

## STEPS INTO MULTILINGUALISM AND STUDENT EMPLOYABILITY VIA ONLINE LANGUAGE LEARNING

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**Research purpose.** The purpose of this paper is to present an on-going Nordic cooperation project within Nordplus. The aim is to display the project in progress and the results as of today.

**Keywords:** multilingualism, language competence, virtual learning, online learning, intensive course

**Research Methodology.** Students may feel challenged as they seek to work life and question whether competencies and skills acquired during their studies meet the requirements on the 21<sup>st</sup> century work life. Communication skills and intercultural competence along with language competence are defined among future skills for work life. With globalization and internationalization in Europe the natural demand for learning other languages than English evokes. One of the EU's multilingualism goals is for every European to speak two languages in addition to their mother tongue. There is a tendency in Lithuania and other Baltic states of establishing Nordic businesses and companies in the Baltic states. Young people find working in an international/ Scandinavian company more attractive as there are wider career ladder opportunities.

Institutions of higher education might not have means to offer education in less frequent languages and to small groups of students. There might also be lack of native teachers of less frequently taught languages such as Finnish in Lithuania. Virtual studies in online environments can alleviate these problems and enable language learning regardless of time and space. Furthermore, online courses and materials might be more effective tools for learning when they are designed or tailored for specific target groups.

**Findings.** This paper discusses a Nordplus project called *Multilingualism a key to employment* which targets challenges of globalization and internationalization with the means of widening the range of students' language skills. The primary goals are to create a virtual course in beginner Finnish targeted for Lithuanian students and that can later be used by students of other nationalities. The other expected outcomes of the project are an intensive course given in natural language surroundings in Finland as a follow-up for the virtual learning. The paper gives first an overview of the project work and secondly, presents the process of creating and testing the virtual course. Thirdly, the plans for piloting and the intensive course are presented. Lastly it discusses challenges met and the future dissemination.

**Practical implications.** The report gives a summary of an on-going Nordic cooperation project and presents the project result which is an online 3 ECTS Moodle course of a Finnish language (A1). After piloting and testing the course it will be offered as an elective course in KUAS Haaga-Helia UAS curricula.