

Advancing epistemic justice: immigrants setting research themes on language proficiency requirements

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Introduction

European countries are tightening language proficiency requirements for immigrants, yet in policy making and research immigrants' perspectives remain absent.

This study aims to advance epistemic justice and inclusion in applied language studies by conducting co-creative participatory research with immigrants. The present analysis investigates research themes set by immigrants.

The research builds on

- co-creative citizen science¹
- participatory and community-centered approaches in applied language studies^{2,3}
- epistemic justice^{4,5}

Methods

- existing survey data, language test takers
- 343 responses, thematic analysis
- question about important research themes related to language proficiency

Literature cited

- ¹Laiho, P. (2025). Citizen Science in applied linguistics. Elsevier Reference Collection in Social Sciences.
²Bucholtz, M. (2021). Community-centered collaboration in applied linguistics, *Applied Linguistics*, 42 (6), 1153–1161.
³Heltai, J., et al. (2025). Authorial voices and scholarliness in participatory sociolinguistic research: An invitation to rethink the concept of academic language. *Research Methods in Applied Linguistics*, 4 (3).
⁴Fricker, M. (2007). *Epistemic injustice: Power and the ethics of knowing*. Oxford University Press.
⁵Poshohi, L. (2020). Epistemic decolonization as overcoming the hermeneutical injustice of Eurocentrism. *Philosophical Papers*, 49(2), 279–304.

Results: research themes by immigrants

Structural aspects of language policy

“How language requirements affect integration, equality, inclusion and participation in society?”

“Many people are not able to work or go ahead in their life because of these requirements.”

Discrimination, racism, exclusion

“Immigrants are expected to become Finnish”

“Kielen osaaminen (tai osaamattomuus) ja rasismi”
Language proficiency (or the lack of it) and racism.

Emotions and well-being

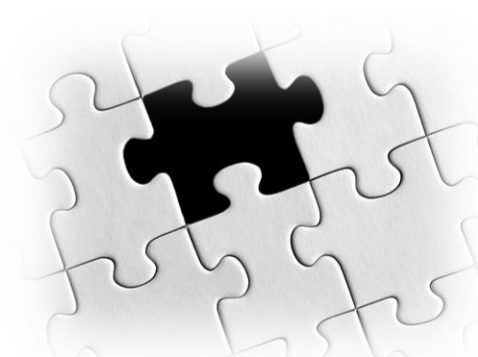
“These situations have a massive effect on people’s stress level and prevents people from working and living in a healthy way.”

Access and quality in language education

“How does language assessment reflect real-life communication skills?”

“Language integration program for all living in Finland. No exceptions.”

“Believe in the outside knowledge.”



Society’s responsibility

“On tärkeää lisätä suomalaisten tietoisuutta siitä, kuinka kommunikoida ihmisten kanssa, jotka eivät puhu hyvin suomea.” It’s important to raise Finns’ awareness of how to communicate with people who don’t speak Finnish well.

“Finland must look at itself first and adapt so immigrants even want to come here.”

Participation and co-creation

“Co-design the language courses of integration with foreigners.”

“Do research with immigrants, who faces language problems”

“I think is important, to have people’s opinion”

Conclusions

The responses highlight diverse, problem-oriented research priorities related to language proficiency requirements. They also reveal concerns that require further attention in research and language policy.

What is missing?

- embodied experiences
- tacit and situated knowledge
- underrepresented groups

Epistemic justice and democratic knowledge co-creation in research require the inclusion of immigrants as knowledge producers. When immigrants participate in setting research themes, existing power asymmetries can be challenged.

What is next?

- co-creative participatory research with immigrants as co-researchers, shaping all research phases
- objective: to foster collaborative spaces for equitable knowledge production and to enhance immigrants’ participation in a democratic society and academia

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Further information

IMPACT project:
<https://www.jyu.fi/en/projects/impact>

