



The Development of International Students' Career Competencies Through Language Learning

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Abstract: A large number of international students consider pursuing a career in Norway after completing their studies in the country. This study investigated the significance of learning Norwegian for international business school students' career competencies in relation to working in Norway. A qualitative approach was employed, using semi-structured individual interviews and thematic analysis. The sample comprised 15 first-year international master's and bachelor's students from various majors, interviewed in two rounds. Participants represented diverse regions, including Europe, Asia, and North and South America. Conducted over one year, the longitudinal study included two interview rounds: the first in fall 2021 with 11 master's and four bachelor's students, and the second in fall 2022 with one fewer participant from each group, totaling 13. The findings revealed that speaking Norwegian is essential for job recruitment and inclusion ('knowing how'), networking at career fairs ('knowing whom'), and envisioning future career opportunities in Norway ('knowing why'). Although students prioritised developing speaking skills, many struggled to improve due to limited opportunities for practical language use both inside and outside the classroom. Furthermore, an internal locus of control in language learning was found to positively influence the development of these career competencies. The study recommends that language courses place greater emphasis on speaking practice and that a tandem language exchange program be introduced to strengthen interactions between local and international students.

Keywords: Professional Communication, Professional Practice, Workplace Diversity, Language skills, Career Competencies, International Students

1. Introduction

1.1. Background

The purpose of the present study is to replicate the Finnish qualitative study by Itani et al. (2015), who argued that due to the increasing internationalisation of careers and workplaces, there is a need to better understand the career realities of different minority groups, such as international students. Research on careers has largely been dominated by an English-language perspective; therefore, other linguistic environments, such as the Norwegian context, must be examined to capture the complexities of a multilingual world.

Norway continues to attract international students, many of whom seek to enhance their career opportunities while studying (Wiers-Jenssen, 2019). The country is regarded as a preferred destination for international students because of its unspoiled nature, high level of safety, strong reputation for teaching quality, and commitment to gender equality (Wiers-Jenssen, 2019). This study contributes to filling the existing knowledge gap by examining the significance of learning Norwegian for international students' career competencies and their motivation to work in Norway. It further extends the generalisability of the findings by Itani et al. (2015) by exploring a new national context.

Career competencies are defined by Akkermans, Brenninkmeijer, Huibers, and Blonk (2013, p. 246) as "knowledge, skills, and abilities central to career development, which can be influenced and developed by the individual." Between 2000 and 2015, Norway witnessed a steady increase in the number of international students. This trend can be attributed to global student mobility, the absence of tuition fees for students from third countries, and Norway's high quality of teaching and research (Wiers-Jenssen, 2019). From 2015 to 2023, the annual number of international students remained relatively stable (HKDIR, 2024). However, following the introduction of tuition fees for students from third countries in 2023, the intake of international students declined (Jacobsen, 2023). The targeted Norwegian business school enrolled 441 international full-degree students in 2021 (BI Norwegian Business School, 2023b). The current study's sample consists of 15 students from this cohort, including both master's and bachelor's students.

An internal survey conducted six months after graduation assessed the employment rate of international bachelor's and master's graduates from the targeted business school. The results indicated that 64% of international master's graduates were employed in Norway, with a response rate of 61% over four years (2021–2024). In the same survey, 49% of international bachelor's graduates reported employment in Norway, with a response rate of 36% over the same period (BI Norwegian Business School, 2023a). Although the representativeness of the sample cannot be fully confirmed, these statistics suggest that a relatively large proportion of

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international graduates secure employment in Norway. These findings are consistent with previous studies indicating that many international full-degree students aspire to pursue their careers in Norway after graduation (Wiers-Jenssen, 2019).

These observations led to the formulation of the following research question: How do international business school students experience the role of learning the local language in developing their career competencies and their motivation to remain in Norway?

1.2. Career Competencies

Early career research in the 1970s focused primarily on the linear career concept, which emphasized upward movement within a single organizational hierarchy. Since then, this traditional perspective has been replaced by the concept of the *boundaryless career*, which suggests that individuals are no longer confined to one organization throughout their professional lives (Arthur, 1994; Brousseau et al., 1996; Eby et al., 2003). Given the increasingly dynamic and unstable nature of the labour market, characterised by job interruptions, dismissals, and frequent position changes, individuals now move more often across organizational boundaries (Eby et al., 2003).

To navigate this evolving labour market, individuals, particularly young graduates, require *career competencies* during their transition from education to employment (Grosemans & De Cuyper, 2021; Akkermans et al., 2013). Young people are especially vulnerable to temporary employment and precarious working conditions (Akkermans et al., 2013). Career competencies have been defined as “knowledge, skills, and abilities central to career development, which can be influenced and developed by the individual” (Akkermans et al., 2013, p. 246). The development of such competencies has received growing attention in employability research (Akkermans et al., 2013).

DeFillippi and Arthur’s (1994) *career competencies framework* has been widely applied in several studies (Akkermans et al., 2013; Eby et al., 2003; Itani et al., 2015; Jones & Lichtenstein, 2000). This framework distinguishes between three main components of career competencies. The first, “*knowing how*,” refers to job-related knowledge and skills (DeFillippi & Arthur, 1994, 1996). Akkermans et al. (2013) describe this as *behavioural competencies*, which relate to an individual’s capacity to explore, plan, and construct their career (Akkermans et al., 2013; Kuijpers et al., 2011). Whereas DeFillippi and Arthur (1994, 1996) emphasised job skills within *knowing how*, Akkermans et al. (2013) focused more on career planning.

The second component, “*knowing why*,” concerns *career identity* (DeFillippi & Arthur, 1994, 1996). Career identity is defined as the way individuals link their motivations, interests, and competencies with a meaningful career (Meijers, 1998). Akkermans et al. (2013) refer to this dimension as *reflective competencies*, which contribute to self-awareness regarding career motivation, qualities, and capacities (Eby et al., 2003; Kuijpers & Scheerens, 2006).

The third component, “*knowing whom*,” involves internal and external organizational networks that may lead to new career opportunities (DeFillippi & Arthur, 1994, 1996). Akkermans et al. (2013) also highlight the significance of *communicative career competencies*, particularly in self-presentation (Akkermans et al., 2013; Kuijpers et al., 2011).

Although Sullivan and Arthur (2006) emphasized the importance of career competencies for individuals’ mobility across organizational, geographical, and cultural boundaries, relatively little research has examined the role of language in career mobility (Itani et al., 2015). The findings of Itani et al. (2015) demonstrate that strong language skills contribute to the development of career competencies that facilitate mobility. They argue that language skills intersect with all three components of DeFillippi and Arthur’s (1996) career competency model.

Firstly, language skills fall under the “*knowing how*” component. Language learning for business has become increasingly essential worldwide, in fields such as trade, marketing, management, tourism, and hospitality, to the extent that many companies now provide foreign language training for employees (Bloch, 1995). For example, Yao (2013) identified English language proficiency as a crucial career competency for Chinese professionals interacting with international business partners.

In Itani et al.’s (2015) Finnish study, bilingualism (Finnish–Swedish) was perceived as advantageous for recruitment and progression to top management positions. Respondents noted that Swedish-speaking employees often had broader personal networks than their Finnish-speaking counterparts, which facilitated career advancement. The study was conducted in western Finland, where roughly half of the population is Swedish speakers. Because Finland was under Swedish rule from 1323 to 1809, the Swedish language historically distinguished colonial elites from local populations. Even today, in Ostrobothnia, the region where the study was conducted, many organizational leaders belong to the Swedish-speaking minority, making bilingualism a valuable career asset.

Furthermore, Finnish employees in the same study discussed the benefits of speaking additional languages, such as English and German. English, in particular, was considered vital for networking, enhancing the “*knowing whom*” component, and for performing work tasks effectively (Itani et al., 2015). Secondly, language skills facilitate the creation of personal and professional networks, reinforcing the “*knowing whom*” competency (Itani et al., 2015). Language functions as a key tool for social interaction within organizations, enabling access to information and relationships that enhance professional growth (Itani et al., 2015; Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 1998). Thirdly, language skills shape an individual’s personal and professional identity as well as their job motivation, corresponding to the “*knowing why*” component of career competencies (Itani et al., 2015). The study further revealed that bilingualism supports advancement into managerial roles and workplace success across Nordic countries. Conversely, employees who could not speak Swedish while working in Finland perceived this as a significant barrier to career progression. Thus, bilingualism can be viewed as an integral part of one’s professional identity.

2. Methodology

In this study, we applied a qualitative methodology. Research on graduate careers has often been limited by a lack of published qualitative data, particularly regarding job tasks, skill requirements, and the knowledge acquired during academic studies, despite the abundance of quantitative data on employment and income (Teichler, 2000). Johnston (2003) further argues that quantitative methods are insufficient for capturing complex processes and human perceptions, thus supporting the use of qualitative approaches to gain deeper insights into such phenomena. Consequently, this study employed a qualitative design.

The research method consisted of semi-structured individual interviews and a thematic analysis. Through a project manager in the business school’s international office, a sample of 15 first-year international master’s and bachelor’s students

with different majors was obtained. These participants were interviewed in two rounds. They represented diverse geographical backgrounds, originating from Europe, Asia, and North and South America. All participants were enrolled in a Norwegian language course offered to international full-degree and exchange students at the targeted business school. The participants began the language course in the fall semester of 2021, coinciding with the start of their degree programmes.

The course offered 140 available places, with enrolment on a first-come, first-served basis, although not all spots were filled. It consisted of three-hour sessions held twice a week in person and spanned 12 weeks per semester. Students could continue attending the course throughout their period of study at the business school. The expected learning outcome of the beginner level (A1) was to enable students to construct simple expressions and sentences on familiar topics while learning basic grammar, reading, and spelling rules. Upon completion of the A1 level, students could progress to three more advanced courses (A2, B1, and B2). The course was voluntary and carried no academic credits (ECTS). It remains available to all international students (BI Norwegian Business School, 2024). The business school subsidised part of the course fee, while students covered the remaining cost themselves.

The study adopted a longitudinal design, with two rounds of interviews conducted over the span of one year. During the first interview round (fall 2021), 11 participants were master's students and four were bachelor's students. In the second round (fall 2022), one master's and one bachelor's student withdrew, resulting in a total of 13 participants (see Table 1).

Table 1: Demographics of interviewees

Interviewees					
Name	Age	Gender	Programme	Interviews	
UJ	-	Male	BBA	Interviews 1 and 2	
AM	25	Female	BBA	Interviews 1 and 2	
EJ	21	Female	BBA	Interviews 1 and 2	
LA	-	Male	BBA	Interview 1	
DAN	25	Female	MSc	Interviews 1 and 2	
EC	28	Female	MSc	Interviews 1 and 2	
DA	26	Male	MSc	Interviews 1 and 2	
NA	-	Female	MSc	Interviews 1 and 2	
RE	22	Male	MSc	Interviews 1 and 2	
TI	29	Female	MSc	Interviews 1 and 2	
AJ	28	Male	MSc	Interviews 1 and 2	
AN	21	Female	MSc	Interview 1	
ER	-	Male	MSc	Interviews 1 and 2	
TA	22	Female	MSc	Interviews 1 and 2	
UY	24	Female	MSc	Interviews 1 and 2	

Source: By the author

The first set of interview questions focused on the participants' motivation for enrolling in the Norwegian language course, the development of their professional and social networks, experiences in searching for part-time jobs, engagement with Norwegian culture and traditions, and future career goals. The theoretical framework guiding the interview design was informed by DeFillippi and Arthur's (1996) model of career competencies, 'knowing how', 'knowing whom', and 'knowing why', and the concept of career adaptability, operationalised through the four dimensions of concern, confidence, curiosity, and control (Savickas & Porfeli, 2012). The second interview guide, inspired by the same literature (DeFillippi & Arthur, 1996; Savickas & Porfeli, 2012), focused on students' experiences with the language course, progress in Norwegian, development of social and professional networks, feelings of inclusion and confidence after completing the course, use of Norwegian at work or during internships, and career aspirations after course completion.

3. Data analysis

The data analysis consisted of codes, subthemes, and themes, and was inspired by concepts drawn from the above-mentioned theories. First, codes were created and then categorised into subthemes and themes based on Braun and Clarke's (2008) procedure of thematic analysis. The following four themes (see Table 2) emerged from the thematic analysis of the first and second interviews: the importance of Norwegian language learning for work, knowing how'; the importance of Norwegian language learning for network-building, 'knowing whom'; the importance of Norwegian language learning for career identity, 'knowing why'; and 'The process of language learning'. In the current study, language learning has been defined as the acquisition of oral and written Norwegian language skills (Hulme and Snowling, 2014). During the coding process, new theoretical insights emerged. Therefore, an abductive approach to the analysis of the data was used. Abduction refers to the process of generating new theoretical insights from qualitative data, considering various existing theories that are applied during the research process (Johannessen, 2022). To protect the interviewees' anonymity, we used the first two or three letters of their names. We have retained the interviewees' original grammar and syntax in the quotes to support the credibility of the findings. The interviews were conducted in English.

Table 2: Example of the thematic analysis

Theme	Examples of codes
The importance of Norwegian language learning for work, 'knowing how'	'Would not have got a job without knowing Norwegian'; 'Companies want people who speak Norwegian'; 'Easier to find a job if you know Norwegian'; 'It is a plus if you can speak Norwegian with colleagues'; 'Gain colleagues' respect by speaking Norwegian'
	'For marketing jobs no Norwegian required'; 'For administrative jobs no Norwegian required';

Source: By the author

4. Results

The following section presents the four themes that emerged from the two interview rounds: the importance of Norwegian language learning for work, ‘knowing how’; the importance of Norwegian language learning for network-building, ‘knowing whom’; the importance of Norwegian language learning for career identity, ‘knowing why’; and the process of language learning. Below is the overview of these themes.

Theme 1: The importance of Norwegian language learning for work, ‘knowing how’

Theme 2: The importance of Norwegian language learning for network-building, ‘knowing whom’

Theme 3: The importance of Norwegian language learning for career identity, ‘knowing why’

Theme 4: The process of language learning

Theme 1: The Importance of Norwegian Language Learning for Work, ‘Knowing How’

In the first round of interviews, all respondents highlighted the importance of learning Norwegian to secure a permanent or professional part-time job. This was the primary reason many students chose to enroll in the Norwegian language course. Their views were largely based on assumptions and information they had heard, as most had not yet gained direct work experience. In contrast, during the second round of interviews, several participants who had obtained work experience noted that speaking Norwegian provided a clear advantage in recruitment processes and in socialising and navigating workplace environments.

[W]ithout taking Norwegian courses, it would ... *bring in a lot of problems in terms of, in terms of having a really good clicks. ... And yeah, definitely, it helps a lot to, to understand the company, the people who work, and the system.* (DA)

Interestingly, two respondents stated that they had decided not to pursue their careers in Norway due to difficulties finding professional part-time jobs without Norwegian proficiency. DAN, for instance, struggled with the language and eventually dropped out of the course because of scheduling conflicts with her university lectures. Her limited Norwegian skills led to repeated rejections from part-time jobs requiring the language, forcing her to take a nightclub job where English was the working language. Consequently, she decided not to build her career in Norway:

I would say it's a very big factor of me not wanting to stay there because I have faced essentially, I have faced rejection before I have even applied to jobs I wanted, because again, the applications usually state that they require fluency in Norwegian and English. (DAN)

ER also observed that although English is often preferred in the international finance sector, Norwegian remains essential for most roles in Norway. He experienced several job rejections from banks due to his lack of Norwegian proficiency:

So, I realised that it's really important to either speak Norwegian fluently or be Norwegian. So I don't see why I would stay. (ER)

However, during the second interview, some participants reported that certain job positions, such as those in back-office operations, administration, and marketing, did not require knowledge of Norwegian. EC explained that her administrative role did not demand Norwegian language skills:

[B]ut it's like administrative tasks. So, I don't like that I'm not selling anything, or I'm not, like, in contact with the customer. So, it's easier. (EC)

Theme 2: The Importance of Norwegian Language Learning for Network-Building, ‘Knowing Whom’

In the first interview round, most participants reported that they had not yet developed a professional network, despite being involved in career-related activities. Two students noted that at recruitment events such as the university’s Career Fair, almost all sessions and interactions were conducted in Norwegian. Similarly, student associations primarily used Norwegian, which limited international students’ participation. EJ described this situation:

Almost all of the activities [during the target university's Career Fair] were in Norwegian, with maybe one activity the entire week being in English. So. And that happens a lot, even with the social activities, I believe, like all of the fraternities and sororities, they're all completely in Norwegian. (EJ)

In the second interview round, when students were asked again about their professional networks, most still reported limited progress. However, three participants who were confident in speaking Norwegian indicated that their language proficiency had helped them network effectively in professional and social contexts, including career fairs. UJ described how revealing his ability to speak Norwegian transformed recruiters’ attitudes:

Because I remember most of the time, they would just say, ‘Ah, but you need to speak Norwegian, I'm sorry.’ And they were expecting me to leave, but suddenly I just switched to Norwegian and said, ‘Yes, but I can learn in one year,’ and suddenly their attitude changed completely. They started talking to me, and you could see that they appreciated the fact that I'm trying to study their language. (UJ)

Theme 3: The Importance of Norwegian Language Learning for Career Identity, ‘Knowing Why’

During the first interview, several respondents mentioned that they were motivated to study in Norway because they viewed it as a stepping stone to remaining in the country after completing their studies. Participants expressed interest in working in Norway for various reasons, including economic stability, high quality of life, safety, environmental focus, climate and sustainability initiatives, favourable working conditions, competitive salaries, flat organisational structures, pension and health benefits, parental leave policies, gender equality, and opportunities within the NGO sector. Four students indicated that their motivation to live and work in Norway stemmed from a desire to escape difficult working conditions and personal challenges in their home countries. One participant explained:

Well, I used to work in Japan, and it was very stressful in terms of the work–life balance. I used to have a friend here in Norway who complained that he worked 30 minutes overtime and how stressful that was, whereas I usually worked three

to four hours overtime back at home. So, I really didn't want to spend my life just working. I also wanted to have a life, so I chose a country that would ensure a proper work-life balance. (UY)

For most students, the motivation to continue working in Norway remained strong after one year of study. They found the language course beneficial; however, some expressed that they were still not confident enough to work in a Norwegian company where Norwegian was the primary language of communication. For instance, NA explained that her part-time job as a receptionist boosted her confidence in using Norwegian professionally. In this position, she was responsible for a team of Norwegian employees, which helped her develop leadership, organisational, and conflict management skills, requiring both linguistic proficiency and cultural understanding. She stated:

So, I organised them and told them what to do, and kind of, yeah, I was kind of responsible for them. So that was like five people. And they were all Norwegian. ... I think it kind of showed me that I'm actually, like, able to work in Norwegian. (NA)

However, as previously noted, only two students (DAN and ER) indicated in the second interview that they were no longer motivated to remain in Norway after completing their studies.

Theme 4: The Process of Language Learning

Five respondents found learning Norwegian relatively easy and described how they actively sought opportunities to practise the language outside the classroom. They improved their language proficiency by speaking Norwegian with colleagues and locals, listening to Norwegian podcasts, and watching Norwegian television series. ER described his proactive learning approach:

And like in daily life, I speak a lot of Norwegian, I listen to Norwegian podcasts, or watch Norwegian series. (ER)

UJ also emphasised that the language course was not the primary reason for his improvement in Norwegian; rather, daily conversations with locals, especially at work, contributed most to his progress. Some participants noted that their enhanced language skills helped them form friendships with Norwegians. This proactive and positive attitude toward language learning appeared to strengthen their motivation to continue working in Norway.

Nevertheless, several respondents reported limited Norwegian proficiency and found conversational practice challenging. They explained that establishing friendships with Norwegians was difficult due to both linguistic and cultural barriers. According to them, these challenges stemmed not only from language limitations but also from differences in culture, interests, and personality. Consequently, the difficulty of forming local friendships reduced their opportunities to practise Norwegian.

Interestingly, despite their limited language abilities, most of these respondents remained confident about continuing to work in Norway. Two students even reported having several Norwegian friends. DAN mentioned that volunteering at the Career Fair helped her interact with Norwegian students, although they often preferred speaking English due to her limited Norwegian skills. This suggests that speaking Norwegian is not necessarily a prerequisite for building friendships in Norway.

Four respondents recommended that the language course place greater emphasis on speaking practice rather than on grammar, reading, or vocabulary. ER observed:

I think that the Norwegian course helps a lot to know how to write and to read, but not much about how to listen and speak. Listening and speaking, I got better, mostly because most of my colleagues are Norwegians.

DAN further suggested that the business school introduce a buddy programme in which Norwegian students volunteer to practise the language with international students.

5. Discussion

Norwegian is considered essential for most jobs, representing the *'knowing how'* component of career competencies. Several students felt that their job applications were rejected due to inadequate Norwegian skills, leading some to consider abandoning their plans to remain in Norway. Similarly, Wiers-Jenssen (2019) emphasized that learning Norwegian is vital for international students' integration into the Norwegian job market. Consistent with the findings of the present study, Pham (2022) argued that language requirements vary across different job types, and international students must therefore develop adaptive strategies to navigate these differences.

As in Itani et al. (2015), most students in this study viewed language proficiency as crucial for developing professional relationships, *'knowing whom'*, although their actual networking remained limited in both interview rounds. Insufficient Norwegian skills hindered their ability to establish connections at career fairs and to participate fully in student associations. Li and Collins (2014) identified communication barriers as major obstacles to international students' professional socialisation, defined as the process of acquiring the values, skills, and knowledge relevant to a profession (Page, 2004). Similarly, Sonnenschein, Barker, and Hibbins (2018) found that only a few Chinese international students learned about employability and future career opportunities through interactions with academics and peers. Language and communication barriers often made students hesitant to discuss their career aspirations, prompting those authors to recommend increased language learning and more structured networking with academics, managers, and peers to enhance professional socialisation.

Like Itani et al. (2015), the present study also demonstrates that language shapes students' understanding of their career motivations, *'knowing why'*. Many participants viewed studying in Norway as a pathway to remaining in the country after graduation, motivated primarily by *pull factors* such as favourable job markets, working conditions, and cultural values (Urbański, 2022). This finding aligns with Wiers-Jenssen (2019), who also identified such pull factors as central to international students' post-graduation intentions. Only four respondents cited *push factors*, conditions in their home countries that compelled them to leave (Urbański, 2022), as motivating their move to Norway. Students who attained some Norwegian proficiency felt more confident about working in Norway and expressed satisfaction with their language courses, although some continued to face communication challenges. Their job motivation and professional identity generally strengthened over time, whereas a few others, discouraged by persistent language barriers, highlighted the need for greater emphasis on speaking practice within the Norwegian course.

Speaking proficiency is widely regarded as the most important indicator of foreign language competency, with learners often assessing their progress based on fluency (Kürüm, 2016). In this study, participants repeatedly identified speaking as their weakest skill, more so than reading, writing, or grammar. This perceived deficiency may have reduced their motivation to pursue careers in Norway. Consistent with Itani et al. (2015), one participant attributed her summer job success and leadership aspirations to her oral language proficiency, underscoring that strong communication skills are critical for workplace influence and advancement (Brink & Costigan, 2015, 2023; Costigan & Brink, 2020).

Students also exhibited varying degrees of ownership over their language learning, shaped by their *locus of control* (Rotter, 1966, 1975; Galvin et al., 2018). Those with an internal locus of control actively engaged in self-directed learning, practising Norwegian through media consumption and everyday conversations, whereas others perceived the language course as insufficient and expressed disappointment when their limited proficiency hindered job prospects. The literature indicates that an internal locus of control positively influences career adaptability, decision-making, and self-efficacy (Hidayat et al., 2019; Kim & Lee, 2018; Jia et al., 2021; Ratal et al., 2022). This helps explain why students with a stronger internal locus of control were more motivated to live and work in Norway, guided largely by pull factors (Urbański, 2022). Conversely, Lease (2004) observed that ethnic minorities often display an external locus of career control, leading to greater anxiety in career decision-making. She therefore advocated for career counselling interventions designed to strengthen individuals' sense of agency and control over their career trajectories.

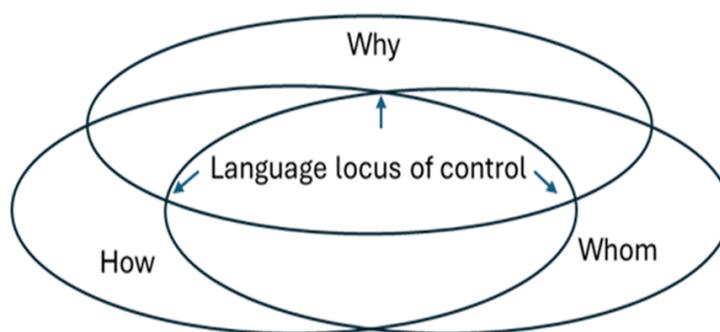


Figure 1: Language Career Competency-Model (LCC)

The model illustrated above (see Figure 1) depicts the influence of language learning on the three core career competencies, '*knowing how*,' '*knowing whom*,' and '*knowing why*'. Mastering Norwegian is essential for securing most positions in Norway and for effective professional networking, aligning with '*knowing how*' and '*knowing whom*.' As students' language proficiency improved, so did their confidence in pursuing a career in Norway after graduation. Conversely, those with lower confidence in their Norwegian speaking abilities were more hesitant to seek permanent employment, reflecting challenges related to '*knowing why*'.

The model further highlights how an internal locus of control in language learning, termed *language locus of control*, positively affects the development of career competencies. In contrast, an external locus of control hinders such growth. Thus, the concept of *career locus of control* can be extended to *language career competencies*, illustrating how control over one's language learning process directly shapes the acquisition of career-related skills and motivations.

6. Recommendations

Business schools should collaborate closely with companies during career events to ensure that international students feel included. For instance, companies should be encouraged to communicate in English with these students when necessary. Student associations should also offer activities where English is accepted to help newly arrived international students participate actively and expand their professional networks. Increased interaction among students, managers, and graduates can further enhance the socialisation of international students (Sonnenschein et al., 2018). Emphasising speaking practice in language classes, rather than focusing solely on reading, writing, and grammar, will help students build both competence and confidence in Norwegian, thereby motivating them to apply for jobs. A tandem language learning programme could further strengthen this by pairing international students with local peers for informal language exchange sessions (IMBR, 2025).

It is also crucial for international students to recognise the importance of developing an internal locus of control in both language learning and career development. They should be encouraged to practise Norwegian actively, both inside and outside the classroom, with proactive engagement integrated into the structure of the language course. Additionally, career counselling should aim to strengthen students' skills in résumé writing, job applications, and interviews. This support will foster a better understanding of job acquisition processes and enhance students' internal locus of control in managing their career trajectories (Lease, 2004).

7. Conclusions

The present study investigated the importance of learning Norwegian for international students' career competencies and motivation to work in Norway. Most participants sought to enhance their career prospects within the country, emphasising the significance of speaking skills for recruitment, social inclusion, networking, and career identity, corresponding to the three dimensions of '*knowing how*,' '*knowing whom*,' and '*knowing why*.'

Although many students gained greater confidence in speaking Norwegian after one year of study, a considerable number still felt insufficiently prepared for professional environments, which discouraged some from pursuing long-term careers in Norway. The Norwegian language course plays a crucial role in supporting students' learning, particularly given the limited opportunities they have to practise with locals. However, further initiatives, such as a tandem language exchange programme, are needed to strengthen speaking practice.

The findings also revealed that students' internal locus of control in language learning positively influenced their career competencies, contributing to the development of what this study terms *Language Career Competencies*. In addition to replicating the findings of Itani et al. (2015) in a different non-English-speaking context, this study integrates *career competencies theory* (DeFillippi & Arthur, 1994, 1996) with *locus of control theory* (Rotter, 1966, 1975), resulting in the proposed *Language Career Competency Model (LCC)*.

8. Limitations

One limitation of this study relates to the use of English during the interviews. As English is not the native language of either the researchers or most participants, linguistic differences may have caused minor misunderstandings that accumulated over the course of the interviews.

Furthermore, the study is based on data collected from a single business school in Norway, which may limit the generalisability of its findings to other institutions or linguistic contexts. Nonetheless, research conducted in Denmark, Finland, and Australia similarly underscores the importance of local language proficiency for international students seeking employment. Consequently, many educational institutions and municipalities have introduced language courses to promote integration and improve employability (Abdulai et al., 2021; Coffey et al., 2021; Tsishuk, 2024; Leinonen, 2024). Thus, the findings of this study may also hold relevance for both Scandinavian and English-speaking contexts.

Future research should examine how learning the local language in various host countries contributes to the development of international students' career competencies. Moreover, as the present study primarily involved a small group of master's students and a smaller subset of bachelor's students, it was difficult to determine potential differences between these two groups. Future studies should therefore include larger and more diverse samples of both master's and bachelor's international students to explore such variations in greater depth.

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