"I WANTED TO PROVE MYSELF THAT I'M NOT STUPID" : LEARNING DISABILITIES AND LANGUAGE ANXIETY

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Tiivistelmä

Oppimisvaikeuksilla voi olla monenlaisia merkityksiä yksilölle niin koulumaailmassa, kuin sen ulkopuolellakin. Aiemmassa tutkimuksessa on huomattu, että kokemukset kieliahdistuksesta tuntuvat usein kulkevan käsi kädessä oppimisvaikeuksien kanssa. Näitä aiheita on tutkittu jonkin verran yhdessä, mutta tuen käsitettä on harvemmin liitetty mukaan aiemmassa tutkimuksessa. Tästä syystä tämä tutkimus keskittyi käsittelemään oppimisvaikeuksiin liitettyjen merkitysten, kieliahdistuksen kokemuksen ja oppilaiden tukemisen keskinäistä suhdetta muutamista eri näkökulmista.

Aineistoa tähän tutkielmaan kerättiin avainkäsitteiden mukaan teemoitellulla kyselylomakkeella, joka koostui erilaisista suljetuista, sekä avoimista kysymyksistä. Kyselyn lisäksi toteutettiin kaksi kokemusasiantuntijahaastattelua, joiden tarkoituksena oli syventää kyselyn teemoja entisestään. Osallistujiksi pyydettiin aikuisia, joilla on jokin diagnosoitu oppimisen vaikeus, tai niihin vaikutuksiltaan rinnastettava diagnosoitu tila.

Tulosten perusteella vaikuttaa siltä, että oppimisvaikeuksiin liitetään hyvin moninaisia merkityksiä, joista suuri osa on negatiivisia. Oppimisvaikeus voidaan nähdä esimerkiksi (kielten) oppimista ja akateemista menestystä haittaavana tekijänä, tai itsetuntoon ja minäkuvaan negatiivisesti vaikuttavana tekijänä. Oppimisvaikeuteen liitettävien moninaisten merkitysten lisäksi kieliahdistuksen kokemus vaikuttaa olevan melko yleinen ilmiö tutkittavien joukossa, mutta kokemuksen intensiteetissä ja toistuvuudessa on eroavaisuuksia. Lisäksi tuloksissa nousee esiin yleinen kokemus siitä, että tuen saanti on ollut enemmistölle riittämätöntä. Tämän lisäksi erityisesti haastatteluissa nousi esiin näkemys siitä, että oikeanlaisella tuella olisi voinut olla merkittäviä positiivisia vaikutuksia sekä oppimiseen, että yksilön itsetuntoon.

Vaikka tämä tutkielma osaltaan täyttää rajattua tutkimusaukkoa, myös lisätutkimukselle on yhä tarvetta. Oppimisvaikeuksien, kieliahdistuksen ja oppilaiden tukemisen suhdetta olisi hyvä tutkia lisää esimerkiksi aineenopettajien näkökulmasta, tarkastellen aineenopettajien valmiuksia tukea oppilaita, joilla on erilaisia oppimisvaikeuksia. Tämän lisäksi lisätutkimusta tarvittaisiin tuen toteuttamisesta suhteessa opetussuunnitelman asettamiin raameihin. Myös tuoreen opintovelvollisuusuudistuksen mahdollisia vaikutuksia tuen tarpeeseen olisi hyvä tutkia lisää suhteessa koulujen tukiresursseihin.

Asiasanat Learning disability, language anxiety, learner experiences, support
Säilytyspaikka Jyväskylän yliopisto
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1   INTRODUCTION

Learning disabilities come in many shapes and sizes. There are language-based ones, behavioural challenges, intellectual disabilities, developmental issues, mathematical disabilities, and many other conditions learners with special needs possess (Kormos and Kontra 2008), affecting many learners all over the world. Naturally, the effects of learning disabilities on individuals with special needs may be as versatile as the disabilities themselves. Previous research of individuals with learning disabilities has been indicating that such individuals may be at risk for higher levels of language anxiety (Nelson and Harwood 2011), than individuals who do not have disabilities hindering their learning or academic success. Therefore, previous research seems to indicate, that at least one possible effect of learning disabilities may be language anxiety.

Anxiety is at least as complex an issue as learning disabilities. Language anxiety, as well as learning disabilities, is a multifaceted and versatile issue, with different types of possible effects on language learning. Language anxiety may be present in a variety of language learning situations ranging from test situations to speaking in a foreign language (Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope 1986: 127), and it may not always be easy to detect. Detecting and understanding language anxiety may be challenging to teachers at least when it comes to anxiety-triggering situations that are not as common as giving presentations, for example, which is relatively common anxiety-triggering situation for many language learners. When discussing language anxiety, it is important to first define anxiety in general, before narrowing the concept down to language anxiety, since the physiological foundations and symptoms are virtually the same, whether discussing anxiety or more restricted language anxiety, but the situations for occurring are somewhat different.

Another complex, yet crucial concept for all learners is support. In the Finnish National core curriculum for basic education (Opetushallitus 2014: 14) it says that teaching needs to be organized to accordingly fit the age and preconditions of students, and that all students have the right to receive teaching, guidance and proper support for learning and studying as needed. It is also mentioned that all students have the right to receive said support immediately, if the need occurs (Opetushallitus 2014: 14). The core curriculum also emphasizes that every student is unique and valuable the way they are, and that students need cheering and individual support to reach their full potential as members of society. Thus, all students regardless of their individual attributes, be it with special needs or not, have the right to basic education and the

support and tools for achieving that, while having the right to be treated with respect and without discrimination (Opetushallitus 2014: 15).

One question the present study aims to answer, is whether the support defined in the core curriculum and the Finnish law have been concrete and accurate for students with different types of learning disabilities, since the concept of inclusion, a crucial concept for supporting learners, is and has been discussed and acknowledged already for decades, indicating that offering at least some support for learners has been seen as important already for a long time. The concept of inclusion has been crucial already since the seventies, first in the form of integration and since the UNESCO Salamanca declaration of 1994, in the form of inclusion (Vitikka, Eskelinen and Kuukka 2021: 28-30), which is something the Finnish Government has since committed to. Inclusion as a concept refers to all students belonging in the same learning environment and having the right to take part in teaching within a shared classroom environment, and to receive support they might need. Inclusion does not only include students with special requirements but all students, since the point of inclusion is a holistic change in the inter-institutional culture of schools (Vitikka, Eskelinen and Kuukka 2021: 29).

The above-mentioned concept of inclusion can also be defined as a way of preventing, reducing, and eliminating different types of hurdles for learning and partaking (Vitikka, Eskelinen and Kuukka 2021: 29). Naturally, all of this applies also to individuals with learning disabilities, who are the target group of the present study. With that said, the experiences individuals with learning disabilities have of support, learning, discrimination or being treated with respect or not, may vary vastly between individuals of different ages, since the core curriculum as well as guidelines for inclusion and other tools for support have undoubtably changed with time, after adopting the concept of inclusion to the everyday life of Finnish schools.

Even though learning disabilities and language anxiety have been previously studied both separately as well as by combining the two concepts, the two have not been greatly studied in relation to supporting learners. As stated above, in the Finnish context all learners, at least in theory, have the right to receive support for learning, but the need for said support may be much greater for learners with special needs, when compared to learners without learning disabilities or other special needs. This in combination with the suggestions that learners with special needs, such as learning disabilities, may be at greater risk of higher levels of language anxiety, is what creates the foundations of the present study, which aims to investigate learning disabilities, language anxiety, and the experiences individuals with learning disabilities have of support.

Due to practical reasons, the present study mainly excludes intellectual disabilities, developmental issues and for example certain neuropsychological challenges, such as autism spectrum disorders. The focus will be on language-based disabilities, but behavioural challenges and attention disorders will be considered as well, especially from the perspective of language learning. These certain disabilities and conditions

will be excluded from a theoretical perspective, meaning that the excluded disabilities will not be covered in the background section, but will be considered in the analysis and results sections, if they are to visibly occur in the data collected.

When looking at the structure of the present study, the background section begins first with a more general overview of the themes the present study focuses on. After the general overview, the concept *learning disability* is introduced and discussed. After the introduction of learning disability, some common disabilities, such as dyslexia and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) are discussed in more detail. After these more specific learning disabilities, anxiety and language anxiety are introduced and discussed. Once learning disabilities and language anxiety are discussed, previous research combining both concepts is introduced in order to relate the present study to the field of previous research even more thoroughly. To further relate the present study to the field of previous research, a separate section considering supporting individuals with learning disabilities and language anxiety is also provided. The focal point of the section combining learning disabilities, language anxiety and support is to discuss the role of language instructors, and further define the research gap the present study aims to fill. After the background section, the aims and methods of the present study are introduced, alongside with the research questions. Aims and methods are then followed by analysis and results of the data collected for the sake of the present study. To conclude the present study, a section of discussion and conclusions is provided.

2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

As stated in the introduction, the present study focuses on combining the concepts of learning disability and language anxiety to supporting individuals with said disabilities. Hence, this section of theoretical framework revolves around said three themes. First, definitions for the concept *learning disability* are provided, which is then followed by defining and discussing few disabilities more thoroughly: a few language-based learning disabilities are introduced and discussed, then followed by a separate section focusing on reading disabilities. Secondly, closer attention is also paid to attention and/or activity disorders. After discussing the beforementioned learning disabilities, the focus is then shifted to *language anxiety*. General anxiety as a psychological concept is introduced and defined first, after which language anxiety is discussed more thoroughly. The section then continues with an overlook to previous research done on learning disabilities and language anxiety, after which a closing section discussing support and language instructors' role in relation to learning disabilities and language anxiety is presented.

2.1 Learning disabilities

In this section the disabilities that the present study mainly focuses on will be introduced. As learning disabilities are a vast field of different types of issues, disabilities, illnesses, and conditions, it is necessary to narrow this field down to meet the needs and restrictions of the present study. Thus, I will focus on a few different categories of learning disabilities that are either relatively common, or otherwise fairly visible in today's western societies, such as Finland. Categories of language disabilities, reading disabilities and attention disorders are presented separately, while how these disabilities may be visible in the everyday life of an individual with one or more of these disabilities will also be discussed.

Due to learning disabilities being such a vast field of different conditions, defining learning disabilities is not the easiest of tasks. *Learning disability* (LD) as a concept is

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not a diagnosis per se, but more of a broader, general term referring to a diverse group of consisting of different disabilities and conditions. These conditions are often realized through difficulties in acquiring and/or using different language skills, such as reading or writing and/or mathematical skills, such as reasoning or calculating (National Joint Committee on Learning Disabilities 1991 in Sutherland, Hamilton, and Berberi 2008: 108). A similar model for defining learning disabilities is *the deficit model*, which as the name suggests, perceives learning disabilities as deficits as well as hindrances for individuals' learning process (Kormos 2020: 129).

Defining *learning disability* has been a challenge already since 1960s, when the term was first introduced (Lerner 1993: 8). According to Lerner (1993), the term was first introduced when educators and parents of children with impairments under different names gathered to discuss uniting these conditions under one name to identify these individuals as a group. One of the most used definitions is, or at least has been, the one incorporated in the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act* (IDEA 1990, cited in Lerner 1993: 9), which has been already introduced for the first time in 1970s. In the IDEA (1990, cited in Lerner 1993: 9) *learning disability* is defined as

> ...a disorder in one or more or the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or using language, spoken or written, which disorder may manifest itself in imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell, or to do mathematical calculations. Such disorders include such conditions as perceptual handicaps, brain injury, minimal brain dysfunction, dyslexia and developmental aphasia.

Based on the above-mentioned definition, Lerner (1993: 9-10) further summarizes learning disabilities in the following four points:

> *1.* The individual has *a disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes*. (These processes refer to intrinsic prerequisite abilities such as memory, auditory perception, visual perception, oral language and thinking.)
> *2.* The individual has *difficulty in learning,* specifically, in speaking, listening, writing, reading (word-recognition skills and comprehension), and mathematics (calculation and reasoning)
> *3.* The problem is *not primarily due to other causes*, such as visual or hearing impairments; motor handicaps; mental retardation; emotional disturbance; or economic, environmental, or cultural disadvantage.
> *4. A severe discrepancy exists between the student's apparent potential for learning and his or her low level of achievement.* In other words, there is evidence of underachievement.

Discovering a more recent definition for the term "learning disability" is also challenging, as more often it is the more specific disability or diagnosis being defined, instead of learning disability in general. With that said, a relatively close concept to learning disability is Specific Learning Disability (SLD), which is more commonly

referred to in more recent research literature as well. The definition of SLD has many similarities with the definition of learning disability presented by Lerner (1993). For example, the Learning Disabilities Association of America (LDA) offers the same definition established by IDEA (1990), also cited by Lerner (1993: 9) to define *specific learning disability*, which further highlights the similarities of both concepts. Also, both *learning disability* and *specific learning disability* can be seen as more general umbrella terms, as they both include different subgroups of learning disabilities (Kormos 2020: 130), instead of simply being specific diagnoses of their own. According to the DSM-5 criteria (in International Dyslexia Association), SLD is considered being "...a type of Neurodevelopmental Disorder..." causing hindrances to different academic abilities, such as reading or writing, skills crucial to "...other academic learning" (IDA), again highlighting the learning-hindering potential of learning disabilities in general.

2.1.1 Language disabilities

In the present study, *language disability* as a term is meant to be an umbrella term for few different language-based learning disabilities. In general, language disability or *language disorder* can be defined as "...disorders that fall under the broad category of speech or language impairment..." (IDEA 2004 in Sun and Wallach 2014: 27). Another definition for *language disorder* is provided by the American Speech-Language-Hearing-Association (ASHA, cited in Lerner 1993: 8), which defines "language disorder" as "...impaired comprehension and/or use of spoken, written and/or other symbol systems...". This definition is further elaborated by Kuder (1997: 9), who highlights from the ASHA's definition, that having a language disorder means that a student with difficulty in language learning may exhibit problems in either understanding a language or producing it, or both. On one hand, this may lead to students with a language or other learning difficulty seeming like they are lacking concentration or being absent-minded, which may be caused by a student having difficulties in following directions when language comprehension is compromised (Kuder 1997: 9). Therefore, students with compromised language production may be unwilling or hesitant to participate in tasks requiring using the language in a productive manner (Kuder 1997: 9), not to mention students who exhibit trouble in both language comprehension and production, making language learning even more difficult than for those exhibiting trouble in either one of the above-mentioned aspects on language learning.

A concept differing slightly from the definition of *language disorder* is *Specific language impairment* (SLI), also known as developmental language disorder or dysphasia, a condition often diagnosed already in childhood. The typical symptoms of SLI include "...impaired spoken language functioning..." noticeably below average, while the individual does not have "...apparent sensory or neurological dysfunction" (Williams, Botting and Boucher 2008: 944). SLI can also be characterised by trouble in phonological processing, trouble in sentence complexity and grammatical correctness, as well as smaller than average vocabulary (Kormos and Smith 2012: 42), all of which are important factors for language learning. According to Kormos and Smith (2012: 42), SLI

has many shared characteristics with reading difficulties, such as dyslexia, but unlike individuals with dyslexia, individuals with SLI also struggle with proficiency in grammar that is appropriate for their age level.

To add to the broad group of language disabilities, some scholars have also proposed that a separate disability for foreign language learning may exist, but the results have been mixed at best. While some researchers have tried to prove that *Foreign Language Learning Disability* (FFLD) is an issue to be acknowledged, some have argued against its existence, and argued that it is merely a part of language-based learning disabilities (LBLD) in general. For example, Sparks (2009: 11) argues that there is not a separate entity of FLLD, but students with language learning abilities that can be positioned to a continuum extending from weak learners to competent ones. This argument is also supported by the statement that having a difficulty in learning does not equal a poor learner and poor success, and that there are also students who are not classified as having an LD who still struggle with learning a foreign language and have difficulties in passing courses, and vice versa (Sparks 2009: 8). The previously mentioned argument could on the other hand support the view of separate FFLD existing, since in previous research it has been found that learning a foreign language can be exceptionally difficult for some students (Shaw 1999: 320), even without any other diagnosed or noticed learning difficulties.

Still, there is no adequate evidence supporting the existence of a separately existing FLLD and by claiming it to be a possible issue, there may be a risk of it masking other issues related to the concept of learning difficulties in general (Sparks 2009: 9). Also, due to LD in general still being somewhat of an erratic issue with disagreements about common and standardized definitions, as well as commonly agreed diagnostic criteria (Lyon, Fletcher, Shaywitz, Shaywitz, Torgesen, Wood, Schulte and Olson 2001: 259), it is possible that a student could possibly be classified as having an LD in some parts of the world and as not having an LD in others, which also adds to the geographical and cultural issues around the topic. With that said, it is important to keep in mind that diagnostic criteria for certain learning disabilities, such as dyslexia or dyscalculia does exist in for example The International Statistical Classification of Diseases and Health Related Problems (ICD), but as indicated by Lyon et al. 2001, globally agreed and standardized diagnostic criteria for a learning disability in general does not exist, which means that learning disability as a general concept acts as an umbrella term for many more specific issues that affect learning negatively and can also be diagnosed according to certain criteria.

2.1.2   Reading disabilities

The commonly recognized view nowadays is that problems in reading are an indication of hindrances in language, instead of hindrances in "general cognitive abilities or visual perception" (Catts & Kamhi 2005: 53), which has not always been the commonly shared view. Still, reading disabilities (RD) are again not the easiest to define, since there is much variation in definitions and even diagnostic criteria due to the

multidisciplinary interest in the issue (Catts & Kamhi 2005: 58, Lerner 1993: 26). When discussing reading disabilities, it is important to keep in mind, that there is much overlap with the concept of language disabilities in general, and it can sometimes be difficult to differentiate language- and reading disabilities from one another (Kormos and Smith 2012: 42). As already mentioned in section 2.1.1, one distinguishing factor can be grammar proficiency appropriate for individual's age (Kormos and Smith 2012: 42), thus making reading disabilities a more restricted category of language disabilities. Therefore, due to the more restricted nature of reading disabilities when compared to broader and more general concept of language disabilities, in the present study, reading disabilities will be discussed as a category of their own.

What can be seen as either an example of reading disabilities, or as a concept alike reading disability, is *dyslexia*. Dyslexia is the most common learning disability, which alone constitutes for almost 50 % of all learning disabilities in general (Sundheim and Voller 2004: 815), which is why it seems relevant to discuss the issue of reading disabilities and/or dyslexia as its own entity, and not just among other language disabilities. As a term, dyslexia is one of the most widely used ones to describe or diagnose this type of specific learning disability (Catts & Kamhi 2005) affecting reading. According to the International Dyslexia Association (IDA 2018), dyslexia is defined as

> …a specific learning disability that is neurobiological in origin. It is characterized by difficulties with accurate and/or fluent word recognition and by poor spelling and decoding abilities. These difficulties typically result from a deficit in the phonological component of language that is often unexpected in relation to other cognitive abilities and the provision of effective classroom instruction. Secondary consequences may include problems in reading comprehension and reduced reading experience that can impede growth of vocabulary and background knowledge.

According to Sundheim and Voller (2004: 819) dyslexia is again an issue "…characterized by deficits in phonologic awareness and concomitant difficulty in word decoding.", emphasizing similar characteristics as the definition of IDA (2018). These deficits and difficulties may naturally affect reading, which as a skill requires phonologic awareness, word decoding and a myriad of other skills at once. Difficulties in the accuracy and/or pace of decoding can be a crucial part of trouble in reading comprehension, or even the reason for the trouble in question (Wong 2004: 110), again highlighting the role of difficulty in word decoding as a characteristic symptom of dyslexia. In general, it can be said that the foundational aspects of dyslexia are "…difficulties in word reading and word spelling." (McBride 2019: 26), which seems to be the focal point of most encountered definitions of dyslexia.

What can also be seen from the different definitions, the terminology around reading disabilities and/or dyslexia is not always clear, even if the definitions themselves would be similar. Some scholars argue that the term dyslexia is not appropriate and adequate to use, and it should be expressed with another term, such as already

introduced reading disability (RD). Hence in the present study, for sensitivity's sake, the term reading disability will be mainly used when discussing the topic in a more general way and that dyslexia as a term will be used when wanting to emphasize an individual, and more specific diagnosis.

2.1.3   Attention disorders

When discussing attention disorders, the one that most likely comes to the minds of many is *ADHD*. ADHD (Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder) is a "neurodevelopmental disorder of the brain's self-management system" (Goldrich and Goldrich 2019: 2). The neurobiological foundation of the issue can be explained with significant differences in the brains of people with ADHD, when comparing to those without the condition, since people with ADHD experience constantly lower levels of dopamine and norepinephrine, both affecting for example individuals' abilities of alertness maintenance, attention focusing and motivation (Goldrich and Goldrich 2019: 1). Individuals with ADHD may also often seem ill-mannered, disobedient and/or inattentive (McBride 2019: 65), indicating the multifaceted nature of the condition. A disorder of similar symptoms as ADHD without the aspect of hyperactivity is instead called an attention deficit disorder (ADD).

Even though it may sometimes be up to discussion whether attention disorders are seen as learning disabilities or not, it is crucial to at least acknowledge attention disorders close relationship to other learning disabilities. For example, attention disorders often go hand in hand with reading disabilities, since attention disorders are frequently comorbid with dyslexia, meaning that dyslexia and ADHD often co-occur together (McBride 2019: 65; Kormos and Smith 2012: 48; Kormos 2017: 23). That said, it is also necessary to recognize that since the role of attention focusing is essential in relation to cognitive functioning in general, attention disorders can affect learning significantly (Kormos and Smith 2012: 48). Therefore, even though attention disorders, such as ADHD or ADD can be seen as falling under the category of troubles with attention, behaviour, and general life management skills, as well as under the category of neuropsychological conditions, attention disorders can also be seen as learning disabilities due to their possible learning-hindering effects.

Attention disorders may possess many possible learning-hindering effects when it comes to learning a foreign language, since attention disorders typically include trouble in functions that are required in a classroom situation, such as "...planning, organizing, maintaining focus, and following through tasks" (Leons, Herbert and Gobbo 2009: 43). Additionally, students with an attention disorder may exhibit trouble with their working memory (Barkley 1997), which together with the previously mentioned factors may result in struggles with independent and constant studying (Leons, Herbert and Gobbo 2009: 43) and attentiveness, as well as regulating their attention (Goldrich and Goldrich 2019: 1-2), thus hindering the learning and academic success of these students. These hindrances are often because of students with an attention disorder, or some other learning disability, having frequent problems in different classroom and learning situations. This again is often mirrored to probable trouble in skills

such as reading or spelling, as well as problems with their working memory, attention span and phonological processing (Leons, Herbert and Gobbo 2009: 44), all possibly affecting learning in many ways.

It is still important to keep in mind, that the diagnosis of an attention disorder, or multiple diagnoses, alone does not indicate how mild or severe the learning disability or disabilities of an individual are, and that there are many separate factors contributing to the learning outcomes of individual students (Leons, Herbert and Gobbo 2009: 43). For example, one possible problem for students with an attention disorder in a classroom situation is that a great deal of learning and instruction is based on the presumption of students having a well-functioning, or at least adequate working memory (Leons, Herbert and Gobbo 2009: 45), which is often something that students with an attention disorder lack of. This means that even if students with an attention disorder may have great cognitive potential, the demands they face from educational settings may clash with the hindrances caused by the disorder (Leons, Herbert and Gobbo 2009: 44). Since discrepancy between the individual's learning potential and performance can be seen as one of the essential criteria for a learning disability (Lerner 1993; Kormos 2020), in the present study attention disorders are included under the umbrella term of learning disabilities. Thus, it also seems relevant to investigate what kind of support would be beneficial for individuals with attention disorders, so that it would assist these individuals in overcoming the above-mentioned hindrances.

2.2 Anxiety and language anxiety

In this section, anxiety as a psychological concept will be introduced and discussed. First, the concept of anxiety will be presented by providing definitions and characteristics, after which the concept will be narrowed down to more specific language anxiety. Anxiety disorders will also be briefly mentioned, but since they are not the focal point or of great relevance for the present study, the role of them will be relatively small.

2.2.1 Anxiety

It is crucial to first define what is meant with *anxiety* in general before it down to the more specific concept of *language anxiety*, to better understand the issue and its foundations. American Psychology Association (APA) defines anxiety as "…an emotion characterized by feelings or tension, worried thoughts, and physical changes like increased blood pressure.". It is also stated by APA, that people with *anxiety disorders* frequently face "intrusive thoughts or concerns". This may lead people to avoiding certain types of situations, which could cause previously mentioned emotional reactions, or a variety of "physical symptoms such as sweating, trembling, dizziness or rapid heartbeat" (APA). Even though the definition provided by APA concerns not

only people with general anxiety, but people with anxiety disorders as well, anxiety as a psychophysical reaction itself is the same. That said, if anxiety is experienced for an elongated period, or the feeling is regarded as overwhelming, general anxiety can also develop into an anxiety disorder (Dean 2016).

In general, anxiety is a multifaceted psychological issue that may occur in many different types of situations. Anxiety as a concept can be characterized as feelings of fright or distress, triggered in situations where an individual encounters something stressful that can be interpreted as a threat (Dean 2016). The sense of threat may be seen as an agreed characteristic for anxiety, since according to yet another definition, anxiety can again be defined as psychological reaction to a perceived threat, which includes characteristics such as "… feelings of worry, apprehension, tension, and nervousness that are unpleasant and distressful… "(Gatto, Thomas and Berger 2016: 301). Besides the sense of threat, and feelings of apprehension, fear or nervousness, the frequent questions of "What if?" can also be seen as characteristic features of anxiety (Guterman 2013: 128), further indicating the worry and distress the feeling of anxiety may cause.

2.2.2 Language anxiety

As already mentioned above, the focal point of the present study is a more specific concept of *language anxiety*, instead of general anxiety or anxiety disorders. Language anxiety can also be referred to with terms Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA) or Second Language Anxiety (SLA) but to simplify, the term language anxiety, or even simply anxiety, will be used to refer to the issue later in the present study. This means that in the following sections, when anxiety is mentioned, it is always meant from a linguistic perspective, unless clearly stated otherwise.

Both general, as well as language anxiety are complex issues that can be further dissected into more specific sub-concepts. According to Horwitz (2010: 1) anxiety is an intricate and complex concept, with many different anxiety types such as "…trait anxiety, state anxiety, achievement anxiety and facilitative-debilitative anxiety" included in the concept. These different types of anxieties apply to language anxiety as well as other more specific situations that are prone to triggering anxiety. Language anxiety itself falls under the category of "situation-specific anxiety" (Horwitz 2010: 1), or specific anxiety reactions (Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope 1986: 125), meaning that the individuals experiencing language anxiety typically exhibit the anxiety only in language learning situations, instead of being generally anxious in multiple different situations in their everyday life. That said, even though language anxiety may in the everyday life of an individual be present more rarely than general anxiety, there are many students struggling with considerable amounts of anxiety in relation to foreign language learning (Sutherland, Hamilton, and Berberi 2008: 110), which makes it an important issue to acknowledge and recognise in language learning as well. Additionally, it has

also been suggested that high levels of anxiety could be one potential reason explaining why some students struggle with language learning, be it an individual with learning disabilities or not (Sparks 2009: 10).

From a more concrete point of view, language anxiety is manifested in a way similar to general anxiety, but as already stated above, in a more situation-specific manner. The experience of "…apprehension, worry, even dread.", difficulties in concentrating, forgetfulness, as well as increased heartbeat and avoiding language-learning situations for example by truancy and neglecting homework (Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope 1986: 126) are all possible signs of language anxiety, making some of the symptoms relatively similar to those of general anxiety, or even anxiety disorders, and some more specific to the context of language learning. Additionally, it possible for language anxiety to have different social consequences as well. Language learners or other individuals with language anxiety can for example stress about their language competence, fear negative evaluation from peers or teachers, or dread misunderstandings or making mistakes (Gargalianou, Muhlfeld, Urbig and van Witteloostujin 2016: 198), which may sometimes make language anxiety a social issue as well.

The above-mentioned definitions of both general as well as language anxiety mainly emphasize the negative aspects of anxiety. Even though anxiety is often characterized as an emotion causing multiple different negative effects, it can also be seen as a much more complex issue, than a strictly negative one. Some scholars have proposed that instead of only a negative emotion, language anxiety may also be a positive one (Trang and Moni 2015: 4) that may even promote language learning (Park and French 2013: 468, 469). The possible positive effects on language learning may sound somewhat controversial when inspected in the light of the provided definitions of anxiety, but according to Trang and Moni (2015: 14), anxiety is unavoidable in foreign language learning context, and that it indeed has some aspects to it that can be seen as positive. The possible positive effects of language anxiety are also somewhat agreed with by Gatto, Thomas and Berger (2016: 301), who suggest that anxiety "…can be considered both positive and negative". These somewhat conflictive statements of the nature of language anxiety could be interpreted so, that anxiety should not be seen as inheritably and solely negative and harmful for language learning, but maybe more so as a scale that can go either way and affect learning in either a negative or a positive way.

2.3   Learning disabilities and language anxiety

Research that combines learning disabilities and language anxiety, two key concepts of the present study, has been done before with the results indicating that individuals with learning disabilities might be at a higher risk for experiencing language anxiety. In order to address previous research more thoroughly, in this section, previous research combining learning disabilities and language anxiety is introduced and

discussed in a more detailed manner. This section is meant to present the effects and implications learning disabilities have on individuals, while also discussing the emotional experiences caused by said learning disabilities, in relation to language learning. Additionally, this section should give more concrete evidence of the possible connection between learning disabilities and experiences of language anxiety.

In previous research on the topic of learning disabilities and language anxiety, it has been noticed that people with difficulties in literacy, such as people with dyslexia, seemed to exhibit higher levels of anxiety than people without disabilities (Carrol and Iles 2006). The results gained from previously mentioned study indicate that students exhibiting struggles in literacy skills, due to a condition such as dyslexia, are also more likely to exhibit increased social anxiety as well (Carrol and Iles 2006: 651, 657). This suggests that individuals with a learning disability may be more prone than their typically developing peers to not only language anxiety, but to social anxiety as well, as has been suggested also by Gargalianou et al. (2016). Similarly, learners with a specific learning disability (SLD) have been found to report anxiety levels notably higher, when compared to a control group of typically developing learners (Haft, Duong, Ho, Hendersen and Hoeft 2018: 493). In the study by Haft et al. (2018: 493) only one of the typically developing students indicated anxiety levels grave enough to reach the status of "clinically significant", as opposed to the group of students with a learning disability. Also, students with an SLD have again been noticed to encounter several different types of social and/or academic stressors due to the disability they have leading to "emotional distress" (Haft et al. 2018: 493). That said, it is not meant to say that anxiety that is assessed being below statistical significance could not cause subjective harm for individuals, but from both statistical as well as diagnostic perspective it would be important to keep in mind.

Children with behaviour disorders have as well been noticed to indicate test anxiety levels higher than their peers (Swanson & Howell 1996: 398), indicating that behavioural challenges may also be a factor causing language anxiety, or at least increasing the risk of experiencing it. In addition, it has also been observed that throughout the transition from primary school to lower secondary school, in general, students are more likely to undergo an increased amount of negative academic emotions, while simultaneously experiencing a decreased number of positive ones (Sainio, Eklund, Hirvonen, Ahonen and Kiuru 2021). Even though this emotional shift seems to apply to all students, it appears to be even more prominent among students with learning disabilities (Sainio et al. 2021). Similarly, it has been observed that children with reading disabilities, such as dyslexia, as well as children with a non-verbal learning disability (NLD) again exhibit more symptoms related to both general as well as social anxiety, when compared to typically developing peers (Mammarella, Ghisi, Bomba, Bottesi, Caviola, Broggi and Nacinovich 2016: 135), likewise indicating the possible negative emotional effects of learning disabilities.

The connection and frequent co-occurrence of learning disabilities and language anxiety has been noticed in a meta-analysis as well. One meta-analysis found students with a learning disability exhibiting higher anxiety levels than their peers without

disabilities (Nelson and Harwood 2011: 3). The meta-analysis can even be seen as potentially confirming the connection of higher anxiety levels and learning disabilities, since the overall effect size of the meta-analysis could be determined as "statistically significant" (Nelson and Harwood 2011: 6). Additionally, the symptomatology related to higher levels of anxiety was experienced by around 70 % of students in the studies included in the meta-analysis, suggesting that individuals diagnosed with a learning disability are statistically at a higher risk for "potentially problematic anxiety-related distress" (Nelson and Harwood 2011: 9). That said, in the studies included in the meta-analysis, none of the participants exhibited anxiety in a clinically significant level, while it is also not possible to generalize that people with learning disabilities as a larger group are certainly faced with severe anxiety (Nelson and Harwood 2011: 9) possibly suggesting the highly subjective nature of the experiences individuals have of language anxiety.

2.4 Supporting learners and the role of language instructors

As already mentioned earlier, the role of support is a crucial for the present study, due to its importance not only for individuals with learning disabilities, but for all learners regardless of age or skill level. Yet, supporting learners with special needs, such as learning disabilities, has not been researched comprehensively from a viewpoint that combines support, learning disabilities and language anxiety. It is vital to take support into account with both learning disabilities as well as (language) anxiety, while also acknowledging that the role of language instructors cannot be overlooked in relation to said issues. Thus, this section is dedicated to the importance of appropriate support for learning disabilities and language anxiety, what is language instructors' relation to the previously mentioned factors, and how language instructors could support learners with at least the most common learning disabilities.

Support as a concept can be defined as "to help someone in an emotional or practical way" (Cambridge dictionary). For language instructors to successfully support learners, it would be reasonable to provide learners with both emotional as well as practical help, for them to better reach their learning potential. In the Finnish context, support in educational settings is mainly mandated though legislation, as well as national core curricula for both basic, as well as upper secondary level education. According to the current national core curriculum of basic education (Opetushallitus 2014), support should be provided for learners based on a three-tiered model, ranging from general support to intensified support and special support, presented from the least to most severe level of support. In the Finnish educational context, support is not meant to be a separate entity, but an entity formed of the three-tiered model of support and pupil and student welfare services together. These types of similar tiered models for support are used in other countries as well (Pulkkinen, Jahnukainen and Pirttimaa 2015: 53), making tiered models rather common systems for providing support for learners.

In the Finnish national core curriculum of basic education (Opetushallitus 2014: 61), it is also said that an individual student can receive support from only one of the tiers at a time, but the support on each tier needs to be flexible, planned in a long-term manner and that it needs to change to fit the current needs of a learner, when necessary. Additionally, support is meant to be provided for as long as it is needed, while being as intense as the learner needs. Accessibility, preventing learning disabilities and early recognition are also emphasized in the core curriculum (Opetushallitus 2014: 61; Sinkkonen, Kyttälä, Kiiskinen and Jäntti 2016: 52), when support is discussed. To compare the requirements of the present core curriculum to an older one, in the national core curriculum of basic education 1994 (Opetushallitus 2000), support is not discussed as a separate entity: the only support-related factor discussed is special education, but *support* as a term is not explicitly mentioned, indicating that supporting learners is taken into account better nowadays in educational settings, at least on paper.

Still, even if support is taken into account better nowadays than in the past, according to Sinkkonen et al. (2016: 51), previous research has revealed that at least in upper secondary education support has been mainly aimed at difficulties in reading and writing, as well as screening for reading difficulties, while the student population has grown to be more diverse, making the need for support more visible and diverse. That in mind, the importance of support has been noticed in previous research. For example, it has been observed that learners succeed better educationally in surroundings that are designed to better fit their needs (Nguyen 2012: 135), and that it should be self-evident, that individual arrangements may be crucial for some learners (Delaney and Hata 2020: 89). Yet it seems that many language instructors are not competent or equipped enough to offer help and support for learners with disabilities (Lyon et al. 2001: 280). For example, research has shown that English Foreign Language (EFL) programs often lack equipment to supply learners with "...appropriate and effective disability services and inclusive instruction." (Young 2020: 27), while it has also been suggested that only a handful of English teachers in higher education may have enough competence or knowledge of learning disabilities, while many teachers may also lack the confidence to provide students with disabilities with support (Delaney and Hata 2020: 80), implying that the resources for supporting learners may not meet the needs learners have.

Besides support, it is also important to pay attention to the role of language teachers and instructors when it comes to both attention disorders, as well as learning disorders in general. Leons, Herbert and Gobbo (2009: 44) suggest that language instructors, so mainly teachers, need to have refined understanding of learning disabilities. By acknowledging the factors included in different types of learning and/or attention disorders, it would be possible to create learning environments that would be more inclusive to all students, thus also enabling learning (Leons, Herbert and Gobbo 2009: 44). Acknowledging and understanding the issues student with a learning disability (LD) may face could lead to facilitating learning, as well as reducing the risk for

anxiety (Leons, Herbert and Gobbo 2009: 44), which would not only benefit students with an LD, but other students prone to language anxiety as well. Students with an LD may struggle with compensating their hindrances in learning and be unwilling to approach their instructors for help (Leons, Herbert and Gobbo 2009: 45), which could be facilitated by educating teachers more on different types of disabilities and conditions that may be a hindrance to learning languages, as well as other subjects.

In general, it can be said that language instructors need to have at least some understanding of learning disabilities, to be able to support learners with and without disabilities. Even though support provided to individuals by friends and family may also be of importance (Trang and Moni 2015), instructors role in supporting learners cannot be overlooked. With instructors acknowledging the multiple factors included in different types of learning and/or attention disorders, it would be possible to create learning environments that would be more inclusive to all students, enabling learning (Leons, Herbert and Gobbo 2009: 44). Acknowledging and understanding the issues student with a learning disability may face could lead to facilitating learning, as well as reducing the risk of anxiety (Leons, Herbert and Gobbo 2009: 44), since it has been noticed that especially individuals with lesser-known disabilities may suffer more from language anxiety, than students with disabilities instructors may be better aware of (Mammarella et. al. 2016: 135). All in all, instructors better understanding of learning disabilities as well as language anxiety could lead to language instructors being able to better support their students and therefore better enable their learning.

3   AIMS AND METHODS

In this section, the aims and methods of the present study will be presented and discussed. In general, the aim of the present study is to investigate the experiences Finnish adults with learning disabilities have of their disabilities, language anxiety and support in relation language learning. The section begins with the introduction of the research questions, which are then followed by more thoroughly presenting the data and the participants. Lastly, the methods used in the present study are introduced and discussed.

3.1   Research questions

The research questions are formulated based on the research gap rising from the theoretical background of the present study, meaning that the research questions are aimed to investigating individual's views on learning disabilities, language anxiety and support. The present study focuses mainly on personal, individual experiences, which is why the meanings individuals give to their disabilities is of interest. Additionally, personal experiences of language anxiety, as well as other emotional experiences relating to language learning is focused on. Lastly, the third research question aims to investigate the role of support, from the viewpoint of individual experiences. Thus, the present study aims to answer the following three research questions presented:

1. What kinds of meanings do the participants give to their learning disabilities, when considering their language learning experiences?
2. What kinds of experiences the participants have of language anxiety? How about other experiences combining language and emotion?
3. Do the participants feel that they have received support for language learning, and has the possible support been sufficient and appropriate?

3.2 Data

In the present study data were collected in two ways: first in the form of an online survey for more general experiences of learning disabilities, language anxiety and support, and second, with an interview for more detailed and personal insights. Due to ethical reasons and the sensitivity of the topics covered by the present study, the questionnaire was anonymous and targeted to adults. The data were collected utilizing few different routes; through a Facebook group, few different organisations, and lastly via student organizations of the University of Jyväskylä. Originally the questionnaire was only meant to reach people through the Facebook group targeted to individuals with learning disabilities, or such individuals' families or educators, but not enough answers were obtained from there. It is also important to notice, that even though data were after that meant to be gathered via a few different organisations focusing on learning disabilities as well, not enough participants were obtained through those either, which is why the amount of university students obtained as participants is highly emphasized among the participants. Due to ethical reasons, the names of the Facebook group or organizations are not mentioned in the present study. The participants for the conducted interviews were obtained through the questionnaire, where interested volunteers were specifically asked to leave their contact information, if they were to be willing to share their views more thoroughly in the form of an interview.

The questionnaire (see Appendix 1) was constructed so that first some background information of the participants was gathered. This includes age, educational background, the learning disability they have a diagnosis of, and when the mentioned disability was recognized and diagnosed. After that, their experiences of the participants learning disability and language learning were charted with both open-end and closed questions of different types. In the next section of the questionnaire, the focus was on language anxiety. The questions consisted again of both open-end as well as closed questions of different types. The last section of the questionnaire was constructed in a similar way, but the final section was focused on support the participants have or have not received to learning disabilities and/or language anxiety. Open-ended questions were seen as important ones for the questionnaire, since they would allow the participants to describe their experiences in their own words, instead of in the words chosen by the researcher. That in mind, the number of open-end questions may have affected the enthusiasm to participate negatively, since they made the questionnaire seem rather long at the first glance. Answering the questionnaire was anonymous for ethical reasons, but as mentioned, some personal details were collected since they were seen as possibly useful and interesting factors for the upcoming analysis.

The interviews, on the other hand, were intended to be of reasonable length, meaning significantly less than an hour long, but the length varied depending on the participants as well; one of the interviewees answered the questions more thoroughly than the other, and pondered each question for a while before answering, affecting the duration of the interview significantly. The interviews were semi-structured, leaving

room for the participant to describe their experiences in a more open way, while also being guided by some specific questions (see Appendix 2). This again let the participants to describe the issues how they see it, rather than only through a lens of the researcher. Two interviews were conducted, intended as interviews of experts by experience.

3.3 Participants

When looking at the participants, in total, 38 people, all of whom adults, answered the questionnaire. What is also important to mention, is that participants whose age is between 18 and 25 years are overemphasized in the data, due to how or where the data was collected from. As already mentioned in the previous section, data were collected via student organisations of the University of Jyväskylä, leading to youngest participants forming the largest individual age group (57,9 %) of the participants. The second largest age groups were 26–35-year-olds, and people older than 36 years, with each group constituting in total approximately one fifth of the participants. For the same reason as the age of the participants, when charting the educational background of the participants, the amount of those who answered "university" is also overemphasised, at 55,3 % of all participants. The second largest individual educational background group was those reporting upper secondary school as their educational background, but it may be reasonable to believe that some of the participants currently studying at a university or a university of applied sciences may have stated upper secondary school as their educational background, if they have not finished a higher-level degree yet. This could have possibly been avoided with a clearer formulation of the question.

The most prevalent learning disabilities among the participants are reading disabilities, with little over 60 % of the participants reporting as having a diagnosis of dyslexia. The second most common disability is an attention and/or activity disorder, with around 42 % of participants affected by either ADHD or ADD. Besides dyslexia and attention disorders, few individual participants also reported having a diagnosis of dyscalculia, mathematical difficulty, and Asperger's syndrome, an autism spectrum disorder. As the percentages indicate, it is clear that at least some comorbidity exists, meaning that some participants are affected by more than one disorder, which is also relatively common according to research literature (e.g., Evans, Clinkinbeard and Simi 2015).

For most of the participants, their learning disability or disabilities had been diagnosed and recognised not until adulthood. None of the participants reported that their disorder had been recognised before their schoolyears, and only approximately 16 % reported that their disability had been recognised and/or diagnosed in primary school. For a relatively large amount of the participants (39,5 %), their disorder(s) had

been recognised or diagnosed in their teenage years, so somewhere between ages 13 and 19. For almost 45 % of the participants, their disability was recognised and/or diagnosed only after their teenage years, so in their adulthood. It is also noteworthy to mention, that the participants also had many different routes to how they sooner or later received their diagnosis.

As for the interviews, both participants reported as being dyslexic, but with somewhat different descriptions for their disorder. Due to ethical reasons, the interview participants will be referred to with the pseudonyms "Mary" and "Anne", to protect the identity of the participants. Two common female names were chosen, since both identified themselves as women. "Mary" reported as having difficult dyslexia, with relatively common spectrum of symptoms. The other interviewee, "Anne", on the other hand, reported as having difficulties in the area of phonological processing, when asked to explicitly name her learning disability. Later in the interview Anne kept referring to her condition as dyslexia, which is why I will in the present study mainly categorize her as dyslexic, even though she has somewhat different spectrum of symptoms than Mary. Mary is in her thirties and Anne in her forties. Mary got their dyslexia diagnosed in middle school, so as a teenager, but Anne did not receive the diagnosis until in her thirties. Both participants also expressed having difficulties in mathematics as well, besides just languages, but neither of the participants has official diagnosis of dyscalculia. What is also common for the participants, is that both are currently studying in a master's program in a university of applied sciences, but after quite different educational paths in the past.

3.4   Methods of analysis

In this section, the practical execution of section 4, Analysis and Results, is presented and discussed. The methods of analysis are introduced, while what was done and how will also be introduced, while also providing reasons for said choices. First, the analysis is discussed from the viewpoint of the questionnaire, after which, the analysis is separately discussed from the viewpoint of the interviews.

For the analysis of the present study, qualitative analysis was mainly used as the primary method. Qualitative analysis was chosen for the present study, as it best meets the needs of the present study, since the present study focuses highly on the subjective feelings and experiences of individuals with learning disabilities. More specifically, the used method of analysis is data driven content analysis, with the research questions as tools for guiding the analysis. Data driven content analysis aspires to formulate a theoretical whole from the data, through units of analysis that are not predetermined (Tuomi and Sarajärvi 2018), which is how the analysis in conducted in the present study as well. Additionally, content analysis in general tries to create a summarized and general view of the topic in question (Tuomi and Sarajärvi 2008), which is what also the present study aims to do. In practice, this means that the data were

examined in relation to the research questions, but the main point of the analysis was to discover possible recurring themes, meanings, and experiences between different participants. With both the questionnaire and the interviews this was done by first reading the data and colour-coding general, recurring themes to different categories, which were again color-coded more precisely from the viewpoints defined by the research questions. After the few different stages of colour-coding, the emerged themes were categorized more specifically, after which the emerged themes were synthesized to textual form presented in section 4 Analysis and results.

As for the interviews, the methods used were slightly different, even though colour-coding and categorization of recurring themes was used with both the questionnaire as well as the interviews. It is important to mention, that the choice to treat the interviewees as experts by experience, also affects the methods chosen for the analysis. The focal point with the interviews was still to examine the data using data driven qualitative content analysis in relation to the research questions, as with the questionnaire, but since only two interviews were conducted in the present study, the analysis was also focused on comparing the findings of the two interviews to each other. The interviews were first analysed separately, results of which introduced as two separate cases in sections 4.3.1 and 4.3.2. After introducing and discussing the interviews of two separate cases, another section is dedicated to comparing the two cases, by analysing the similarities and differences between the two.

4   ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

In this section, the analysis, and results of both the questionnaire, as well as the interviews are introduced and discussed. First, the answers to the questionnaire are analysed with a focus to the meanings the participants assign to their learning disabilities in relation to language learning. Second, the emotional experiences related to language learning and learning disabilities are introduced and discussed: first from the viewpoint of few different groups and then more specifically from the viewpoint of support. After the questionnaire, the focus of the analysis is shifted to the interviews. First, both interviews are introduced as separate cases, after which the similarities and differences between both participants are introduced and related to the research questions of the present study.

4.1   Meanings of learning disabilities

Based on the questionnaire, the participants generally seem to assign many types of meanings to their learning disabilities in relation to language learning, but most of the meanings seem to be negatively coloured. These different meanings were charted in order to gain an answer to the first research question of the present study, which explicitly aims to examine the meanings the participants give to their learning disabilities when related to language learning. The variety of meanings expressed by the participants could be divided into five different hypernyms or categories, which are presented in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Different categories of meanings assigned to the learning disabilities of the participants.

Category:	Concrete examples:
1 Hindering learning and/or academic success	Difficulties in writing, reading is slow, challenges with working memory, bad learning outcomes and grades caused by disabilities, spelling difficulties, difficulties in proving one's proficiency, mixing letters and utterances, learning outcomes not matching with the effort put in
2 In relation to self-esteem, self-confidence, self-image, and other negative emotional experiences	Feeling that others are competent while I'm not, motivational issues, feelings of being worse than others, perfectionism and demanding too much from self, fear of being laughed at or being embarrassed, fear of failing, giving up when everything feels too difficult
3 Causing factor for negative learning experiences	Feeling like being unable to learn, frustration due to learning outcomes being far worse than in other subjects than languages, unpleasant reactions from teacher and/or peers, anxiety
4 Promoting and helping learning and academic success	Positive effects of hyperfocus, receiving more support for learning
5 Neutral or irrelevant	Feeling that learning disabilities have not affected learning, dyscalculia not affecting language learning

Even though some overlap between the different categories presented in table 1 may be seen, the focal point of each category differs from one another. Other, more specific categories could have been introduced as well, but the five hypernyms or categories presented are the most prominent and visible ones in the answers of the participants. The meanings falling under category one were the most frequent ones when compared to answers falling under other categories, as most participants related at least some learning- and/or academic success-hindering meanings to their learning disability or disabilities. The most common concrete realizations of their disability or disabilities were difficulties in reading, writing, spelling, or working memory, which for many had affected their learning outcomes, such as grades, as well.

Other frequently occurring meanings the participants seemed to relate to their learning disabilities were those relating to self-esteem, -confidence, -image, or to other negative emotional experiences. Several participants seem to relate their learning disabilities to feelings of being worse than others or being stupid, fearing failure or getting

laughed at, lack of motivation, or to giving up completely because of their struggles. These negative emotional experiences are also closely related to the meanings designated to the third category, which focuses more specifically to negative learning experiences, but since the perspective and focal point is still slightly different, these categories were assigned as two separate ones. While the meanings emerging from the participants answers are rather similar in the two previously mentioned categories, the concrete examples shift slightly more to external from internal. In category three, reactions and attitudes faced from teachers and peers are emphasized more than in category two, due to some participants explicitly mentioning that they have faced unpleasant attitudes and reactions to their disabilities from teachers and/or their peers.

Besides the more negative ones, some positive or at least neutrally loaded meanings can be seen in the answers. Some participants even assign learning-facilitating meanings to their learning disabilities. For example, experienced hyperfocus, a state of "enhanced attentional focus and diminished awareness of time" linked to ADHD (Groen, Priegnit, Fuermaier, Tucha, Tucha, Aschenbrenner, Weisbrod and Garcia Pimenta 2020: 1), is associated with language learning by some participants, on the side of some participants receiving more support for language learning because of their disabilities. Few participants also seemed to think that their learning disability has not affected their language learning experiences, which was especially the case for individual diagnosed with solely dyscalculia. According to some the participants with diagnosed dyscalculia, since their learning disability had nothing to do with language learning, it has not affected it in any ways. All in all, it seems that the participants tend to assign many different meanings to their disabilities in relation to language learning.

4.2   Emotional experiences related to learning disabilities

As already indicated by the meanings attached to learning disabilities, the answers to the questionnaire seemed to be mostly negatively coloured, indicating that also negative emotional experiences related to learning disabilities may be rather common for the participants. An example suggesting this, is that negatively loaded words, phrases and expressions were in total used more than twice as often than positively loaded ones. Around 250 negatively loaded expressions were used, whereas the number of positive ones was less than half of that, settling to around 120 used words and expressions. Having said that, the intensity of used words varied between the participants. For example, some participants described their experiences as utter hell ("suorastaan helvettiä"), whereas for others the discomfort has been less severe, more so as certain things being especially difficult ("erityisen hankalia"), but not "hellish". For the positive ones, the intensity of the words and phrases was generally more composed. For example, some participants described their language learning experiences as interesting and nice ("mielenkiintoista ja mukavaa"), but more intense positive expressions were not used by the participants.

Table 2: The number of positively and negatively loaded words and expressions used in the questionnaire answers.

Positive:	Negative:
120	252

Besides frequently used negatively loaded expressions indicating familiarity with negative emotional experiences in general, most of the participants also seem to be familiar with language anxiety. In total, 81,6 % of the participants reported having experienced language anxiety. Out of those, 33,3 % reported having experienced said anxiety either randomly without clear recurrence, or less frequently than once a month, while 46,7 % reported experiencing or having experienced said anxiety either weekly or on daily, or on (nearly) daily basis. Additionally, 20 % of the participants stated experiencing or having experienced language anxiety a few times a month, making frequently, between weekly and daily, occurring language anxiety rather common for the participants.

The purpose of the second research question of the present study, "What kinds of experiences do the participants have of language anxiety? How about other experiences combining language and emotion?", was to chart more explicitly the experiences related to language anxiety, as well as other, for example positive, emotional experiences related to language learning. Even though the experienced language anxiety has been rather common for the participants, the frequency, severity of experienced anxiety, as well as the situations for experiencing anxiety has some variety between the participants.

As already stated, the participants who experience language anxiety only seldomly are a minority among the participants. In addition to rather frequently occurring anxiety, when inspecting the severity of experienced language anxiety, 71,1 % of the participants reported their experienced anxiety as being or having been severe, with the severity being self-reported as a number ranging from 7 to 10, on a scale from 1 (minor or nearly non-existent) to 10 (extremely severe). Besides the commonly experienced and rather severe anxiety, it was also common for the participants to experience anxiety in multiple different situations. The two most commonly anxiety-triggering language learning experiences or situations for the participants were the fear of negative assessment or critique ("negatiivisen arvioinnin/arvostelun pelko") and difficulties in speaking in a foreign language or having to perform while speaking in a foreign language ("ääneen puhumisen tai esiintymisen vaikeus"), with more than 80 % of a total of 31 answerers choosing those options. The percentages of the other sectors of

language anxiety ranged from the minimum of 67,7 % (difficulty to communicate in a foreign language, "vaikeus kommunikoida vieraalla kielellä") to 74, 2 % (both test and exam anxiety as well as the fear of making mistakes, "testi- ja koeahdistus" and "virheiden tekemisen pelko"). All in all, even though some variety exists, the experiences of language anxiety were rather similar for many participants.

On the other hand, there were also participants with positive experiences of language and emotion as well. There were few participants who had always enjoyed language learning, while also feeling that they have been successful in the context of language learning. Besides that, participants who reported having received support for language learning, or participants gaining different positive experiences of language learning in more informal settings, were also found. Therefore, even though that language anxiety was mainly prevalent for the participants, other, more positive experiences combining language and emotion were also reported.

4.2.1 Emotional experiences in different groups

The individual answers sheets could also be categorised into different groups based on the learning disabilities of the participants: 1) individuals with dyslexia, 2) individuals with an attention and/or activity disorder, 3) individuals with multiple disorders, and 4) individuals with other, mixed disorders. Group three consisted mainly of individuals with both dyslexia and an attention and/or activity disorder, and of one individual with additional dyscalculia as well. The group of other, mixed disorders consisted of two individuals with (solely) dyscalculia, two individuals with Asperger's syndrome and one individual with disorder in visual perception and multiform developmental disorders. Though Asperger's syndrome is not a learning disability per se, it can have major effects for learning, which is why it is still accepted as one in the present study. Even though the answers from individuals in group 4 cannot be generalised due to major differences in the different disorders, it does not seem reasonable to either analyse or generalize based on answers of only one or two individuals, which is why they in this case were categorised as only one group.

In the four different groups, there seemed to be many similarities, but some differences did occur as well. The biggest of the four groups was group 1, the individuals with dyslexia, with 20 individuals. These individuals reported dyslexia as their sole learning disability, without any additional diagnoses. Out of the 20 individuals, 18 reported having experienced language anxiety in their lives. It is also crucial to acknowledge that out of those, 16 individuals reported experiencing or having experienced rather severe anxiety. Severe anxiety in this context means that on a scale ranging from 1 to 10, the number answered by the individual was at least seven or higher. In general, participants with dyslexia also seemed to experience or have experienced anxiety relatively frequently. Additionally, only three of the 20 individuals assigned to this group reported feeling that they have received support for language learning.

As a group, the individuals with dyslexia seemed to think that their disability has had a significant impact on their language learning, and that this impact has been bigger in relation to language learning, than in relation to other subjects. There were few exceptions to this, with some individuals reporting that their disability has had as big or even bigger impact to other subjects than languages, but these individuals were a minority within the group. For many, their dyslexia has affected both their experiences as well as their learning outcomes in foreign languages, while also having a significant impact on their experienced language anxiety, and its severity.

The second largest group was the individuals with an attention and/or activity disorder, such as ADHD or ADD, which constitutes of nine participants in total. Out of those nine participants, seven reported having experienced language anxiety. That said, only two of those seven has experienced severe anxiety, so again on the scale from 1 to 10, at least seven or higher. In this group, the amount of those who felt that they have received support for language learning was four individuals. That said, it is crucial to keep in mind that since the group is relatively small, it is not possible to generalise the results. Still, the general direction of the answers was somewhat different when compared to group 1. In this group, the participants learning disorder did not affect their language learning significantly more than other subjects, and for many, it had affected other subjects even more than language learning. The experienced anxiety was also less significant and generally not experienced as frequently, as in group 1.

What was noticeable in group 2, was that there seems to be conflict between having received support and feeling as having received support, as was in group 1 as well. This contradiction emerged from two specific questions of the questionnaire, since the participants were first asked explicitly, if they have received support or not. After that, the participants were asked on a scale from 1 to 10, how much they have received support. The highest number reported by an individual in this group who feels that they have not received support was as high as five, with two more participants answering with four. Numbers such as four and five seem surprisingly high for those expressing that they have not received support for language learning. It could be relevant to investigate the issue further, to examine why the emotional response and feeling as if they had not received any support is this common, when many participants still indicated having received at least some support.

The third group, individuals with multiple, overlapping diagnoses constitutes of only four people. This is somewhat surprising, since according to research literature, it is rather common for individuals with a learning disability to have either another learning disability or other learning-hindering condition, or more (Evans, Clinkinbeard and Simi 2015). As already mentioned, three out of the four individuals in this group had a dual diagnosis of both dyslexia and an attention and/or activity disorder, with one individual with an additional diagnosis of dyscalculia. Again, since this group constitutes only of four people, it is not possible to generalise the results, draw conclusions, or to find any general guidelines for the experiences of the individuals in this group. Still, three of the four people in this group reported having experienced language

anxiety, but it had been severe for only one of them. Besides that, the experienced anxiety was again not as commonly occurring, when compared to the group of solely dyslexic individuals. Additionally, in this group, only one participant felt as having received support for language learning, which is in line with the answers of participants in the groups introduced above.

The fourth and final group consists of few separate disorders, since the number of participants with these individual disorders is relatively small in the collected data. As already stated in the beginning of this section, there were two individuals with dyscalculia, two individuals with Asperger's syndrome, and one individual with a disorder of visual perception and multiform developmental disorders. Since the latter differs greatly from other participants with multiple diagnosis, the answers of said individual were included in this group instead. Nevertheless, in this group, three of the five individuals had experiences of language anxiety, with the experienced anxiety being rather significant for all three. One of those three was an individual with dyscalculia, but according to that person, their learning disability had relatively nothing to do with the experienced language anxiety, but it was caused by other factors.

Naturally, the experiences of language anxiety and support for language learning may vary greatly between someone with mathematical disorder and multiform developmental disorders, future research could be beneficial to investigate the issue more thoroughly from the viewpoint of different, possibly not as common, disorders affecting learning. Since the number of these individuals in the present study is so small, it does not seem relevant to try to address these above-mentioned disorders more thoroughly, since the amount of data is not sufficient.

In general, in all the groups individuals who have at least some experiences of language anxiety were the majority. Especially in groups 1 and 4, the experienced anxiety also seemed to be mainly significant, based on the participants self-report on a scale ranging from 1 to 10. Participants who felt as having received support for language learning were a minority in all four groups, but in group 2, individuals with an attention and/or activity disorder, the difference was rather small, as the number of individuals feeling supported was almost half of the whole group. That said, it is crucial to keep in mind since most of the groups were rather small, further research would be needed to investigate whether individuals with certain learning disorders are more prone to language anxiety, or whether people with certain learning disorders are more prone to receive proper support than others.

4.2.2   Emotional experiences and support

This section aims to provide an answer to research question three, which aims to investigate whether the participants feel that they have received support for language learning, and whether that support has been sufficient and appropriate for the participants. An overview of the answers provided by the participants seems to show that the majority of the participants feels that they have not received support for language

learning. On the other hand, as already stated in section 4.2.1, some participants answered that they feel like they have not received support for language learning, while on the contrary indicating, that when the question is formulated differently, they seem to acknowledge having received at least some support. This may suggest that even if these participants have received some support for language learning, the said support has not been sufficient or appropriate to help them, thus resulting in feeling that they have not receiving any support. With that in mind, the answers to the questionnaire being conflicting at times, may also be due to the highly subjective nature of feelings and experiences.

Another interesting observation emerging from the answers is that the answers provided by the participants could be categorised into four different groups based on what the participants answered to questions 13 (Have you ever experienced language anxiety?) and 22 (Do you feel like you have received support for language learning?). These four groups were differentiated by whether they answered yes or no to question 13, and again yes or no to question 22. The groups that could be categorised were 1) those who reported having experienced language anxiety and have received support for language learning, 2) those who reported not experiencing language anxiety, but having received support for language learning, 3) those who reported having experienced language anxiety, but not having received support for language learning, and 4) those who reported not having experienced language anxiety, and not having received support for language learning. The number of participants falling under each category is presented in Table 3 below.

Table 3: The different categories found from the answers to the questionnaire with the number of participants assigned to each category.

1. Has experienced language anxiety and has received support for language learning	3. Has experienced language anxiety but has not received support for language learning
6	25
2. Has not experienced language anxiety but has received support for language learning	4. Has not experienced language anxiety and has not received support for language learning
3	4

As can be seen from Table 3, the number of participants falling under category 3 (Has experienced language anxiety but has not received support for language learning) is significantly higher than the number of participants falling to the other remaining categories. This means that approximately two thirds of the participants have experienced language anxiety, while also feeling that they have not received support for language learning. All in all, as can be seen from Table 3, 29 individuals of the total of 38 participants feel that they have not received support for language learning, while only 9 individuals feel that they have received support.

The participants were also explicitly asked in the questionnaire, whether the support they have received has been sufficient and appropriate. Out of all 38 participants, 22 gave either no answer at all, or a conflicting answer, which could not be interpreted either as a clear yes or no. 11 participants stated explicitly that support has not been sufficient or appropriate, while five participants stated that the support they have received, has been sufficient and appropriate. Based on the answers to this question, it is not possible to generalise anything either way, but when looking at the answers to other questions revolving around the same topic, the participants mainly seem to be unhappy with the support, or the lack of, they have been faced with. It is difficult to say why so many of the participants failed to answer said question, and it could be beneficial to research the topic more, to see whether results would still be as conflicting, or whether results that would be more possible to generalise were to occur.

4.3 Interviews

For the present study, two interviews were conducted. The interviewees were picked from a group of volunteers, who in the questionnaire explicitly stated their interest to participate in an interview as well. The point of the interviews is to deepen the themes from the questionnaire, and to explore the participants thought more thoroughly and personally in relation to their experiences of learning disabilities, language anxiety and support. To summarise, the interviewees were meant to be treated as experts by experience, as already mentioned in section 3.4. As for the analysis, the interviews are first presented as separate cases for both interviewees. After the individual cases, similarities and differences between the participants are presented and discussed. Lastly, the interviews are then discussed in the light of the research questions of the present study.

4.3.1 Case one: Mary

The first interview case to be presented will be referred to with the pseudonym Mary. Mary is a dyslexic woman in her thirties, and she is currently studying in a master's degree programme in a university of applied sciences. Mary has received her diagnosis of dyslexia as a teenager in lower secondary school, and she feels that her disability has affected language learning and mathematics more than other school subjects, meaning that she has struggled the most with languages and mathematics. Despite her struggles with languages, Mary has been learning three different languages: compulsory English and Swedish, as well as additional and optional German.

Mary seemed to keep the interview on a more general level, instead of sharing very private and personal experiences. But even though the interview stayed mainly on a more general level, Mary did share some emotional experiences connecting her

learning disability and her experiences of language anxiety. When discussing her experiences of language anxiety, Mary repeated a few times feeling as it does not make any sense ("eihän täs oo mitään järkee") or that she does not know what she is doing ("enhän mä tiedä mitä mä teen"). Besides feeling somewhat lost and not understanding during lessons, she also mentioned feeling that she was easily labelled by teachers as either a lazy student or a bad learner. As already mentioned, Mary also stated that languages and mathematics have always felt a lot more difficult for her than other school subjects, which on the side of language anxiety has left her feeling as if she is worse than other students, and that it is not worth it to even try to learn. Additionally, language learning has also always been extremely boring to Mary. Due to language learning being received as both difficult as well as boring, Mary has also lacked the motivation to learn or even trying to learn.

When asked more thoroughly of her learning disability and how it has been realized for her, Mary accentuated pronunciation as the most difficult field of language learning. She claimed that she cannot pronounce any other languages than Finnish ("mä en osaa ääntää muita kielii kun suomee"), and that for a long time she spelled words the same way they are pronounced, because she struggled to comprehend the difference between spelling and pronunciation. Besides pronunciation, Mary also reported having difficulties with the gender of words in both Swedish and German, prepositions, and that the grammars of both Swedish and German were the one and same for her, as she could not tell them apart. This has been visible for her for example with word order, as she stated that the word order of German has often been affecting her written Swedish. That said, Mary feels that English has been a bit easier for her, at least in a grammatical sense, as she feels that English grammar is different enough from Swedish and German to not get it mixed that easily, and that she has had more exposure to the English in her everyday life. Still, it is important to keep in mind that Mary that with the English language, the issues in pronunciation and spelling have been prominent.

When it comes to language anxiety, for Mary the experiences and symptoms have been clearly distinguishable. She stated that for her, language anxiety has been the most visible in feelings of "freezing" or "getting stuck" ("näkynyt jäätymisinä ja jumiutumisina") in language learning situations, meaning that in those situations she has felt that she simply cannot say or write the answer to an assigned task or question. These feelings combined with other factors have led to Mary not even trying anymore, as well as to the lack of motivation to finish for example tasks and assignments. Besides not even trying anymore and the lack of motivation, inattentiveness and not wanting to participate have also defined her experiences of language anxiety. Mary feels that her learning disability has not affected her language anxiety per se so that she sees her disability as a clear trigger for experienced language anxiety. Instead, a clearer trigger has been how her learning disability has been handled in classroom situations.

As for support, the support received from friends and peers seemed to be of importance for Mary. She thinks that people should talk more the amount how much

friends and peers can help and assist the learning of students with learning disabilities, and how much support and acceptance from the peers can help individuals with learning disabilities emotionally as well. This is based on her personal experiences, as she said having received concrete support from her friends has helped her a fair amount. According to Mary, when she has been progressing slower than others, her friends have worked with assigned mathematical problems and tasks together with her, and in language classes her friends have tried to clarify and explain things when she has struggled to understand. Mary also explained that this support from friends and peers has been major for her emotionally, as her friends have always been there for her and accepted her despite her disability. Peer support seems to have had a bigger impact on her than the actions of teachers, as she stated that she believes the teachers have also tried to support her in their own ways, but the means have been quite scarce and that maybe they have not had the right tools and knowledge to help her.

When discussing support on a more general level, Mary stated that she wants to believe that appropriate support does matter, when an individual is able to receive support that is suitable for them. She also believes that appropriate support could have anxiety-relieving effects for those who struggle with language anxiety. Mary also feels that the target of support in general should not be every student receiving good grades or all students learning languages in the same way, but affecting individuals so, that everyone would feel good instead of feeling as if they are unintelligent or lazy. Also, she brought up children with learning disabilities or other difficulties progressing from preschool to primary school, and how schools should already at that point come up with ways to sustain the agency and competence of all learners, so that the transition to school would be a wonderful experience for everyone.

The way Mary's learning disabilities have been encountered by other people, such as teachers, has been mostly negative or indifferent. Besides her personal experiences, Mary also has second-hand knowledge of how learning disabilities are encountered and acknowledged in today's school settings, due to her professional career. Mary said that she is under the impression that learning disabilities may still be poorly acknowledged in educational settings, and teachers still lack knowledge and concrete tools on how to manage with learning disabilities in their classrooms. As a more personal experience, Mary also said that her teachers' approaches to learning disabilities have not always been as sensitive as they could have been. Her learning disability has often been ignored or dismissed even after receiving the official diagnosis, and before receiving the diagnosis no one seemed to even suspect that she could have a learning disability. She thought that her issues may have been overlooked, since her academic success has always been "sufficient", meaning that she has not been on the verge of failing courses or not passing tests, et cetera. Even though Mary's academic success may have been sufficient from schools' viewpoint, she herself has noticed a clear difference, when comparing her performance in other subjects, versus in languages and mathematics, which have always been the most difficult one's for her.

Mary also reflected that maybe her teachers have not had the right tools to intervene and help with her dyslexia, and therefore she has just been left to cope with it, without proper support from her instructors. Since she has always passed courses and in general performed sufficiently, she may have not been seen as someone in acute need of support. Besides the lack of support from her instructors, Mary also feels that the teachers' understanding of her dyslexia has been relatively minor, and that the inadequate, yet received, support has mainly been pushing and demanding her to just do things ("tee nyt vaan"), which relates the perceived insensitiveness of her instructors. Mary still feels that the teachers have believed in her and tried to encourage and support her, but the mentality has been, in her words, the one of a bulldozer ("puskutraktorimeininki"), meaning that the teachers have not really helped her to learn, but simply demanded her to do the assigned tasks. According to Mary, this is again related to the teachers struggling to comprehend what her learning disability really is.

Nowadays Mary sees the more solution-oriented approaches as good and appropriate ways to handle learning disabilities. She emphasises focusing on the aspects that already work for individuals with learning disabilities and where the individual's performance is already sufficient and decent, instead of emphasising and focusing on the things that are difficult and laborious for the individual, and where the individual's performance is compromised. Mary also emphasises approaching learning disabilities with progressing from the least difficult thing of all the difficult things ("mikä näistä vaikeista asioista on vähiten vaikee"), instead of demanding the individual to simply do the required tasks. Besides the more solution-oriented approaches, Mary feels that early involvement and intervening is also an important factor when encountering learning disabilities in educational settings.

Besides solution-orientated approaches and the importance of early intervening, Mary also emphasises providing individuals with feelings and experiences of being successful and competent ("onnistumisen kokemus ja tunne siitä että on pätevä"). She believes that individuals should be provided with a feeling that they are competent human beings, even if they struggle with certain aspects of learning, while also emphasising that sufficient performance should be normalised. She also called for acceptance; not everyone needs to be good at everything. Students should not be appraised through their grades and scores too much, but instead it should be made clear that passing is already enough. Also, related to not appraising students through their grades, students who receive scores that are on the lower end of the assessment scale should not be deemed as lazy, since according to Mary, poor performance in school is very seldom related to a student being lazy, and that there are almost always some other underlying problems behind poor performance, than the student being lazy.

When asked of positive learning experiences, Mary seems to have virtually none related to language learning. During the interview, Mary was explicitly asked of positive learning experiences with an emphasis towards language learning. To that, she stated that language learning has always been relatively boring for her, as already mentioned earlier in this section. She said that she has never really gotten to use

languages in more authentic situations, and that language learning has always been exactly the same from the very first lesson to the last one. That said, she did report positive learning experiences from the mathematics classroom. She said that she really liked her lower secondary school mathematics teacher, because the teacher seemed to understand the struggles caused by different learning disabilities or other difficulties, and that the teacher adapted and adjusted the lessons to fit the needs of the students. Mary explained that the teacher gave her and other struggling students different types of exercises to do, so that they would still be involved in mathematics, but they were not always expected to solve the same problems and tasks the rest of the group was working with. She stated that the teacher set certain boundaries and established the minimum effort that needed to be done to pass, but other than that, the teacher did not constantly intervene and demand the struggling students to do all that the typically developing students without any major problems in mathematics did. She also stated that most of the students seemed to enjoy those lessons, and that one could see the teacher's acceptance that not everyone needs to be great at mathematics.

4.3.2   Case two: Anne

The second interview case presented will be referred to with the pseudonym "Anne". Anne is a woman in her early forties, and her learning disability is primarily in the area of phonological processing, but she also referred to her disability with the term dyslexia. Like Mary, Anne is also currently studying in a master's degree programme in a university of applied sciences. Anne has not received her diagnosis until in her thirties, and she feels that both her condition as well as the late diagnosis has affected learning as well as her life in general greatly. She has struggled especially with language learning, yet she has been learning optional French in addition to compulsory Swedish and English.

Anne's answers indicated many negative emotions and experiences concerning her learning disability and language learning. One emotion she kept mentioning throughout the interview was shame. Anne stated she has felt ashamed because of her condition. An example of this is that after finally receiving her diagnosis, she was still too ashamed to tell of the diagnosis at work, due to the nature of her job. At the time she worked in a communications position, and stated thinking that people in such positions simply cannot be dyslexic ("eihän viestinnän ihmisillä voi olla mitään lukivaikeutta"). Besides this, the feeling of shame has been present in her educational path as well. Anne stated that it took her approximately eight years after primary school to get her first degree. She felt that graduating so late was embarrassing, since other people she knew could have already graduated to several degrees from different levels at best, unlike her.

Besides shame and embarrassment, Anne has also felt resentment linked to nobody even expressing a worry, that she could have a learning disability. As was already mentioned, she did not receive her diagnosis until her thirties, meaning that her struggles went unnoticed or ignored in educational settings. That said, Anne also

mentioned that already in her childhood, she noticed that she was falling behind of other students and had not been progressing as quickly as others for example in English. One even more concrete example is that when Anne started fifth grade in a new school, she noticed that she was clearly behind of the other students, which is something she also admits to being bitter of. Anne stated that she is bitter not only due to nobody noticing her difficulties, but also because of falling behind without adequate help, as well as because of nobody reacting to her learning struggles in her school years.

Due to her struggles in language learning, Anne has also suffered with motivational issues and struggles with self-image and self-esteem. She suggests that her learning disability may also have affected her psyche, while thinking that it could have been one affecting factor behind her experienced depression as well. The motivational issues Anne mentioned were caused by her not understanding during lessons and therefore not being motivated, which has sometimes been realized in the classroom as unwanted and inappropriate behaviour. Struggles in learning have also affected Anne's self-esteem and self-image negatively, which has resulted in her feeling that she is somehow stupid for not learning like other students. These negative experiences combined with experiences of language anxiety, have resulted to her not having any positive experiences of language learning.

When it comes to language anxiety, Anne's experiences have been relatively severe. When asked more of her experiences, she stated that language anxiety has been an almost daily occurrence for her in many different settings. One of the most distinct anxiety triggers for her seems to be speaking in a foreign language, such as English. She mentioned her fear of speaking (English) a few times during the interview, and at one time described speaking in another language than Finnish as being pure horror ("ihan horroria") for her. Anne also told that her fear of speaking in a foreign language has prevented her from participating in certain situations. For example, she said that a neighbouring family of hers, is (at least) bilingual, with the parents speaking English with each other, and them speaking both English and Finnish to their children. Anne shared that a while ago, when she was outdoors with her own family, they ran into the said multilingual family and a third family, all gathering up for a chat. The other adults switched to English, and Anne, while she mainly understood what they were talking about, could not bring herself to participate orally. This left her feeling ashamed and anxious, as she said that it would be horrible if others think that she is being rude, when the reality is that she was too afraid and anxious to speak English.

It is possible, that the ways her learning disability have been concretely realized explain her fear of speaking in a foreign language. As already mentioned in the beginning of this section, when asked what kind of learning disability she has, Anne stated that her issue is in the area of phonological processing, which she later in the interview referred to as dyslexia. Anne said that her disability is often visible in situations where listening is required (for example in a language laboratory) and that she also struggles in Finnish with differentiating between single or geminate consonants when listening someone speaking. Besides issues in language production and listening

comprehension, Anne also referred to word order as being like Hebrew to her ("ihan hepreaa"), meaning that she feels clueless about the correct word order required in different situations.

When asked of her experiences of support, Anne feels that she would have benefitted from more personal and individual support, such as a private tutor, had it been financially possible for her. Another helpful medium could have been moving to a foreign language-speaking country, for example as an au pair, and therefore being exposed to the language in a more authentic setting. According to Anne, being exposed to a language in such way would have "forced" her to better use and learn the language. All in all, Anne feels that appropriate support could have had a major positive impact on her. She also feels that when it comes to her personality, self-esteem and self-image, appropriate support could have had significant positive impact on those, which again could have lessened her feelings of shame and being worse than others.

Anne also stated, that raising awareness to different (more concrete) support mediums to help learning, could be beneficial to all students. Anne thinks that with appropriate support, it could be possible that no student would feel as if they were stupid or worse than others. Also, when asked about how language teachers and instructors should take learning disabilities or other learning-hindering issues into account, Anne said that they should be encountered in a gentle manner to again prevent students feeling as if they were stupid or a bad student or learner, or the individual thinking that they are somehow different in a negative way. Anne also feels that since there is so much knowledge of different types of study techniques and such nowadays, all students would benefit from the means that could also help students with learning disabilities.

All in all, Anne seems to think that she has not received enough support for learning, since her learning disability has not even been diagnosed until her thirties. Thus, she has not been able to receive appropriate and adequate support, which has left a negative impact to many different areas of her life. During the interview, Anne was also asked if she remembered any positive learning experiences, but she stated having none, meaning that all her learning experiences were either negative, or neutral at best. Many of these experiences were also coloured by her language anxiety, which affects her even today. That said, nowadays her language anxiety is more indirect, and focuses on her daughter. Anne fears that her child will inherit her learning disabilities, and thus faces struggles like her. This again emphasizes how big of an impact her learning experiences, learning disability and language anxiety have affected her, while continuing to impact her life even today.

4.3.3   Similarities and differences between Mary and Anne

In this section the interviews will be examined from the viewpoint of similarities and differences between the participants, as well as the research questions of the present study. The research questions and how the interviews answer to those will be

discussed in the order of the research questions, so starting with meanings the participants assign to their learning disabilities, continuing with experiences of language anxiety, and ending with experiences and thoughts of support.

When it comes to these interviews, a few shared themes emerged in both. For one, both participants stated that teachers and instructors should address learning disabilities in their work in a sensitive manner and in a way that does not leave the individual with the disability feeling like they are stupid, lazy, simply bad at learning, or otherwise feeling like they are somehow worse and not as good and worthy as their other, typically developing peers. What also seemed to be a shared experience for both participants, was that according to both, their learning disability was either mainly ignored or not taken into account during their school years, even though one of the participants had received her diagnosis in her early teenage years. Both also seemed to sternly believe that appropriate support could have affected their learning and academic success and/or self-esteem positively, either by reducing their experienced language anxiety, or facilitating learning and schoolwork, and that it could possibly even have influenced their career paths. They also seemed to believe, or at least hope, that learning disorders are better acknowledged in schools today, and that the ways and tools for support have developed and are better nowadays, than they were at their school years.

It may also be of importance to be mindful of the differences between the interviews, and possibly more specifically the differences in the style of the participants answering the interview questions. Whereas Mary kept the answers on a rather general as well as mainly more superficial level while relating the answers strongly to her field of work and expertise, "Anne's" answers were more personal and relating to her emotional experiences. Mary's answers focused more to a solution-oriented view and as speaking more on the behalf of other people than herself, while Anne's answers focused more on feelings she has experienced, instead of more general thoughts. These differences seem important to be brough forth, since it makes it somewhat more difficult to try to compare the answers to each other to see, whether similarities or differences emerge.

The first research question of the present study is "What kinds of meanings do the participants give to their learning disabilities, when considering their language learning experiences". There were some similarities in the meanings Mary and Anne gave to their disabilities, but differences were also visible in their answers. For example, Mary expressed her learning disability as a factor giving her a negative brand in the eyes of teachers, as she said that she was easily labelled as lazy or a bad student, even though her issues were caused by her dyslexia. Anne did not report being branded negatively, but unlike Mary, she reported her learning disability as a factor causing shame. Mary did not mention shame in her interview, even though other negatively coloured emotional experiences were discussed. Also, the answers given by both indicated that their learning disability has caused hindrances for learning, but the emphasis was slightly different for the participants. Whereas Mary's answers indicated her dyslexia as a factor making learning more difficult, Anne's answers seemed

emphasize her disabilities making her learning process slower, instead of only making learning more difficult. That said, there was also some overlap in their answers, since Mary also stated her being slower than others in mathematics classroom, but the emphasis they made was still somewhat different, at least when it comes to language learning.

Both Mary and Anne have also felt that their disabilities have affected their self-image and/or self-esteem negatively. Mary associated her difficulties to the feeling of being inferior, while Anne associated her difficulties to the feeling of being less intelligent than others. Anne also explicitly stated that her learning disabilities have had a severe, negative impact on her self-image and self-esteem. Anne in general seemed to associate her difficulties to negative experiences of herself more severely than Mary, and referred to these experiences frequently throughout the interview, whereas Mary only mentioned intrapersonal experiences only couple of times here and there in a slightly more casual manner.

Another shared meaning for both Mary and Anne is their learning disability as a factor causing motivational issues. They both stated that since language learning has been difficult for them, and since they have had trouble understanding and learning, both have also had issues with motivation. Both Mary and Anne have been lacking motivation to learn languages, which is somewhat conflicting, since both have studied an additional language besides compulsory English and Swedish. That said, especially Mary reflected on whether she has had too many languages to learn, and whether someone should have suggested that maybe three different languages are too much for her, considering her learning disability.

Anne assigned a few more meanings, that were not mentioned by Mary, to her learning disabilities. An interesting issue she associated with her difficulties was their possible effect on her mental health. Anne stated briefly that she has struggled with depressive episodes in her life and sees to connect her depression with her learning disabilities. She also believes that the negative impact dyslexia has had on her educational and working life, has also taken its toll on her psyche. Besides the possible negative effects on her psyche, Anne also stated that even if she does not want to be, she is somewhat bitter, that the adults in school or other adults in her life never noticed her struggles, and that she did not receive and explanation or a reason to her struggles until far in adulthood. This has left her wondering, whether appropriate and rightly timed support could have affected her career path as well.

All in all, the meanings Mary and Anne associate their learning disabilities and language learning experiences with seem to be mainly negatively coloured. The answers provided indicate negative impacts on many different areas of self and life in general. Mary and Anne have both felt that they are either bad (language) learners or unintelligent, that they somehow are different or slower than other students, and that they have lacked motivation because of the hindrances caused by their learning disabilities. Additionally, neither of the women seemed to associate any positive meanings related to their learning disabilities, when regarding their language learning experiences.

The second research question is "What kinds of experiences the participants have of language anxiety? How about other experiences regarding language and emotion?" In short, both Mary and Anne have experiences of language anxiety, but there are differences in how the anxiety has been concretely realized for them. Mary seems to emphasise how her anxiety has been realized in the foreign language classroom, whereas Anne emphasises how frequent and grave it has been for her also in her everyday life outside educational settings. As already mentioned, Mary stated that for her language anxiety has been the most visible in feelings of being "frozen" in the classroom, meaning that she has felt as if she has not been able to say or write something in the foreign language. These experiences have then led to her giving up even trying, and thus not participating in classroom situations. The giving up and not participating has also impacted her studying at home as well, as she stated that she has not really attended to her homework either, since language learning has felt so difficult for her.

Anne did not share such concrete examples of the realization of language anxiety as Mary, but her answers indicated strong feelings of nervousness and fear attached especially to situations requiring speaking in a foreign language. As already stated above, Anne emphasized more the frequency of experienced language anxiety. According to her, language anxiety has been very frequent experience, occurring virtually daily in different everyday life -situations, as well as in her studies and work. What is interesting in her experiences, is also the experienced second-hand language anxiety she feels for her daughter. Anne explained that since her young daughter has an increased risk to learning disabilities due to the possible heritability of learning disabilities, she fears that her daughter may end up experiencing troubles with language learning. Anne is concerned that her daughter may end up facing similar, anxiety and shame evoking situations as she has encountered in her life.

When it comes to other experiences combining language and emotion, the experiences shared by Mary and Anne differ quite a bit. Whereas Mary had at least some positive experiences to share, Anne on the other hand had virtually no positive emotional experiences connected to languages and language learning, but instead had even more negative feelings attached to those. Mary shared that she had positive emotional experiences attached to her peers, who have offered her support both in languages and mathematics, as well as to one mathematics teacher, who according to her seemed to understand the struggles caused by her learning disabilities, whereas Anne had no positive experiences to share. Anne stated bluntly that she has no positive emotional experiences of language learning to share, when asked explicitly. Instead, frequently throughout her interview, she brought up different negative emotional experiences. One of the most frequently shared (negative) emotional experiences was the aforementioned feeling of shame. Besides that, she has also felt that she has been falling behind other students in her learning process, and that due to not understanding and struggling, especially as a child, she has acted out in the classroom due to the frustration of not understanding.

That said, it is interesting that Anne did tell that in her current studies, her learning disabilities have been considered rather well. She even mentioned the actions provided by the school as rather exemplary ("aika esimerkillistä"), on how they have met her special needs. She also stated feeling relieved and liberated, since she now has the right to certain support actions. It seems that her educational path has been largely coloured by the time when she did not yet have a diagnosis of her learning disability, which is why it was unclear why she struggled with (language) learning at the time. Due to this it may be possible, that Anne is still adjusting to learning with the help of proper support actions, since the whole situations differs quite a bit from her previous learning experiences, also on the emotional level. Thus, it is possible, that Anne has not yet internalized the fact that she is receiving support, since it is still such a new experience for her, differing greatly from her previous learning experiences.

To conclude the points related to the second research question of the present study, it is clear that both participants have experiences of language anxiety, but in practice the way their anxiety has been realized has some differences. Even though both seem to have some positive experiences of learning, they seem not to be connected to language learning per se. Mary emphasises more of the positive emotions connected to mathematics, even though her friends had offered her similar support to language learning as well. Anne instead seems to not attach any positive emotional experiences to language learning or learning in general, even though she seemed to have some positive experiences from her current studies. All in all, the other emotional experiences regarding language and emotion, seem to be much vaguer and more ambiguous, than the participants experiences of language anxiety.

The third and final research question of the present study is "Do the participants feel that they have received support for language learning, and has the possible support been sufficient and appropriate?" For both participants the consensus seems to be that they either have not received support, or that the amount of support they have received has not been sufficient or appropriate. For example, Mary feels that since her performance in school has always been at least decent or "enough" so that she has not been at risk of failing courses, different types of support mediums have not been considered in her case, even after receiving the diagnosis of dyslexia and telling her teachers of her struggles to learn. Mary also thinks that her teachers have tried to support her in their own ways, but since the general understanding of learning disabilities has in her opinion been quite poor, the mediums for support have not been sufficient. Mary also considered the possibility that maybe the teachers have felt as if they do not have the ways and mediums to help students with learning disabilities, which is why their support has been limited to simply demanding to do the required tasks, while struggling to really understand the issue.

For Anne, the situation has again been different. Since she did not receive a diagnosis for her learning disability until in her thirties, receiving proper support for learning has not been a possibility for her in the past. Besides that, Anne feels that her struggles have been ignored or overlooked, which has left her feeling bitter. As mentioned before, she feels bitter because no one seemed to notice her struggles, which has

presumably affected her not getting a diagnosis until later in adulthood. That said, as mentioned in the section concerning research question two, in her current studies she has received support, and know that she has both the right and the access to receive support to help her with learning. Still, in general Anne seems to think that she has not received support for learning, which is correspondent to the findings regarding the questionnaire.

What is also interesting, is that both Mary and Anne mentioned that they have not had the possibility to receive support from their parents. Both also stated that at least one of their parents has, or at least seems to have learning disabilities themselves, which has made it difficult or impossible for them to help their children with subjects that are difficult for them as well. Anne also stated that that she has encountered a peer with learning disabilities as well but stated that said peer came from a family of two teachers, meaning that their baseline for receiving help and support has been very different than for her, whose mother, based on the common symptoms of dyslexia she makes, is also presumably undiagnosed dyslexic. Mary had similar thoughts to Anne, since she also stated that it was not possible for her parents, especially her also dyslexic father, to help her with language learning, meaning that it would have mean even more crucial to receive support from teachers and school in general.

All in all, both Mary and Anne seem to think that in general they either have not received support for language learning, or that the support they have received has not been sufficient or appropriate. One exception to this has been Anne's current master's studies in a university of applied sciences, where she has had the possibility to receive support or modifications to improve her learning. Mary instead did not mention any specific support mediums she has been granted even in her current studies, which might indicate that the possibly received support may not have been sufficient or appropriate even recently.

5   DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

In this section the present study will be discussed and evaluated from few different viewpoints. The section first begins with a summary of the results, after which the evaluation of the present study is presented with discussion of its limitations. After the evaluation, the implications of the present study will be discussed in relation to previous research in the field of learning disabilities and language anxiety. Lastly, the section will be closed with suggestions for further research of the key concepts discussed in the present study.

5.1   Summary of the results

As mentioned above, the results of the present study will be summarized first. In this section, the results will be summarized in consideration to the three different research questions of the present study. Results to the research questions will be discussed in numerical order, after which a brief conclusion of the results will be presented.

To summarize the results in relation to research question one "What kind of meanings do the participants give to their learning disabilities, when considering their language learning experiences?", the meanings the participants, who answered the questionnaire, assign to their learning disabilities are rather versatile. Whereas many of the participants relate a variety of negative, such as learning hindering or self-esteem negatively affecting, meanings to their learning disability or disabilities, some consider even positive, or at least neutral, meanings attached to their disabilities when considering their language learning experiences. On the other hand, when it comes more specifically to the interviews, the meanings linked to the interviewees' learning disabilities are almost solely negative, without much versatility, unlike the assigned meanings in general. Potential reasons for this will be discussed later in section 5.3. With that said, it is also important to keep in mind that the results relating to research question one cannot be closely related to previous research, since *meanings* individuals

relate to their learning disability or disabilities, specifically, have not really been researched before.

The second research question of the present study "What kinds of experiences the participants have of language anxiety? How about other experiences combining language and emotion?" focuses on the participants different emotional experiences, such as language anxiety. In general, the results seem to implicate, that language anxiety is, or at least has been, a rather frequent and severe issue for many of the participants, while more positive, as well as other, emotional experiences have been much scarcer. This is the case with both the questionnaire, as well as the interviews. Therefore, the results relating to research question to are mainly in line with previous research on learning disabilities and language anxiety. For example, it has been noticed in previous research as well, that learners with different learning disabilities have been found to report anxiety levels significantly higher than peers without disabilities (Carrol and Iles 2006; Haft et al. 2018; Nelson and Harwood 2011). With that in mind, the results gained from the present study cannot be fully compared to some of the previous studies, since many of them include a control group of typically developing peers, to who the answers of learner with learning disabilities have been compared to, unlike in the present study. Thus, based on the present study it is not possible to assess whether learners with disabilities are at a higher risk for language anxiety and other negative emotional experiences, than individuals without disabilities.

The third research question of the present study "Do the participants feel that they have received support for language learning, and has the possible support been sufficient and appropriate?", as the question explicitly suggests, aims to chart the experiences the participants have of support, and whether said support has been useful and sufficient for them or not. Again, in general (so considering both the questionnaire in general, as well as the interviews more specifically), the results seem rather discouraging, since many of the participants feel that they have either not received any support for language learning, or that the support they have received has not been sufficient, or that it has not been useful for them. The results here could be explained with the results of previous research, since previous research on the topic has suggested that many EFL teachers may be underequipped to help learner with disabilities (Lyon et al. 2001) while lacking both competence as well as confidence to support learners with disabilities (Delaney and Hata 2020), and that many EFL programs lack the resources to appropriately support learners (Young 2020). It is possible, that the participants (language) instructors as well have lacked competence, confidence and/or resources to provide sufficient and appropriate support for learners with disabilities.

In conclusion, the results in general seem somewhat discouraging. Generally, the participants seem to associate mainly negative meanings to their learning disabilities, seem to have many negative emotional experiences related to language learning, and seem to mainly have experiences of support that has not been sufficient or appropriate to meet their special needs. While there are some exceptions to the general tone of the results, the bigger picture does seem to be rather negatively coloured. While the results at times are not surprising when relating those to previous research, they raise

some questions on how well educational settings are equipped to encounter learning disabilities in the schools of today, and whether it would be important to address the issue better in educational settings, to provide better experiences for future learners both with and without disabilities.

5.2   Evaluation and limitations of the present study

This section focuses on evaluating the present study and discussing its limitations. The quality, reliability and validity of the present study will be discussed, alongside with thoughts on what could have been done differently, to further improve the present study. Ethical concerns related to the present study will also be discussed.

In the present study, some limitations related to the participants would seem reasonable to acknowledge and discuss. One of these limitations is the anonymity of the participants, due to which it may be challenging to assess the reliability of the answers. It does not seem reasonable to suspect the participants answers, but it is in practice possible for anyone to answer anything to the questionnaire anonymously. On the other hand, anonymity may encourage individuals to participate, and to honestly share even embarrassing or painful experiences. Even though the anonymity of the participants may potentially cause some reservations to the reliability of the present study, it can also be seen as ethical choice, since anonymity may provide comfort and courage for different types of people to share their experiences, when knowing that their answers cannot be linked to their everyday lives. With that said, the anonymity may also propose a risk related to the age of the participants. Even if the questionnaire was targeted to people older than the age of 18, it was not possible to verify the age of the participants, meaning that the participants could report their age belonging to any of the age groups listed no matter their actual age. This again suggests that the anonymity of the participants may raise some ethical concerns, while also having effects that at the same time may improve the ethicalness of the present study.

In addition to the anonymity of the participants, it seems relevant to ponder and discuss whether it would have been reasonable to gather more background information of the participants. For example, the gender of the participants was not charted in the questionnaire, which raises the question, whether possible gender differences would have added value to the analysis, and whether it would have offered even more possibilities for further research. Also, it seems relevant to think whether some questions should have been formatted in a different way, to even better ensure that all participants would interpret the questions in as similar manner as possible, to make the answers even more comparable. In relation to the participants, the overemphasis of university students may also be seen as a limitation, since data gathered from more diverse population could possibly have affected the results.

Another limitation of the present study is the highly subjective nature of the key concepts, or at least their concrete realizations. It is possible, that even learners with the same learning disability, be it even with similar symptoms, may experience their disability very differently. Additionally, whereas to receive a diagnosis of a learning disability one must meet the requirements of certain criteria, it is far more difficult to assign strict criteria for experiences of support. Then again, for language anxiety, diagnostic criteria of general anxiety can be used, due to the similar symptomology and biological foundations of the concepts. Since experiences on general, as well as the experience of language anxiety or other emotional experiences, instead are highly subjective, the experienced intensity or significance of anxiety, for example, may in practice be very different for two different participants, even if they were to self-report the severity of their experienced anxiety with the same numerical value on a scale. Also, as it has been stated earlier, the results indicated clear inconsistencies in the answers of the participants in relation to their experiences of support, again emphasizing the subjective nature of the concept.

The number of participants could also be seen as a limitation. Since the number of participants is still rather small in the present study, it would not be reasonable or justifiable to draw any generalisations based on the present study. Investigations in greater volume and possibly in quantitative manner would be needed to be able to generalise results, and to see whether certain guidelines were to emerge from larger amounts of data. In addition to the relatively small number of participants, few learning disabilities were much more frequent than others in the present study. Especially dyslexia is emphasised among the participants. Even though the frequency of dyslexia is understandable, due to common prevalence of the issue (Sundheim and Voller 2004), it seems that some learning disabilities, especially the combination of multiple issues, were underrepresented in the data, since according to research literature, comorbidity is rather common for individuals with learning disabilities (Evans, Clinkinbeard and Simi 2015; McBride 2019). More specifically, at least dyslexia and ADHD have been noticed to co-occur frequently (Kormos and Smith 2012).

The thematic broadness of the present study may also be considered a limitation, at least for a study only as broad as a master's thesis. For a study of this nature, it could have been reasonable to narrow the topic down even further, and to possibly focus on only one, more specific learning disability in relation to language anxiety and support, instead of learning disabilities in general relating to the aforementioned issues. By narrowing the topic to only one or two learning disabilities could have enabled the present study to even better shed light on the effects of more specific issues. With that said, broader, more general topic can still be seen as reasonable, as it may provide at least some new information on more than one or two learning disabilities to certain groups of people, who are not expected to be experts on the topic of learning disabilities but require some knowledge of their effects to learning.

Some ethical issues were also encountered with the interviews. Since it was virtually impossible to organize the interviews so that the anonymity of the participants would stay intact due to the participants contact information needed for the interviews, it

was crucial to address the interviewees with a pseudonym in the present study, to protect the participants privacy. Additionally, it was important to treat the interviews and the questionnaire answers as two separate entities, since it was promised to the participants answering the questionnaire, that the contact information the volunteers were to enlist, and the interview answers would not be linked to their answers to the questionnaire but treated as two separates. This was again done to protect the anonymity of the participants as well as possible, and to treat the interviews and the questionnaire as separates. Besides limitations with the anonymity of the participants, it was also difficult to make certain writing choices based on the interviews, since at times it raised questions whether it truly is acceptable to share such personal and even hurtful experiences of individuals, even behind a pseudonym and with the participants' consent. This reflects mainly to the writing choices in sections 4.3.1-4.3.3, trying to balance the writing choices between being as informative as possible, while also trying to remain as respectful as possible towards the interviewees, due to the sensitive nature of the topic.

In conclusion, it can be said that the present study faces some limitations, but most of them provide ground for further research on the topics discussed. Additionally, even though the present study faces its own limitations, there seems to be no significant ethical issues related to the present study, due to the voluntary participation, anonymity, and the required legal adulthood of the participants, but the few possible ethical issues are still crucial to acknowledge and discuss. Furthermore, it is always important to assess and discuss the limitations of a study, since acknowledging the limitations increases the transparency of the research process, further increasing the reliability of the study in question.

5.3   Implications of the present study

This section aims to present and discuss the implications of the present study, including the value the present study adds to the field of previous research. The section begins with an overlook to the similarities between the present study and previous research. After that, the differences and conflictive findings will be discussed. The section then continues with what has been gained from the present study, meaning the value this thesis adds to the theoretical framework, and whether the present study succeeds at filling the research gap or not. Lastly, concluding remarks of this section will be provided.

5.3.1   Similarities and differences between the present study and previous research

When it comes to combining learning disabilities and language anxiety, the results of the present study seem rather similar to the results of previous research. For example, it has been noticed in previous studies that at least learners with dyslexia have

indicated higher anxiety levels, than those without, limiting not only to academic situations, but a variety of other academic and/or social situations as well (Carrol and Iles 2009). Experiences of both frequent and rather severe language anxiety were also noticed in the present study, when assessing individuals with dyslexia. Learners with dyslexia or similar symptoms, have also been noticed to exhibit higher anxiety levels than their typically developing peers by Piechurska-Kuciel (2008), again indicating possible anxiety-causing effects of dyslexia. That in mind, individuals with dyslexia as s group were the ones with the most frequent and severe experiences of language anxiety in the present study, when comparing the experiences of individuals with different learning disabilities, which again suggests that dyslexia may have negative emotional consequences for language learning. This can potentially be explained by the characterizations of dyslexia, which include lack of phonological awareness and trouble in word decoding (Sundheim and Voller 2004), as well as deficits in reading and/or spelling of words (McBride 2019).

Results similar to previous research were also noticed with attention and/or activity, or behavioural, disabilities as well, but the results in general seemed less conclusive than the results of previous studies. In the present study, the relationship between attention and/or activity disorders and language anxiety was not as clear and straightforward as among participants with dyslexia. The results of the study by Swanson and Howell (1996) also suggests that individuals with learning disabilities and behavioural challenges may exhibit higher levels of test-related anxiety, which was also a rather common anxiety trigger for the participants of the present study, than their peers. Still, the results were not as clear in the group of individuals with attention and/or activity, or behavioural, disabilities as they were in the group of individuals with dyslexia. Granted, the relationship between specifically attention and/or activity disorders and language anxiety have been studied less, than for example the relationship between reading disabilities and language anxiety. Therefore, it is not possible to relate the results of the present study regarding attention and/or activity disorders to previous research as straightforwardly as the results regarding reading disabilities, such as dyslexia.

One clear difference between the present study and previous research is that there was no control group of typically developing individuals to compare the participants with learning disabilities to. In great amount of previous research combining learning disabilities and language anxiety, the results concerning individuals with learning disabilities have been compared to a control group of typically developing peers, to examine the statistical and/or clinical significance of the results. For example, in their research, Haft et al. (2018) noticed that learners with a specific learning disability reported significantly higher anxiety levels, when compared to a control group of learners without disabilities. Similarly, the meta-analysis of Nelson and Harwood (2011) confirmed that individuals with learning disabilities exhibit higher anxiety levels than typically developing peers. Since the present study does not include a control group of typically developing individuals without learning disabilities, it is not possible to assess, whether the experiences of language anxiety were to be more frequent or

severe to individuals with disabilities, than for typically developing individuals. Still, both previous research as well as the present study indicates that learning disabilities may correlate with language anxiety.

Another conflictive aspect of the present study were the inconclusive results between the concrete amount of received support and emotional experience of receiving support. The results of the present study suggest that there is some incongruence between the participants relationship of concrete support and feeling supported on an emotional level. This incongruence has not been thoroughly reported or research previously, but previous research may offer possible reasons for said incongruence. For example, it has been noticed in previous research, that language instructors may be underequipped to support learners with disabilities, while also lacking the competence to do so (Lyon et al. 2001). Additionally, it has been also observed that teachers working in higher education lack competence, knowledge, and confidence to support learners with special needs (Delaney and Hata 2020). In addition, judging by comparing the current national core curriculum of basic education (Opetushallitus 2014) to an older one (Opetushallitus 2000), since learning disabilities at least in the Finnish context are better into account nowadays than in the past, it would seem reasonable to assume, that language instructors' competence, knowledge, and confidence to support learner with special needs has been more insufficient in the past than it is today. This possible insufficiency of knowledge, competence and confidence could possibly at least partly explain the experiences the participants of the present study have of (the lack of) support.

5.3.2   Research gap and the value of the present study

The aim of the present study was to begin filling the research gap that exist when combining learning disabilities, language anxiety and supporting learners. Naturally, it is not reasonable to except only one study to completely fill said research gap, but the present study provided some insights to the importance of supporting learners with learning disabilities and language anxiety. Therefore, the present study can be seen as offering new value to the research field, with slightly different perspective, than has been chosen for previous research. This section focuses on presenting and discussing new information gained from the present study, while also presenting and discussing the more negative implications, that have also been observed in the present study.

First, the present study provides information on how individuals with learning disabilities see their own disability in relation to their language learning experiences, which has not been explicitly and thoroughly studied before, at least not in a larger scale. The mainly negatively coloured, learning, and academic success –hindering and self-esteem harming meanings the participants often assign to their learning disabilities may indicate, that the participants have not received sufficient or appropriate support for learning, or to managing their disabilities. In addition, the results explicitly

suggest the same, further implying that most of the participants have not been receiving the support and help they need or would have needed for language learning.

The present study also offers some insights to the relationship of learning disabilities and language anxiety from the viewpoint of differences between different learning disabilities. Whereas the increased risk for higher levels of anxiety has been observed before among learning disabilities in general (Nelson and Harwood 2011), among students with dyslexia (Carroll and Iles 2006), as well as among those with specific learning disabilities in general (Haft et al. 2018), the experiences of language anxiety has not been compared much between individuals with different learning disabilities. For example, the results of the present study suggest that individuals with dyslexia seem to have experiences of frequent and severe language anxiety, similarly to the results of Carroll and Iles (2006), while the results of the present study also suggest that experiences of language anxiety may not be as grave among individuals with other learning disabilities, such as ADHD or dyscalculia.

The more discouraging information the present study offers, is the alarming number of participants whose experience is that they have not received support for language learning: either at all, or not sufficiently. As mentioned in the discussion concerning the conflictive results between concrete support and the feeling of emotionally being supported, the number of participants for whom support has not been appropriate and sufficient could also be explained with the language instructors possible under equipment and the lack of competence, knowledge, and confidence to address learning disabilities in the classroom, as was noticed by Lyon et al. (2001) and Delaney and Hata (2020). These observations and speculations could pave way for further research, more thoroughly discussed in section 5.4, since the participants of the present study have not attended basic education under the current national core curriculum. Hence, it would seem reasonable to investigate the experiences of support the students of today have, to chart whether the updates to the national core curriculum of basic education (Opetushallitus 2014) concerning support have or have had an actual impact on supporting learners with (and without) learning disabilities.

In conclusion, even though the results of the present study are in many ways similar to the results gained from previous research, this thesis offers also new, relevant information on the personal experiences of individuals with learning disabilities. At the same time, the present study also offers many possibilities for further research, which is more thoroughly discussed as a separate issue in section 5.4. All in all, the present study is not enough to fill the whole research gap alone, but it provides a solid starting point for additional research to continue from.

5.4 Suggestions for future research

As already mentioned in the sections above, the present study offers many possibilities for further research. One possibility would be to investigate language anxiety and individuals' experiences of support in relation to more specific, individual learning disabilities, since the answers of participants divided into different groups based on their learning disabilities seemed to generally differ from one another. Also, the research focusing on combining learning disabilities and language anxiety has before been often based on comparing the experiences of individuals with learning disabilities to the experiences of typically developing peers, while combining support to the two other issues seems to lack greatly. Supporting learners with learning disabilities or language anxiety has been investigated separately before (e.g., Leons, Herbert and Gobbo 2009; Delaney and Hata 2020; Young 2020), but these issues have not been greatly studied together, which based on the results of the present study, would seem reasonable to do for example in a more quantitative manner.

Additionally, the role of language instructors in relation to learning disabilities, language anxiety and experiences of support could be investigated further. Since it has been noticed in previous research that many EFL teachers or programs are often underequipped to encounter and support individuals with learning disabilities (Delaney and Hata 2020; Young 2020), it seems also reasonable to further expand the research field to include support, as well as anxiety, in addition to learning disabilities to further investigate the relationship of the three. Also, since the results of the present study, as well as previous research seems to indicate that learners with learning disabilities might me more at risk of language anxiety (e.g., Carrol and Iles 2006; Haft et al. 2018; Nelson and Harwood 2011), other emotional experiences of learners with special needs could be researched as well. The role of support from language instructors could also be further investigated from the viewpoint of effects on learners' self-esteem, academic success, and the quality of learning experiences, since again the results of the present study indicate that appropriate support from teachers could affect those fields greatly. At best, this type of future research could be even used to further improve current teacher training programmes to better fit the needs of future teachers.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1 (The questionnaire)

Kysely oppimisvaikeuksista ja kieliahdistuksesta

Pakolliset kysymykset merkitty tähdellä (*)

Olen viidennen vuoden kieltenopiskelija Jyväskylän yliopistosta, ja tällä kyselylomakkeella olen keräämässä aineistoa pro gradu -tutkielmaani oppimisvaikeuksista ja kieliahdistuksesta.

Kyselyyn vastaaminen on täysin vapaaehtoista, ja kyselyyn vastataan anonyymisti. Kyselyn tuloksia tullaan käyttämään ainoastaan tähän tutkielmaan ja aineistoa säilytetään Jyväskylän yliopiston tietosuojaohjeistusten mukaisesti. Vastaamalla kyselyyn hyväksyt kyselyn tietojen käyttämisen mainitsemallani tavalla. Mikäli kyselystä herää jotain kysyttävää, minuun voi ottaa yhteyttä sähköpostilla osoitteeseen anni.vm.torvinen@student.jyu.fi. Mahdollista yhteydenottoasi tai yhteystietojasi ei yhdistetä vastauksiisi.

1. Olen lukenut ylläolevan tietosuojailmoituksen, ja suostun tietojeni ja vastausteni käsittelyyn sen mukaisesti. *

    Kyllä

    Ei

2. Ikä *

    18-25

    26-35

    36-45

    46-55

    56 +

3. Koulutustausta

    Peruskoulu/vastaava

    Lukio

    Ammattikoulu

    Ammattikorkeakoulu

    Yliopisto

    Muu, mikä?

4. Mikä diagnosoitu oppimisen vaikeus sinulla on? Useamman vaihtoehdon valitseminen on mahdollista. *

    Lukemisen ja/tai kirjoittamisen vaikeus (dysleksia)

    Kielellinen erityisvaikeus (dysfasia)

    Matemaattinen vaikeus (dyskalkulia)

    Aktiivisuuden ja/tai tarkkaavaisuuden häiriö (esim. ADHD, ADD)

    Jokin muu, mikä?

5. Missä vaiheessa oppimisvaikeutesi on tunnistettu?

    Varhaislapsuudessa (alle 7v.)

    Alakouluikäisenä (7-12v)

    Teini-iässä (13-19v)

    Aikuisiällä (20+)

6. Kerro halutessasi, miten oppimisvaikeutesi havaittiin/tunnistettiin:

7. Kuinka suuresti koet oppimisvaikeuksien vaikuttaneen kokemuksiisi

vieraiden kielten oppimisesta?

     Vain hyvin vähäisesti tai ei lainkaan

     Melko vähän

     Kohtalaisesti

     Paljon

     Todella paljon

8.   Miksi   koet/et   koe   oppimisvaikeuksien   vaikuttaneen   kokemuksiisi
vieraiden kielten oppimisesta?

9. Kuinka paljon koet oppimisvaikeuksien vaikuttaneen

oppimistuloksiisi vieraissa kielissä?

     Hyvin vähän tai en lainkaan

     Melko vähän

     Kohtalaisesti

     Paljon

     Todella paljon

10.   Asteikolla   1–10,   kuinka   suuri   merkitys   oppimisvaikeuksilla   on   ollut
sinulle kielten oppimisessa?

     1. Olematon

     2.

     3.

     4.

     5.

     6.

     7.

     8.

9.

10. Valtava

11. Asteikolla 1–10, kuinka suuri merkitys oppimisvaikeuksilla on mielestäsi ollut muiden aineiden kuin kielten oppimisessa?

1. Olematon

2.

3.

4.

5.

6.

7.

8.

9.

10. Valtava

12. Kerro omin sanoin, miten oppimisvaikeutesi on näkynyt kieltenopiskelussa kohdallasi?

13. Oletko koskaan kokenut kieliahdistusta*?

Kyllä

En

*kieliahdistuksella tarkoitetaan negatiivisia huolen ja pelon tunteita, jotka liittyvät toisen tai vieraan kielen käyttämiseen tai oppimiseen. Ahdistus voi olla tilannesidonnaista, eli liittyä tiettyihin tilanteisiin (esim. esitelmän pitäminen, koetilanne), tai yleisemmin koko kieleen tai oppiaineeseen liit-tyvää.

14. Kuinka usein olet kouluaikoinasi kokenut kieliahdistusta?

Satunnaisesti ilman selvää toistuvuutta

Harvemmin kuin kuukausittain

joitain kertoja kuukaudessa

Viikoittain

Päivittäin tai lähes päivittäin

15. Asteikolla 1–10, kuinka vakavaa kieliahdistusta olet yleisesti ottaen kokenut?

1. Hyvin vähäistä

2.

3.

4.

5.

6.

7.

8.

9.

10. Todella vaikeaa

16. Mitä seuraavista kieliahdistuksen osa-alueista olet kokenut?

Testi-/koeahdistus

Ääneen puhumisen tai esiintymisen vaikeus

Vaikeus kommunikoida vieraalla kielellä

Negatiivisen arvioinnin/arvostelun pelko

Virheiden tekemisen pelko

17. Millaisissa tilanteissa erityisesti olet kokenut kieliahdistusta?

18. Millainen vaikutus oppimisvaikeudellasi on ollut kieliahdistuksen kokemukseen?

Olematon/Hyvin pieni

Melko vähäinen

Kohtalainen

Melko suuri

Todella merkittävä

19. Omin sanoin kuvailtuna, mitkä tekijät oppimisvaikeudessasi ovat mielestäsi vaikuttaneet kieliahdistuksen syntyyn?

20. Muita tekijöitä, joiden koet vaikuttaneen kieliahdistukseesi?

21. Oletko havainnut eroja kokemassasi kieliahdistuksessa eri koulutusasteilla?

22. Koetko saaneesi tukea kielten oppimiseen?

Kyllä

En

23. Millaista tukea olisit kaivannut ja toivonut kielten oppimiseen?

24. Millaista tukea olet saanut kielten oppimiseen?

25. Keneltä koet saaneesi tukea kielten oppimiseen?

26. Asteikolla 1–10, kuinka paljon koet saaneesi tukea kielten

oppimiseen?

 1. En lainkaan/äärimmäisen vähän

 2.

 3.

 4.

 5.

 6.

 7.

 8.

 9.

 10. Todella paljon

27. Onko saamasi tuki ollut mielestäsi riittävää ja oikeanlaista?
Miksi/miksi ei?

28. Onko saamasi tuki helpottanut kieliahdistustasi? Miksi/miksi ei?

29. Millaisia positiivisia oppimiskokemuksia muistat kieltentunneilta?

30. Koetko, että koulumaailma on muuttunut tässä kyselyssä käsiteltyjen teemojen suhteen omien kouluaikojesi jälkeen? Miten/miten ei?

31. Tahdon kertoa lisää kokemuksistani haastattelun merkeissä:

Kyllä

En

32. Yhteystietosi, mikäli haluat kertoa lisää haastattelussa.

Etunimi

Sukunimi

Sähköposti

Appendix 2 (the interview questions)

Pohjustus:
- Motivaatio osallistumiseen, minkälaisella asenteella osallistumassa

Taustakysymykset:
- Ikä
- Sukupuoli
- Koulutustausta
- Oppimisen vaikeus

Pääkysymykset:
- Onko tähän alkuun jotain teemaan liittyvää, mistä itse haluat erityisesti kertoa?
- Miten oppimisvaikeutesi on näkynyt kohdallasi kieltenopiskelussa?
- Millaisia kokemuksia sinulla on kieliahdistuksesta?
- Näetkö yhteyttä kieliahdistuksen ja oppimisvaikeutesi välillä? Ovatko ne mielestäsi vaikuttaneet toisiinsa?
- Olisiko kieliahdistukseesi voinut vaikuttaa koulun puolelta? Miten?
- Miten opettajien tulisi mielestäsi suhtautua oppimisvaikeuksiin niitä kohdattaessa? Miten opettajat ovat sinun kohdallasi suhtautuneet oppimisvaikeuteesi?
- Millainen merkitys oikeanlaisella tuella on/olisi voinut olla kielten oppimiseen ja/tai kieliahdistukseen?
- Millaista tukea oppilaiden olisi mielestäsi hyvä saada oppimisvaikeuksien kanssa pärjäämiseen?
- Millaisesta tuesta olet/olisit itse erityisesti hyötynyt?
- Onko jotain positiivisia kokemuksia, mitä muistat kielten oppimiseen liittyen? Esim. Tunnekokemuksia, onnistumisen tunteita, tuen saantia tms.
- Muuta mitä olisit vielä halunnut kertoa? Tai jotain mitä haluat kysyä minulta?