



Language skills

a competitive asset in working life

Confederation of Finnish Industries





Language skills a competitive asset in working life

COLLABORATION AND NETWORKS REQUIRE DIVERSE LANGUAGE SKILLS

This is Finland in the 21st century: Our workforce moves across borders, tourism to Finland is increasing and

Finnish population has become multicultural. Finns themselves continue to reinforce their international experience by working, travelling and studying abroad.

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In working life, collaboration in international networks requires diverse language skills. Many businesses operating in Finland belong to international corporations, which may have locations on several

continents. At the same time, local work communities in Finland have become multicultural, including speakers of many languages.

Language skills are a business requirement not only for large international corporations but also everyday life in small and medium-sized businesses. Many start up businesses again are born global, directly targeting international markets.

The need for language skills has also expanded across different personnel groups. In addition to management and specialists, language skills are now a requirement at the operational level as part of the basic professional skill set.

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At present, almost one third of all EK member companies need to use the Russian language in their business.

NEED FOR RUSSIAN ON THE RISE

Today, the most common languages used in the Confederation of Finnish Industries' (EK) member companies are Finnish, English, Swedish and Russian.

At present, almost one third of all EK member companies need to use the Russian language in their business. 70 per cent of these companies find that Russian will be needed more and more in the future. In addition, the Russian language will in the future be needed by one quarter of the companies that do not use it today. While Russian is needed across all business sectors,

Most common languages in EK member companies in 2013.

Finnish	97%
English	76%
Swedish	47%
Russian	29%
German	14%
Estonian	5%
Chinese	4%
French	2%
Spanish	2%
Italian	1%
Portuguese	1%

The popularity of different languages varies based on the field of operation:

Among industrial companies

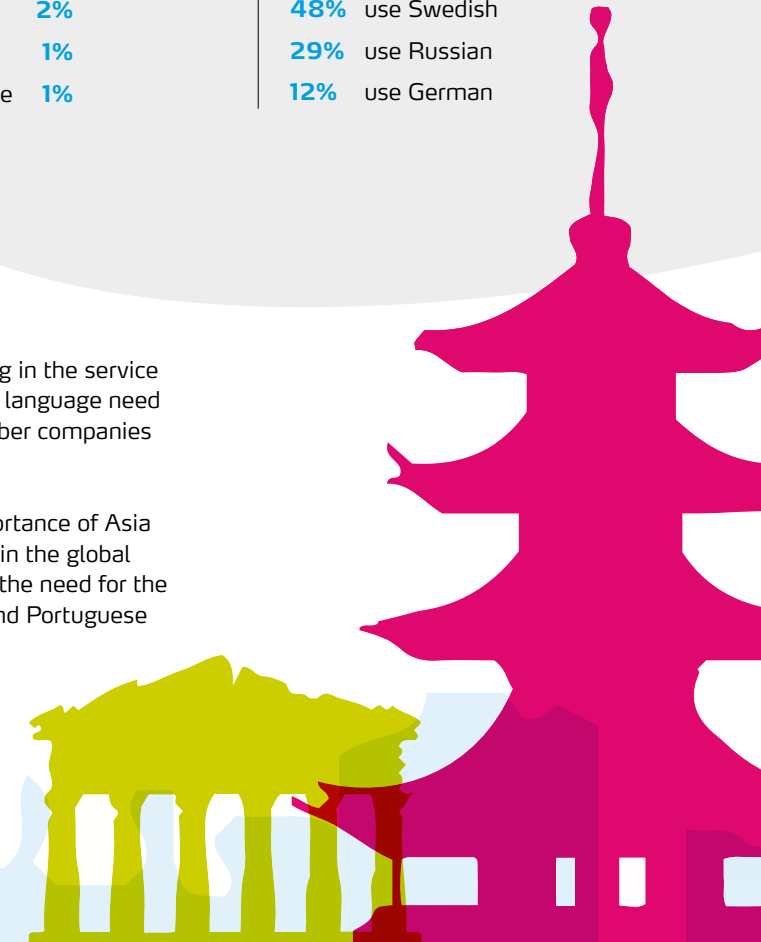
97%	use English
56%	use Swedish
35%	use Russian
29%	use German

Among service sector companies

75%	use English
48%	use Swedish
29%	use Russian
12%	use German

companies operating in the service field mentioned the language need more than EK member companies on average.

The increasing importance of Asia and South America in the global economy increases the need for the Chinese, Spanish and Portuguese languages.



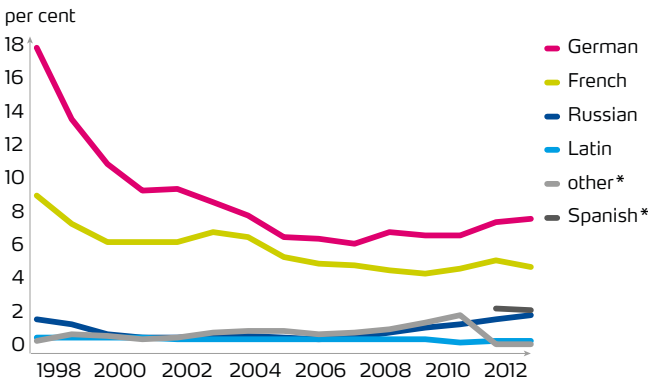
LANGUAGE SKILLS ARE REQUIRED FROM SPECIALISTS AND CUSTOMER SERVICE

Finance <ul style="list-style-type: none">customer servicesalesspecialist work	Information and communication services <ul style="list-style-type: none">sales"every position"	Health services and social work <ul style="list-style-type: none">nursingcustomer servicemanagement
Retail sales <ul style="list-style-type: none">customer servicesales"every position"	Hotels and restaurants <ul style="list-style-type: none">customer servicewaiters/waitressesspecialist work	Research and technical services <ul style="list-style-type: none">specialist worksalesproject work
Education <ul style="list-style-type: none">teachingspecialist work	Real estate and property services <ul style="list-style-type: none">customer servicework supervisioncleaning	
Business services <ul style="list-style-type: none">customer servicemanagement	Traffic <ul style="list-style-type: none">salesmanagementspecialist work	
Electronics and electricity industry <ul style="list-style-type: none">salesspecialist workmanagement	Machinery and metal products <ul style="list-style-type: none">salesproject workproduction work	Chemical industry <ul style="list-style-type: none">sales and purchasesmanagementspecialist work
Energy industry <ul style="list-style-type: none">customer servicespecialist worksales	Food industry <ul style="list-style-type: none">managementspecialist worksales	Paper and wood industry <ul style="list-style-type: none">salesmanagement
Construction <ul style="list-style-type: none">work supervisionspecialist work		

Work positions which will require more language skills in the near future.

SERVICES

INDUSTRY



*) Spanish was included in "other" until 2010. As of 2011, Spanish makes up its own group.

Share of 8th and 9th grade students taking a short elective language curriculum from 1998 to 2012 (source: Finnish National Board of Education).

LANGUAGE STUDIES DO NOT MEET WORKING LIFE REQUIREMENTS

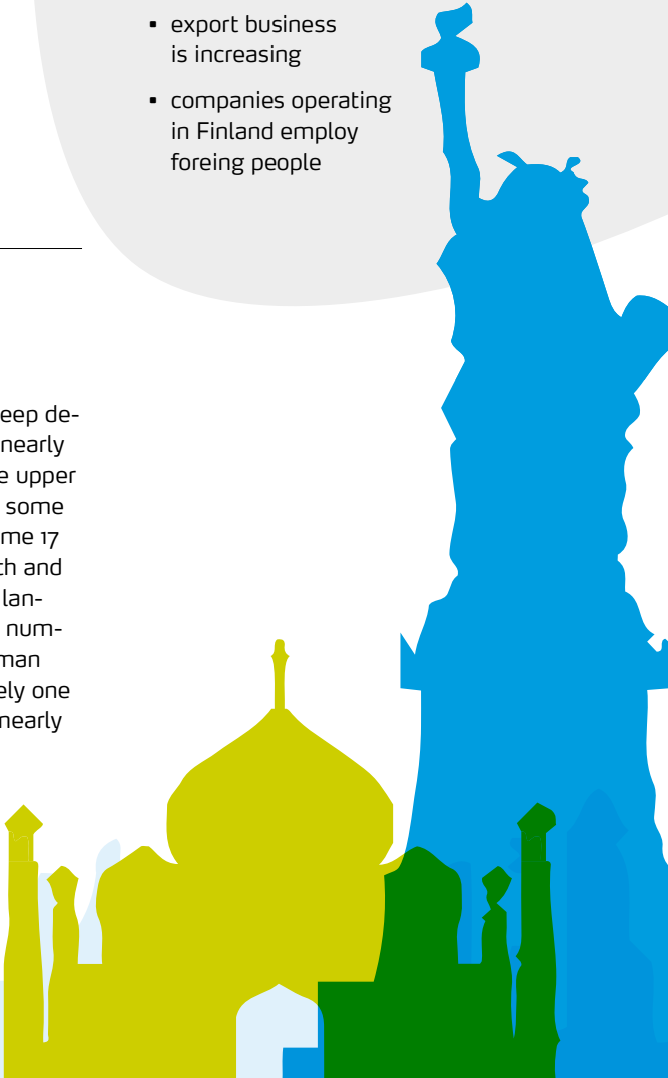
The availability of language options and language studies in general have become less diverse in basic education and upper secondary schools in Finland. It is a growing trend that a young student only knows English and Swedish after finishing his/her basic education. At the upper secondary level, approximately half of the students study two foreign languages.


In upper comprehensive school (grades 7 to 9), the popularity of

optional languages is on a steep decline. During the mid-1990s, nearly 40 per cent of students in the upper comprehensive level studied some optional language. Today, some 17 per cent of students in the 8th and 9th grades opt for additional languages. Since the 1990s, the number of students learning German has collapsed to approximately one fourth while French has lost nearly 50 per cent of its popularity.

Companies will increasingly need language skills because

- the business environment is becoming more international
- companies either operate in Russia or have Russian customers
- the company belongs to an international group
- export business is increasing
- companies operating in Finland employ foreign people





Many ways to improve language skills

All business sectors and different work assignments require language skills. While English, Russian, Swedish and German remain the languages that are needed most, a more diverse need for languages exists in today's business life. For some companies, it is imperative to have staff skilled in Chinese, French or Spanish, making skills in these languages a decisive factor in personnel recruitment.

Diverse language skills provide Finns with a competitive asset in the international economy. EK would improve Finns' language skills through the following actions:

- Language studies should be started as early as possible. This provides a good premise for developing solid language skills. Learning languages playfully at an early age builds the foundation for a positive attitude toward other languages and cultures.
- Education providers should offer more language options for students and parents than today. This requires cooperation between education providers and institutions in both basic education and at the secondary education levels.
- Remote teaching should be used for providing more language study options. Remote teaching can support attaining adequate student group sizes for optional languages.
- External service providers, such as language clubs and language schools, should also be used for organising teaching and club activities for schools.
- Students and their parents should have access to guidance on language options and information on the importance of versatile language skills for further studies and working life. This requires that teachers working at the basic education and upper secondary school levels are provided with more understanding on business life and how companies operate.
- Information and communication technology should be integrated into language teaching in a more diverse and open-minded manner than today. In order to keep different kinds of learners motivated in language studies, a variety of study contents, working methods and environments are required.
- Language teaching should increasingly emphasize the development of practical communication and interaction skills. Teaching should provide more opportunities to use the language in practice.
- The amount of teaching provided in a foreign language and cooperation between different study subjects should be increased. Phenomenon-based thematic learning and studying various subjects in foreign languages provide the students with diverse possibilities for improving their language skills.
- International cooperation develops language skills and increases understanding of different cultures. The internationalisation of Finnish schools is the responsibility of the entire school community, not just language teaching. It should be a well-planned, properly organised activity.
- For immigrant students, Finnish or Swedish skills learned during basic education provide the foundation for their further studies and success in working life. As immigrant students often do not reach the same levels as native students in reading, writing and mathematics, their language curriculum should be relieved. More investment is needed in teaching Finnish or Swedish as a secondary language.



Confederation of Finnish Industries



Confederation of Finnish Industries (EK) is the leading business organization in Finland. Our main task is to make Finland an internationally attractive and competitive business environment. EK represents the entire private sector and companies of all sizes.

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