—fails to recognize the university as a complex language community. As A. Saarinen and Jäppinen (2014) highlight, the absence of migrant voices in policy discussions limits genuine inclusion. Consequently, fostering genuine participation necessitates that universities, rather than operating under the assumption that language acquisition alone ensures involvement, acknowledge diverse linguistic backgrounds, cultivate inclusive environments, and involve affected individuals in shaping policies. Moving beyond "harmonious empty pluralism" (Mohanty, 2003, as cited in Ahmed, 2012) demands structural transformation over mere performative gestures. Indeed, Hoffman (2007, p. 119) and Lehtimaja et al. (2021, p. 12) further problematize equity, demonstrating how seemingly neutral policies can inadvertently produce inequalities for both international and local scholars and students.

This production of inequality also manifests when language policy adopts a principle centered on national language protection. Language policy approach based on this overlooks the broader socio-economic and institutional forces that shape language use. As Mufwene (2006) and Hultgren (2014) argue, language policies alone cannot drive significant change without addressing structural conditions, professional incentives, and power hierarchies. T. Saarinen's (2020) research further highlights how policies promoting national languages in higher education are often entangled with nationalist discourse, potentially creating exclusionary environments rather than fostering integration. By prioritizing language preservation over institutional inclusivity, such policies impose expectations on international scholars without providing the necessary support, career incentives, or social integration.

This study examines how institutional language policies in Finnish universities, shaped by the dual pressures of national language protection and internationalization, influence the inclusion and participation of international researchers. My central argument is that language policy, rather than arbitrarily regulating linguistic practices, is best conceptualized as a mechanism for genuine inclusion. Such inclusion extends beyond mere presence, encompassing voice, influence, and active participation in decision-making, leadership, and institutional practices, far exceeding simply fostering positive workplace interactions. Going

beyond the analysis of rigid language protection policies, this article explores how institutional structures can better reflect academic realities and promote meaningful multilingual participation, including opportunities for learning national languages.

2. Methodology

This research explores language policy as a negotiated space of power, not a static set of rules, by integrating Bourdieu's habitus, Spolsky's language community, and Ahmed's critique of inclusion. It examines how diverse habitus, shifting community norms, and power structures influence the language integration of international researchers, and investigates language policy's potential to foster participatory inclusion.

Within this framework, Spolsky's concept of language community is particularly relevant. Unlike a notion of linguistic community centered on a single language, Spolsky (2007) emphasizes the negotiation of multiple languages to produce rules of coexistence. Language policies and practices, which shape belonging, participation, and power dynamics, consequently highlight the need for inclusion beyond symbolic acknowledgment. A language community, in this view, is defined not only by the language(s) spoken but also by the social rules and expectations governing language use within that group.

This analysis explores how linguistic habitus influences the language learning of international researchers and the misalignment of their motivation and integration with institutional expectations. The concept of habitus refers to the deeply ingrained linguistic dispositions that shape how individuals use and perceive language in social contexts. Formed through one's social background, education, and experiences, habitus influences language acquisition, usage, and the perceived legitimacy of different languages (Bourdieu, 1991). Habitus also reveals how proficiency in a powerful language, as a socially constructed advantage, influences participation in university life. An internationalized university often favors individuals with strong, native-like, standard language skills in the key languages. Conversely, those lacking such proficiency may struggle to fully participate, which can hinder their effectiveness.

This issue is often compounded by a significant gap between policy and practice: While multilingualism is promoted in official discourse, English continues to dominate the everyday realities of teaching and research for international students. Such practices can devalue local language learning while implicitly favoring native-level proficiency. This disconnect is illuminated by Ahmed's critique of inclusion, which reveals how universities often perform symbolic gestures of inclusion without addressing underlying structural inequalities. Ahmed (2012) notes that inclusion frequently involves bringing in marginalized individuals into existing frameworks without changing those frameworks, leading advocates to face resistance for challenging established norms. To illustrate a more inclusive vision of language policy, I turn to Darvin and Norton (2016) in the conclusion, whose discussion of cosmopolitanism—as a counterpoint to dominant narratives of globalization and internationalization—provides a valuable lens for envisioning more equitable and multilingual learning spaces for language community members.

The empirical data for this study were gathered through a multi-faceted approach. First, 42 semi-structured interviews were conducted between 2022 and 2023. These interviews, lasting 40 to 80 minutes, explored the academic and linguistic experiences of PhD students, postdocs, and assistant professors (both international and local) across five Finnish universities. Participants were purposefully selected to ensure a

diverse representation of disciplines, countries of origin, and language backgrounds. The semi-structured interview script focused on participants' experiences with language use and their views on language policy. While guided by the script, specific questions also probed unique experiences, including language background and academic interests, informed by prior background research. The ethics statement for this research was submitted to the granting agency, and all participants provided informed consent, confirming their full awareness of the nature of the research and the use of their data.

Complementing the interviews, institutional documents, including language policies, strategic plans, and website materials, were analyzed to trace the evolution of institutional stances on language use over a ten-year period, from 2013 to 2023. Further insights were derived from observational data collected through formal recordings and field notes, documenting language-related discussions in both formal and informal university settings. Thematic analysis was conducted using Atlas.ti software, following a six-phase approach by Braun and Clarke (2021), with coding performed both inductively (to capture emergent themes) and deductively (informed by the theoretical framework of habitus, power, and language community). The final list of codes is presented in Table 1.

To establish dependability, which is the qualitative equivalent of reliability, this study implemented a rigorous and transparent research process, documenting all phases of data collection, analysis, and interpretation. This included detailed records of interview protocols, document analysis procedures, observational field notes, and coding decisions made during the thematic analysis. I undertook iterative analysis, aiming to minimize researcher bias and enhance the dependability of the findings by ensuring conclusions were grounded in the data and supported by multiple perspectives (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Table 1. Final list of codes.

Theoretical codes	Codes from the data
Inclusion as active participation	Misunderstanding of language challenges, differing perceptions of willingness vs. ability
Language policy as a tool, resource allocation, and power	Workload as a barrier to language learning
Tension between language protection and internationalization	Limited opportunities for language practice socially and professionally
Language policies: linguistic homogeneity vs. global movements and hybrid identities	Unclear value of Finnish for career advancement, bilingualism further challenging the value of learning one national language
Language policies masking underlying power dynamics	Tension between local and global publishing priorities, institutional influence on language value
Faculty mobility and internationalization	Insecurity about teaching, increasing prevalence of teaching in English
Language skills as socially constructed	Missed opportunities for integration, language skills as a means of professional and community engagement
Individual's ability to navigate the institutional structures	Language learning as professional development (or not)
Power dynamics and language use, motivation for language learning	Flexibility in language requirements
Language community, diverse language practices within universities	Ambiguous language policies
Cosmopolitanism as a counter discourse	

This study primarily focuses on prevalent linguistic experiences within Finnish universities. While a few cases of advanced Finnish proficiency among highly educated migrants were selectively included for diversity, these were notably tied to strong language support communities, indicating that inclusion fostered learning, rather than the reverse. This aligns with literature on the rarity of such proficiency (Rodriguez-Kaarto & Hahn, 2014). Therefore, this analysis prioritizes common trends, dedicating a detailed examination of successful language acquisition to future research.

3. Analysis

3.1. Devaluation of Linguistic Labour

Insufficient national language proficiency among international university staff in non-English-speaking countries creates inequities in task distribution, e.g., administrative work, and complicates collegial relations. Such differences in linguistic habitus impact collegial relationships. These challenges extend beyond mere language barriers, potentially leading to misunderstandings and fostering exclusion. One research participant illustrates a misinterpretation of the international researcher's situation:

> I have, for example, a colleague who has been living in Finland for 15 years but refuses to speak Finnish with me. We always speak in English. And I think it's sad. I've told her several times: "Look, I'd love to speak in Finnish with you." But she says: "I can't express myself well enough." And I tell her: "Of course you can if you just practice." But if she doesn't want to speak, speak, speak, uh, Finnish with me. This is on a personal level.

This misinterpretation often stems from the difficulty local colleagues face in discerning whether individuals are unable or unwilling to learn the national language. The phenomenon of "second language shame" (Galmiche, 2018) further highlights how self-expectations in competitive environments can generate feelings of shame and communication barriers. This underscores that motivation is socially conditioned (Welesilassie & Nikolov, 2022). This dynamic creates significant communication challenges at the institutional level, often overlooking the emotional dimensions of language use, such as confidence, anxiety, or perceived legitimacy associated with speaking a particular language.

From an institutional perspective, alienation and a lack of understanding regarding the challenges of learning Finnish or Swedish impede the development of an inclusive language policy. Norton (1995, 2000, 2013) explored the social dynamics of language learning, arguing that commitment to learning should not be reduced to individual motivation and that power relations often limit opportunities for learners. She emphasized that the binary of motivated/unmotivated fails to explain why highly motivated learners may resist speaking in unequal situations.

Then, the working conditions of researchers show challenges of dedicating time and sustaining a long-term commitment to language learning. As one participant described:

> I tried that many times, I have made many attempts to learn Finnish, but…at some point, I am getting lost due to too much work, and it starts getting impossible. You cannot put in as much time as you want to learn the language. I mean, the work and the whole new things in the country, the whole culture, and stuff like that.

Others echoed this sentiment, often citing heavy workloads and adjustment challenges as reasons for lagging in national language skills. This often led to a sense of failure and self-blame regarding their lack of progress.

Researchers report that existing language support inadequately prepares them for professional application, leaving them struggling to utilize Finnish in work tasks. This included a lack of advanced, profession-specific courses. This structural challenge, tied to the devaluation of academic care work (Cardozo, 2017), reveals a failure to create effective support systems, particularly as Finnish-speaking colleagues may lack the resources to facilitate language acquisition. Fostering genuine inclusion necessitates a shift towards nuanced language policies that prioritize community-driven linguistic spaces, rather than solely focusing on formal, individual language acquisition.

3.2. Social Aspects of Language Learning

Many internationally recruited employees experienced social isolation, with their primary interactions occurring in the workplace. As one participant explained:

> Just like I said, I didn't have a single Finnish friend; I only had international friends. So, we would either speak in English or in their languages, or something else, but we never use Finnish together.

Participants' habitus, favoring exclusive international socialization, limited their Finnish practice and workplace communication. This, coupled with a lack of socially constructed motivation—evidenced by the absence of advanced language courses and limited negotiation of linguistic participation within the academic community—hindered integration and language development.

Although some participants were contractually required to learn Finnish, this requirement often lacked follow-up from employers, and workplace communication often provided no opportunities for meaningful interactions in the language, rendering it impractical. This raised a broader issue of ambiguous understanding regarding the role of the Finnish language in career advancement. Some participants expressed frustration with learning Finnish, seeing little value in it for their professional growth, as one participant explained:

> I have time now, but my brain and my subconscious are against it. Subconsciously, I think that there is no sense in learning Finnish. Despite how well I would have learned it, you are not going to be accepted in the Finnish environment, you are not going to know Finnish on a native level. They will tell you that your Finnish is not enough, we cannot give you this job. Your Finnish is good, but not good enough for this job.

Some respondents raised concerns over the requirement for bilingualism in the Finnish labor market. They pointed to instances where colleagues who already learned Finnish were denied jobs due to insufficient knowledge of Swedish, reinforcing the doubt that language proficiency in either national language would be valued or rewarded.

While officially bilingual in Finnish and Swedish, Finnish universities operate as complex language communities. While local staff must demonstrate proficiency in both, international employees are often exempt—yet this exemption does not translate into real inclusion or access to opportunities. Instead, the institution's habitus

prioritizes English for career development, even for local researchers, reinforcing ambiguity about the role of national languages in professional advancement.

Despite the symbolic capital inherent in national languages in the academic context, the prioritization of English in research and teaching diminishes the perceived professional value of Finnish and Swedish for international researchers, hindering their motivation to learn. This lack of structured support and clear institutional expectations reduces language learning to a mere symbolic gesture, isolating staff and impeding meaningful linguistic practice.

However, while institutional failures create ambiguity, Finnish remains relevant in underexplored contexts, offering opportunities for enhanced work integration. Recognizing these nuances necessitates a shift towards negotiated linguistic practices and a stronger institutional commitment to systemic changes that support language acquisition, moving beyond symbolic acknowledgment to practical application.

3.3. Professional Potential of the National Languages

Some researchers were uncertain about their specific goals for learning Finnish. While many acknowledged its usefulness for daily interactions, this goal was often not motivating enough, and they questioned its relevance for academic success. As one participant noted:

> It is hard to demand that people publish in Finnish or Swedish because, mostly, publications in international journals are counted. This is currency; they are not counted equally.

Some argued that publishing in Finnish could be valuable for scholars aiming to impact both national and international academic spheres, as it reaches local professional audiences. While most local colleagues were fluent in English, a share of their professional discussions occurred in Finnish. This view suggests that publishing in Finnish could help include internationally recruited researchers in the Finnish academic community.

Even when opportunities to use Finnish exist and language proficiency is acquired, the prioritization of English in publishing influences decisions regarding language use. The tension between local and global language practices in academia makes internationally recruited faculty most vulnerable to such situations due to their precarious employment conditions. It is also crucial to consider the role of institutional influence in how Finnish is valued in publications. The next quote highlights the tension between local and global language practices in academia, particularly regarding the use of Finnish for publishing. The participant describes an international researcher with adequate Finnish skills who undervalues publishing in Finnish. This attitude reflects a broader trend where university policies prioritize international visibility and funding, often making publishing in English essential for career advancement:

> In Finland, publications in Finnish…are highly valued, but for her [a colleague], the idea was straight away: "No, we don't publish in Finnish." Her Finnish skills are OK, she's been living here for years. But of course, if we were writing with her, I would be the one checking the text. In the end, she would be able to discuss and write with me in Finnish, but this was not the question. The question [is] that she doesn't think that Finnish is a valuable language. If we have this attitude in academia in the future, we

> won't write in Finnish at all. It also comes from their university leaders [who say] we get more money if [we] publish in international publications.

This situation underscores the importance of institutional support not only in promoting language proficiency but also in demonstrating the value of academic expression in local languages. Even if an individual can write in Finnish, the lack of institutional recognition can diminish their value, revealing the interplay between personal motivations and systemic pressures.

The importance of Finnish also became apparent in research dissemination. One participant reflected on a missed opportunity to engage with the Finnish media:

> I realized that my work is interesting to the audience here. So, if I had learned the language, I would have been able to communicate it better. I did not know what would happen when I completed my PhD. If I had known that I would stay, I would have learned the language more, which would have enhanced my integration into this community.

This comment underscores a missed opportunity for full inclusion in the Finnish academic community. Knowledge of Finnish was seen as a way to strengthen connections with the local community, enhance professional opportunities, and foster a sense of belonging.

Insufficient national language skills lead to missed opportunities in areas like establishing stronger connections within the local academic community and society, research dissemination to local audiences and media, and teaching in the local language.

The issue of teaching in Finnish also raised insecurity, with many participants uncertain about language expectations, particularly whether they could teach in Finnish or if English would suffice. As one respondent noted:

> Maybe one needs to know Finnish to teach, but the idea that one needs to know English after university to be able to work in it is also gaining ground. At least at our faculty.

This researcher struggled to see how their limited language skills could be used in academia, noting that teaching in English is increasingly common and considered beneficial for students. However, in a few cases, internationally recruited researchers successfully transitioned to teaching in Finnish, supported by colleagues and resources like proofreading services. They explained that the need to teach in Finnish became clear early on through workplace inclusion, enabling a strategic approach to language learning and sustained motivation.

These observations highlight missed opportunities for integration, underscoring the importance of language skills for professional and community engagement. It remains unclear, however, whether these potential benefits are fully realizable through language learning or if native-level skills would still be preferred.

Institutional ambiguity regarding teaching in the national languages creates an environment where international researchers' habitus prioritizes navigating instability, leading many to undervalue Finnish as a

career asset. This mirrors findings in Chinese universities (Chen et al., 2020), where learners of non-English languages often perceived their studies as a leisure activity, struggling to connect language proficiency with tangible professional advantages. Similarly, in Finland, while research dissemination in Finnish is seen as valuable for local integration, the overall lack of perceived professional applications diminishes language learning motivation. As Dörnyei and Al-Hoorie (2017) and Papi et al. (2019) suggest, demonstrating the practical applications of Finnish could foster a more motivated and integrated research community.

3.4. Absence or Presence of Formal Requirements

While comprehensive data on national language proficiency among international university employees is lacking, language acquisition is a recognized challenge in Finnish universities. This mirrors broader Nordic concerns about national language domain loss (Hultgren, 2014) and prompts discussions on language requirements. However, the need to prioritize competitiveness and attract top researchers often undermines these requirements. As illustrated by Siiner (2016) at the University of Copenhagen, research productivity in English frequently outweighs national language proficiency. Similarly, although Finnish universities have considered language requirements (Lindström & Sylvin, 2014), current policies tend to frame national language proficiency as something to be encouraged rather than a strict requirement. This approach is exemplified by Aalto University's guidelines (n.d.):

1. The various university bodies, groups, and committees use the working languages flexibly, making sure that all members have equal opportunities to participate in discussions.
2. Aalto University supports the integration of international students and staff and offers them the possibility to study Finnish culture.
3. Students and staff are encouraged to study Finnish, Swedish, and English.

Ambiguous language policies, lacking clear obligations and supporting infrastructure, create uncertainty and exacerbate precarity for international employees, revealing institutional unawareness of their challenges. Though employees described a lack of guidance and difficulty applying learned skills at work, and an absence of formal requirements, informal expectations still impacted professional development. For example, one participant described a situation where there was no expectation to learn Finnish:

> As part of my job, there was no requirement for me to speak Finnish. But [within my unit], I think it was two or three times a year they'd have a big meeting with the head of the language center, and [it was] not conducted in Finnish....And then they would have these...professional development days, and those would all be in Finnish. And I understand...that there are people who would like to have those events and those meetings in Finnish. Of course, I understand...that I am in Finland after all....But, yeah, [you are] excluded because you couldn't understand....I'm reluctant to say that I felt excluded and I should have been included because, at the same time, I think, well, maybe I should have tried harder to learn Finnish....Although I don't feel that my circumstances allowed me to do that particularly well.

Participants acknowledged their responsibility in language learning, but the absence of clear workplace paths and delayed university expectations fostered feelings of exclusion, underscoring the need for realistic communication about language. Some researchers noted that this could limit their career mobility, as it might tie their professional prospects to the university, restricting future opportunities:

> The only opportunity without learning the language is that I might end up in the research field. If I want to move to the industry, I will have to learn the language. I am learning it on my own, but I am not sure how fast I will go.

Opportunities for further career development within academia were also affected by the lack of sufficient Finnish skills:

> When it comes to applying for local opportunities and local grants, being able to communicate in the Finnish language, potentially achieving some status, would be very useful.

Another participant noted the impact of language on career advancement:

> Now I am worried that not having [a Finnish or Swedish [language skills], I cannot move on with my career here. I cannot teach in Finnish, Swedish, or both, so I cannot get a position as a university lecturer. Administrative positions are also not possible for me, since they have not given me a grant this year, [so] I cannot find a temporary job at the university.

While some participants see learning the language as part of a stable career path, others, particularly those in temporary positions or planning to leave Finland, are less motivated to invest in language learning. This diminished motivation could limit their opportunities further. Uncertainty about the future often influences the decision to learn Finnish. Some senior researchers shared that they only began learning Finnish once they realized they were likely to remain in Finland long-term.

Overall, the need to learn the language was rarely unclear for internationally recruited employees. Instead, the problem lay in concrete pathways to progress with language skills and make them relevant for their workplace. The paradox of language policy in Finnish academia is that both the presence and absence of formal requirements create challenges for international researchers. Required proficiency lacks clear benchmarks and career incentives, while its absence still leads to implicit expectations and exclusion. This ambiguity deepens precarity, making it unclear whether language learning offers real professional benefits. This complex interplay of uncertainty and perceived professional value reveals how participants' habitus—shaped by individual circumstances and institutional ambiguity—significantly impacts their motivation and engagement with Finnish language learning.

3.5. University-Provided Language Courses

Offering language courses was the most widely discussed form of inclusion support through language, both within the interviews and document data. Some problems with their provision were also noted:

> I mean, for people who come to Finland [to work] at the university, we should offer language courses. From day one. And because people learn in different ways, it's hard to say how long the timeline would be. Let's say, for example, somebody comes here and lives with a Finnish speaker at home. [They] can probably learn faster because [they have] more possibilities to use the language, but let the language courses be one thing, and [they should] start from level zero. But then it seems to be, for me, that if you come to Finland, you can start at the university and you can do level one or two or whatever. But then

> it stops...that we don't actually offer courses...so we should have this continuum here that we start and we push the people through, we motivate them. And if we talk about researchers at the university, as we know, there's always a question of time, which is most [important/limited]. And then it should be, I think, it would be a good idea to have the language learning courses as part of your work plan. I mean, it should actually be in your work plan that this is where you go to the courses, you learn Finnish.

Incorporating language courses into employees' work schedules could ensure they have time to attend classes and practice their skills, making language acquisition an integral part of researchers' work. However, this approach raised concerns about program effectiveness, particularly given the often unclear practical application of these skills in academic work. Another issue was the need for tailored, flexible language programs at all levels, accommodating individuals' varying acquisition paces throughout a researcher's tenure at the university. Specific requirements and progress measurements were also criticized.

The perceived purpose of language learning explained resistance to formal progress measurements; it was considered that language was needed for life, rather than for fulfilling some formal requirements:

> Yeah, I don't know. For example, when I teach Swedish as the second national language, we have very strict levels. [Students] have to reach level B1, and it's very strict. But for people who come to Finland, and... when the language skills [are] not officially, you know, regulated, why do we need to test the people anyway? I mean, we're testing, and [suppose] you didn't pass the exam. You failed. I don't know. I don't think it's necessary [for people] who come to Finland to work at the university and take courses in order to cope with the language in the country. I don't think language testing is needed... For example, the situation you described: There's somebody taking a course over and over again. The teacher should just say: "Go on, you can go on here now."...Yeah, you can take a test, but then, during the course, I mean, it is just Finnish...in the beginning [it is] a little bit different. It can be a little bit demanding, and if you don't...if you're always all the time saying the exam...doesn't give you any hope, really, but OK. Oh, lovely language. I want to learn this.

When the goal was to acquire enough language skills for the workplace, practical language use was prioritised over formal assessment. Rigid language requirements and formal progress measurements were viewed as demotivating, especially for those struggling with Finnish. Instead, emphasis was placed on practical language use over formal exams.

This concern reflects the realities of international researchers juggling multiple responsibilities, making formal testing and rigid assessments challenging. However, the lack of clear goals or accountability could undermine both institutional responsibility and the quality of language courses. This led to discussions about whether universities do enough and if language courses adequately support a balanced approach to language learning. As one speaker put it:

> Give people time, integrate it in their work plans, and then give [them] the possibility to work with somebody who...speaks Finnish, that you would have a colleague who would....But this again, when everybody is so busy at the university, this demands time. You could create a system where you would have a language tutor or a tutoring teacher, [so] that when you would want to start teaching in Finnish that somebody would be there with you in the beginning and help you.

Current university language support, lacking consistent integration into work plans and reflecting ambiguous requirements, fails to facilitate professional integration or the development of an inclusive linguistic *habitus*. This gap between acknowledged value and systemic provision necessitates community-based approaches, including tutors and peer learning. However, resource limitations remain a critical barrier, demanding a stronger institutional commitment to language support as a core aspect of academic development and integration.

Another researcher also doubted the university's commitment to allocating sufficient resources to address language-related issues in other spheres as well:

> I don't know how the system works at the moment, but if we think, for example, that Finnish speakers teach in English, I think they should get a little bit more resources to plan their teaching, because it takes more time to prepare for an international course….I know it will be really hard at the university because we are short of money all the time and short of resources, but this will be kind of the ideal situation for you because you need more time when you plan your course than in Finnish.

This concern extends beyond internationally recruited employees, reflecting a broader trend of declining language support in higher education (e.g., Gallagher-Brett & Broady, 2012). While some researchers argue that English dominance is excessive, they also face challenges working in English and may need additional support.

3.6. Example of Successful Peer Support

In addition to limited university support, the importance of collaboration and community-based decision-making for progress was acknowledged. From an institutional perspective, this would require fostering a strong sense of community and collaboration across diverse groups, all seeking equitable access to resources. One potential solution was demonstrated when a Finnish colleague, a Swedish language teacher, supported another Finnish colleague in developing Swedish-language teaching:

> What we did, he did his lectures and gave them to me…I was listening to him and helping him. It was actually him who did the whole work, but I was helping him there. Yeah. And this is the system we could have now. It was about the Finnish speaker, who…promised to teach in Swedish and did it, and he did it brilliantly. Of course, he made some mistakes…but who cares? He could do it. He's a marvelous person. He could do it….But this could be something you could do, but it should be a system.

This highlights the need for a long-term perspective, a system providing support for skill development:

> That would be fantastic. But I mean, I know it's probably not realistic when we talk about our universities or the university. I don't know if the university has the rationales to do it, because it also doesn't seem that this is very much stimulated from the top.

Research participants' calls for greater support reveal a tension between internationalization ideals and institutional constraints, where national language protection for native speakers limits inclusive practices and intensifies power imbalances. This necessitates a counter-discourse promoting equitable support

and community integration, fostering a new linguistic habitus through collaborative learning and practical resources.

However, insufficient university resources, indicative of power dynamics privileging other forms of capital, hinder this process and create ambiguous language policies, thereby impeding effective inclusion. As Spolsky (2007) argues, language communities are shaped by negotiated rules of coexistence, yet the current institutional framework fails to adequately facilitate this negotiation, resulting in a lack of genuine integration.

Darvin and Norton (2016) highlight how globalization can construct new inequalities, advocating for cosmopolitanism to challenge these dynamics. Similarly, international faculty face a burden akin to Ahmed's "diversity fatigue," where they are expected to perform unpaid linguistic labor without adequate institutional support. Their struggles are often framed as personal failures, mirroring the resistance encountered by diversity workers. The symbolic nature of language demands, coupled with administrative dominance of Finnish and unrealistic national language standards, further underscores institutional inertia and the need for resource-backed inclusion.

4. Conclusion

Language policy in internationalized universities is more than a set of formal rules; it is a negotiation site shaped by power dynamics, habitus, and institutional structures. While formally committed to both national language protection and internationalization, Finnish universities often prioritize English due to its role in research, funding, and career advancement, even while proclaiming national language value in formal documents. This creates linguistic hierarchies where Finnish and Swedish, despite being institutionally valued, offer limited professional incentives for international faculty. This English dominance, functioning as a socio-economic commodity (Mufwene, 2006), contributes to a disconnect between policy and practice, hindering meaningful integration.

Unequal power relations and a lack of structural support mean that language learning is not merely a matter of individual motivation but is deeply shaped by social and institutional contexts. Even highly motivated researchers may resist learning Finnish if it reinforces their marginalized status or if conditions for meaningful participation are absent.

The concept of linguistic habitus helps explain why international researchers experience exclusion despite language policies that ostensibly encourage language learning. Their linguistic dispositions—formed by prior experiences and professional trajectories—often misalign with dominant institutional norms that favor English for professional success while expecting national language acquisition without sufficient support.

Universities reinforce this contradiction by offering language courses without embedding practical opportunities for language use within the workplace, leading to what could be described as "language learning fatigue." This reflects Ahmed's critique of diversity work, where inclusion is performed symbolically rather than meaningfully institutionalized. Furthermore, the expectation to learn Finnish without adequate support mirrors the broader devaluation of care work in academia, where mentoring and peer support for language learning remain informal, unpaid, and unrecognized in professional evaluations. This misalignment,

coupled with unrealistic expectations and a lack of institutional support, creates exclusion, mirroring the undervalued care work highlighted by Cardozo (2017).

A more inclusive language policy means moving past rigid linguistic hierarchies to foster a genuine language community. Communication challenges in multilingual settings often arise not from a lack of shared language but from unclear expectations and limited opportunities for language negotiation. Rather than treating language learning as an individual's sole responsibility, institutions must embed multilingual practices into daily academic life and offer structured support for linguistic inclusion. Recognizing language policy as a contested, rather than fixed, space allows for a more dynamic approach. This approach acknowledges the evolving linguistic landscape of universities and seeks to include international researchers not just as English-speaking academics, but as members of a diverse academic community. Drawing on Norton's understanding of power relations, this study argues for a shift from individual responsibility to institutional commitment. Universities can move beyond symbolic gestures by fostering a truly multilingual environment through negotiated linguistic norms (Spolsky, 2007) and addressing structural inequalities. A cosmopolitan perspective further challenges rigid language binaries, advocating for shared responsibility and embedding multilingual practices into academic life.

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Conflict of Interests

The author declares no conflict of interests.

Data Availability

Following completion of project publications, some data will be destroyed for privacy, while other data will be archived via the Finnish Social Science Data Archive (FSD).

Supplementary Material

Supplementary material for this article is available online in the format provided by the author (unedited).

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