Immigrant families' home use of electronic and online Icelandic L2 materials for children

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Abstract. This article presents two studies performed on 14 immigrant families with children aged one to 16; 12 families in Iceland and two Icelandic families living abroad. Lack of exposure and availability of online materials for learning Icelandic as an L2 may affect what skills children can practise at home. This study represents 32 children aged one to 16, all of whom practise Icelandic (L2) at home. Data regarding use and availability of online and offline learning materials were collected by means of a survey containing both open-ended and closed questions. A comprehensive, central directory of available materials was created in parallel as a desktop research. These studies reveal that Icelandic is spoken in most homes but children require further development of specific language skills, predominantly reading. Families consider reading, writing, and vocabulary to be the most important skills to practise, while grammar, speaking, and listening take lower priority. Children's books are the most frequently used learning material, while textbooks, audiobooks, and other language programmes or apps are used less frequently. TV, films, and online channels (e.g. YouTube) are used to provide language exposure.

Keywords: electronic materials, children's education, Icelandic L2, online learning.

1.   Introduction

Computer-assisted language learning is interdisciplinary in its nature and reflects innovative approaches in designing materials, curriculum specifications, and the use of technology in language education (Levy, 1997, pp. 1-2). Different kinds of language learning materials are available on the Internet; however, not all are

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freely accessible or suitable for children. This article aims to explore the needs that parents have for children learning different skills in Icelandic L2 and the kinds of materials available on the Internet.

Children of immigrant families in Iceland and Icelandic families abroad often lack exposure to the Icelandic language for various reasons. For instance, children in immigrant families who move to Iceland may be of various ages and need to practise Icelandic L2 both at school and at home at different levels and in different contexts. Similarly, while some Icelandic families relocate abroad permanently, others intend to return to Iceland, and their children need to continue practising Icelandic L2 at different levels. In both cases, lack of language exposure remains an issue. The amount of input can therefore vary, which affects the length of time needed for learning and acquiring Icelandic L2 (Thordardottir & Juliusdottir, 2013, p. 412). Children's requirements and needs may vary depending on age, interests, parental support, family arrangements, and not least of all the availability and accessibility of language materials and tools. A wide variety of learning materials in Icelandic L2 for children is already available online, though parents and guardians are often unaware of how to access them. This article presents two parallel studies: a qualitative investigation of families' experiences using such material and their learning goals for their children, and the creation of a comprehensive central database of currently available online/electronic Icelandic L2 material for children. By comparing the results of both studies, we hope to identify areas in which to further develop the selection of these materials and to improve their accessibility. Respondents included 14 immigrant families in Iceland and abroad: six monolingual, seven bilingual, and one trilingual.

2.   Method

The study is twofold and consists of an online survey with open-ended and closed questions regarding use and availability of online materials, and the creation of a comprehensive central directory of available materials. The survey was distributed to the parents and guardians of every child who has attended *Tungumálatöfrar*, a summer course for Icelandic L2, since 2017, using purposeful sampling method (Palinkas et al., 2016). The survey was designed to collect specific qualitative data from this sample (Chapelle, 2001). Information collected includes demographic data from 14 families with 32 children aged one to 16 (family makeup, children's ages, language(s) spoken at home, parents' native languages, country of residence, and intention to return to Iceland if applicable); information regarding Icelandic usage and study practices at home (e.g. frequency of purposeful study, type and

frequency of materials used, and language skill areas emphasised); and further information pertaining to families' experience of online L2 material (e.g. ease of locating and using material, children's interest in material, materials that parents would like to see available in the future).

The parallel desktop research involved locating and analysing all relevant online materials for children learning Icelandic L2. Keywords 'Icelandic as a second language', 'children at primary school level', and 'learning materials for children at primary school level' were used respectively in Google Search until no new resources were presented. Each resource was inspected using content analysis (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2011). A central database was created with a general overview of each resource provider, providing a brief description of materials available. Moreover, 11 more exhaustive lists containing a total of 336 resources were created and analysed in terms of material type (e.g. book, app, PDF, audiobook, game, website, etc.) and target audience (e.g. parents, educators, and learners).

## 3.   Results and discussion

Results revealed that families consider reading, writing, and vocabulary to be the most important skills to practise, while grammar, speaking, and listening take lower priority. Children's books are the most frequently used teaching materials, while textbooks, audiobooks, other language programmes, and apps are used less frequently. TV, films, and other online materials (e.g. YouTube) are used for language exposure (Figure 1).

In contrast with Figure 1, however, parents believe that children express the most interest in books, interactive online materials (e.g. websites with games and exercises), online courses (e.g. Icelandic Online), and YouTube for language exposure and practice. Nearly half of the children represented (43%) practise Icelandic only once a week, another near half (43%) practise five to seven times a week, and only 14% practise at home once to twice a week. Some parents/ guardians report difficulty in locating suitable materials online, while others express interest in a greater variety of downloadable and printable materials to reduce their children's screen time.

The accompanying directory of available materials, platforms, websites, programmes, and other resources for Icelandic L2 supplements this survey by helping to make existing resources readily available (supplementary materials). The directory is presented in an overview table and includes essential information

about 19 collections of resources intended to streamline users' search for specific materials.

Figure 1.　How often do children use different types of materials to learn Icelandic L2 at home?
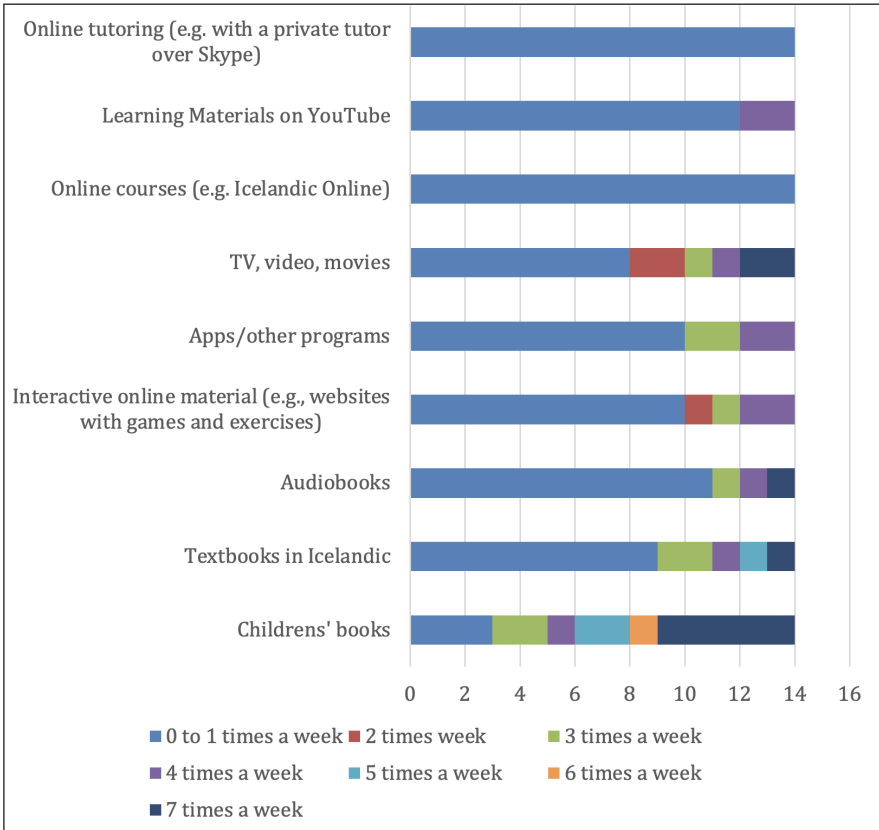
4.　Conclusions

Families reported that reading, writing, and vocabulary are the most important skills for their children to practise, while giving grammar, speaking, and listening less priority. The most widely used learning materials are children's books, TV, videos and movies, textbooks, interactive online materials, apps and other programmes, learning materials on YouTube, other online courses, and audio books. Regarding actual use of materials, however, children prefer books, interactive online materials, online courses, and YouTube for language exposure and practice. Practice time is

divided according to frequency: 43% of participants practise once a week, 43% five to seven times a week, and 14% up to twice a week. Due to the quantity of resources collected, the supplementary material is not exhaustive and aims only to show the layout of the overview of a total of 19 resource providers, nine of which offer teaching materials free of cost. The other ten resource providers offer information for parents and educators, or are subscription-based or locked to the general public. One informational resource (*Fræðsluskot*) provided two material lists; these lists are made into a total of 11 exhaustive directories that are not part of the overview. The number and variety of individual learning materials available per resource provider varies greatly, from four (*Íslenskuhorn Hófíar*) to eighty (*Kötluvefurinn*). Some materials and resources are offered by more than one provider. Some providers specialise in one type of material (e.g. *Mímisbrunnur* and *Snjallskóli* offer apps and interactive programmes), while others offer greater variety. Because of the comprehensive nature of the data collection, all resource providers are included in the overview and directories. Some offer mass produced/professionally developed materials, while others are homemade by parents/educators; the resources' and materials' quality therefore varies greatly.

5.   Acknowledgements

6.   Supplementary materials

Resource directories of teaching materials for children learning L2 Icelandic readily available online: https://research-publishing.box.com/s/pv2pdwwld7vftsi6recujw4pcofhkp3h

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