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The academic language café

Supporting learning and integration for immigrant-origin students in university libraries

Abstract

This study investigates how academic libraries, librarians, and faculty support the educational experiences and social integration of immigrant-origin students (N2-students) through the Academic Language Café (ASK) program at the University of South-Eastern Norway. Using a conceptual lens rooted in information grounds theory, the research employed mixed methods, including semi-structured interviews with ASK coordinators, observations, and surveys targeting N2-students participating in the service. The Academic Language Café has two primary goals: to help N2-students develop Norwegian language skills and professional jargon, and to enhance the teaching competencies of faculty and librarians for this student group. Findings suggest that students perceive ASK as a supportive environment for both learning and socializing, with information exchange focused on academic writing, exam preparation, and information literacy. N2-students benefit from interactions with coordinators and peers, gaining insights into university resources and strategies to overcome challenges related to internships and studies. However, a gap exists between students' expectations and their actual experiences, particularly in conversational practice, which some feel is underemphasised. The service has increasingly prioritised assignment support, sometimes at the expense of broader academic discussions. Additionally, through interactions with N2-students, librarians and teaching staff gain valuable insights into diverse cultural, ethnic, and religious backgrounds, enriching their cultural awareness and improving their understanding of the unique challenges faced by immigrant-origin students. Overall, the program effectively supports students' social, academic, and professional integration while also enhancing the teaching competencies of coordinators.

Keywords: language cafés, university libraries, immigrant-origin students, nursing, integration, social capital, information grounds

Introduction
Studies show that immigrant-origin university students (referred to as N2-students), who migrated to Norway or whose parents did, are more likely to have reduced language proficiency compared to their peers raised in Norway by Norwegian-speaking parents. This has been particularly evident in bachelor programs such as nursing, radiography, and optometry, where the need has been highlighted for more targeted support for these students as they struggle with Norwegian language barriers and require additional guidance from both faculty and library staff (Frisnes et al., 2020; Muñoz Llort et al., 2023; Sverre et al., 2020). Research also shows the importance of supporting these students to improve retention rates, which are crucial in fields like nursing since there is a pressing need for more health professionals in Norwegian society (Dolonen & Reppen, 2022; Småland Goth et al., 2015).

Accordingly, academic libraries increasingly aim to offer programs that support N2-students' academic and professional achievements, as well as their integration into local communities. One such program addressing the linguistic challenges faced by nursing students specifically, is the Academic Language Café (Akademisk Språkkafé, also known as ASK), an ongoing two-hour library service organised every Wednesday afternoon at the University of South-Eastern Norway (USN). ASK emerged in 2017 from a collaboration among the university library, the Department of Nursing and Health Sciences at USN's campus in Drammen, the Faculty of Health and Social Sciences, and external researchers specializing in multicultural pedagogy. The Academic Language Café has two main goals: first, to provide learning activities for N2-students to develop their Norwegian language skills and professional jargon; second, to enhance the teaching competencies of faculty and librarians regarding this student group (Frisnes et al., 2020; Sverre et al., 2019).

Language cafés and similar programs are a commonly offered service in Nordic public libraries. Research highlights the programs' ability to facilitate immigrants' language learning and support their social, economic, and political integration by serving as information grounds where information is exchanged and, ultimately, knowledge shared between attendees (Johnston, 2016; Johnston, 2018; Pettigrew, 1999). However, there is limited research on language cafes in academic libraries and how they can support students' learning and integration. Therefore, this study explores what motivates N2-nursing students to attend the Academic Language Café, its potential role as an information ground, the benefits it provides to both participants and coordinators, and ultimately how these benefits support integration.

Background and context
Requirements and Challenges for N2-Students in Norwegian Nursing Education
The Norwegian government's framework for nursing studies, known as *Rammeplan for sykepleierutdanning*, delineates essential competencies for nursing graduates, with a focus on three key requirements particularly pertinent to N2-nursing students. These include the imperative for nurses to engage with and apply research articles from both Norwegian and international sources within the nursing field. Additionally, graduates are expected to possess knowledge encompassing health and social issues, along with a comprehensive understanding of the operations of the Norwegian welfare state. Lastly, the framework underscores the importance of effective communication skills in assisting patients and their families with health-related concerns (Kunnskapsdepartementet, 2008).

Central to these requirements is proficiency in Norwegian language usage, both in written and oral communication, as well as an understanding of sociocultural issues and governmental operations specific to Norway. However, studies indicate that N2-students often struggle with these aspects of Norwegian language proficiency. Research highlights that insufficient language skills and a limited vocabulary hinder N2-students' ability to produce academic texts, comprehend research, and

communicate effectively with colleagues and patients, potentially leading to significant implications for patient care (Frisnes et al., 2020; Jonsmoen & Greek, 2017; Nayda & Rankin, 2008; Nordsteien, 2017).

Additionally, another study revealed that when N2-nursing students lack proficiency in Norwegian language skills, it can lead supervisors and nurses at the workplace to underestimate their practical skills or theoretical background due to difficulties in expression. This underestimation may be more pronounced in environments with lower workplace safety and tolerance levels. However, in more supportive workplaces characterized by high levels of tolerance, the impact of their language limitations on colleagues' perceptions may be less severe (Jonsmoen, 2015).

Language Proficiency Challenges for Nursing Students
Essential language skills range from academic writing and the use of professional jargon to fluent spoken communication with both patients and colleagues (Jonsmoen & Greek, 2017). Despite the importance of these skills, students across the board, including native speakers, struggle with academic writing, and faculty often lack the resources to provide adequate instruction (Arntzen & Eriksen, 2019; Hambro et al., 2019; Jonsmoen, 2021; Jonsmoen & Greek, 2017). Particularly pertinent to N2-students, nursing students must attain an advanced intermediate proficiency level in Norwegian prior to commencing their studies. However, studies suggest that this proficiency level does not ensure competence in all situations (Jonsmoen, 2015; Muñoz Llort et al., 2023). Alarmingly, Jonsmoen & Greek (2017) indicate that a significant number of N2-students lack the necessary Norwegian language skills to successfully complete and pass their courses.

To address these challenges, academic writing courses offered by either academic writing centres or university libraries can teach students to articulate and argue their points effectively (Hambro et al., 2019; Jonsmoen & Greek, 2017; Muñoz Llort et al., 2023). Participation, however, requires time that N2-students might not have due to family responsibilities, internships, or additional study hours needed to understand their course material (Frisnes et al., 2020; Jonsmoen, 2021; Lundestad, 2015).

Adapting to Academic and Societal Norms in Norwegian Higher Education
Apart from academic writing skills, N2-students' spoken Norwegian skills are also vital for their social inclusion at the university and in the workplace (Smith et al., 2022). A lack of academic and social integration can diminish the quality of the students' learning environments and their contributions to them. This is especially noticeable in assignments where N2-students are mixed with native students, and partially excluded due to language barriers (Jonsmoen, 2015; Småland Goth et al., 2015).

Immigrant-origin students face significant obstacles in Norwegian higher education, including adapting to new cultural and academic settings. For example, they must adjust to Norwegian academic norms like informal student-lecturer relationships and expectations of critical thinking, which can be challenging for those from more hierarchical educational systems (Arntzen & Eriksen, 2019; Frisnes et al., 2020). These challenges, coupled with the necessity for advanced proficiency in Norwegian, complicate both their academic and social integration (Arntzen & Eriksen, 2019). However, despite these challenges, research shows that the presence of N2-students introduces intercultural skills beneficial for both them and native Norwegian students, particularly in diverse settings like healthcare, where understanding and communicating in a patient's native language can help patients feel safe (Arntzen & Eriksen, 2019; Jonsmoen, 2021; Småland Goth et al., 2015).

Previous Research

The role of the university library and its librarians

University libraries have been adapting themselves to serve as a social arena and dynamic meeting place, offering both a comfortable open study space with sofas or silent rooms for study groups, as well as events such as debates and presentations where patrons are encouraged to engage in conversation (Grønlund & Ringnes, 2017; Landøy & Akselberg, 2019). University librarians also increasingly involve themselves in the students' and faculty's research process, assist their patrons with data management, and offer instruction in information literacy. This indicates a shift toward a more educational role for academic librarians, where they adopt a (post-)constructivist approach to teaching that encourages patrons to discover solutions independently rather than receiving all the answers directly from the librarian (Delaney & Bates, 2015; Hicks & Lloyd, 2022; Landøy & Akselberg, 2019).

Language cafés and conversation-based programming

Norwegian public libraries have expanded their services for immigrants, focusing on conversation-based programming such as language cafés, which allow immigrants to enhance their Norwegian language skills in an informal and relaxed setting alongside native speakers and other language learners. These programs, varying in location from libraries to cultural centres, are meant to complement formal language education by promoting conversational skills and introducing participants to local customs and societal norms, thereby aiding in their social and political integration through information sharing (Johnston, 2016; Johnston, 2019; Johnston & Audunson, 2019; Salinas et al., 2019). Research indicates that such services can increase immigrants' trust in the library as a welcoming and supportive space, while also facilitating social connections, increasing the participants' social capital and easing their transitions into their new community (Johnston & Audunson, 2019; Fischer et al., 2004; Grossman et al., 2022; Letnes, 2015; Vårheim, 2009; 2014; Vårheim et al., 2019).

Furthermore, these language cafés provide the opportunity for actual spoken interaction, a common shortfall in language education. Studies from Canada and Sweden highlight the benefits of social engagement and cultural exchange for language learning and mutual understanding between immigrants and locals, showing the importance of a welcoming and supportive space for these interactions (Jansson & Kunitz, 2020; Johnston, 2018; 2019; Van Gilst, 2010). In addition, by giving immigrants the opportunity to voice their opinions and engage in conversation, and thereby practise their language skills and increase their knowledge on Norwegian customs, it can assist their integration through sharing information with other attendees (Johnston & Audunson, 2019). This framework of support and inclusion is central to the Academic Language Café at USN, as it aims to enrich immigrant-origin students' learning environment and thereby help facilitate their integration (Sverre et al., 2022).

Researching ASK holds promise for addressing the challenges faced by N2-students in acquiring proficiency in Norwegian. Insights gained from ASK's approach to promoting oral academic language use, in collaboration with academic writing centres, could offer needed insights for tailoring solutions to enhance language learning experiences for these students. Moreover, research into ASK's impact on cross-cultural understanding and demographic bridging can inform broader educational strategies aimed at fostering inclusive learning environments. Ultimately, by investigating ASK comprehensively, practical knowledge can be gained that supports educational institutions in effectively raising linguistic and academic development among diverse student populations.

Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

To understand how the ASK program can support N2-students academically, professionally, and socially, this study uses the concepts of integration, social capital, and information grounds. This framework views integration as a social process interconnected with the formation of social capital, which is facilitated by the information exchange that occurs in information grounds. Similar frameworks have been employed to examine how language cafés and other conversation-based programs in public libraries support integration processes (Johnston 2016). This study aims to test the applicability of this framework to the understanding how conversation-based programming supports integration in academic libraries.

Integration: Exploring the Social, Cultural, and Economic Dimensions

Integration can be understood as a multidimensional social process in which cultural diversity is embraced within a multicultural society (Berry, 1997; Døving, 2009). It spans various aspects of life, including social, cultural, economic, and political dimensions, and allows immigrants to engage fully while preserving their own identity (Valtonen, 2008). Integration in one area, such as a professional setting, does not automatically extend to other areas, such as social integration (Døving, 2009; Temple, 2010). Successful integration requires mutual accommodation, where all groups recognize and respect each other's right to cultural distinctiveness, enabling ethnic groups to maintain their unique identities while participating as equals in the broader society (Berry, 1997; Eriksen, 2012).

Norwegian policies advocate for integration over assimilation, emphasizing shared values such as democracy, human rights, freedom of speech, equality, and the rule of law (Døving, 2009; Hilt, 2020). However, there has been a strong emphasis on education and professional integration to ensure economic stability for immigrants (Døving, 2009).

Expanding Social Networks and Accessing Resources through Bridging Social Capital

To fully understand how the ASK program facilitates integration, it is crucial to examine how social capital functions within this process. Social capital refers to the ability of individuals to secure benefits and solve problems through their involvement in social networks. It encompasses three main aspects: the interconnected relationships between individuals and groups (social ties), the levels of trust within these relationships, and the monetary and non-monetary resources or advantages gained and shared through these connections (Bourdieu, 1986; Poteyeva, 2024; Putnam, 1995). Notably, Bourdieu (1986) proposed that the amount of social capital available is influenced by both the size of one's network and the resources possessed by its members.

Social capital can be divided into two main types: bonding and bridging. Bonding social capital involves relationships within close-knit groups, characterized by strong ties and mutual support, while bridging social capital encompasses connections across diverse social groups. Enhancing one's social capital often involves leveraging weaker ties – connections beyond one's immediate circle of close friends and family. Research suggests that these weaker ties can provide access to valuable information and opportunities not available within an individual's stronger ties (Granovetter, 1973; Lin, 2002; Putnam, 1995). Consequently, bridging social capital appears to act as a social lubricant, facilitating advancement by broadening access to diverse resources (Widén-Wulff et al., 2008).

Information Grounds: Fostering Integration Through Weak Ties and Information Exchange

Building on research about weak ties and information exchange, Pettigrew (1999) defined information grounds as environments where people gather for a specific purpose, and from which the spontaneous and serendipitous sharing of information is a byproduct of their interactions. Fisher and Naumer (2006) expanded on this core premise by outlining seven criteria for identifying information grounds and the various benefits they may offer:

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- Individuals gather for a purpose other than information sharing.
- Participants are diverse and play various roles in the sharing and dissemination of information.
- Social interaction is a key activity.
- Information exchange occurs both formally and informally among all participants.
- Information grounds can emerge anywhere and are not restricted to a specific space.
- The information shared can benefit participants cognitively, physically, affectively, and socially.
- Attendees bring different perspectives to the gathering, enriching the information exchange process.

Aim and research questions

Based on previous literature and the theoretical framework presented in this article, the overarching aim of study is to investigate how academic language cafes, using the ASK program and N2-nursing students as an example, can support immigrant-origin students. Firstly, the goal is to understand if and how the service motivates and benefits the nursing students' learning, integration, and professional development by enhancing their knowledge and linguistic competencies necessary for workforce participation and promoting social inclusivity. Secondly, this study will investigate whether interactions between ASK program attendees, coordinators, and volunteers expand the students' social networks and generate social capital, specifically through increased trust and access to knowledge and information relevant to their academic, professional, and/or social lives. ASK also appears to align closely with many of the criteria set by Fisher and Naumer (2006) to identify information grounds: individuals gather for reasons beyond information sharing, social interaction is central to the gathering, and participants are diverse with varied roles in information dissemination, thus contributing different perspectives. Therefore, the specific aim of this study is to determine the extent and relevance of information exchange in facilitating the integration process for N2-students, as well as to assess its impact on the teaching competencies of faculty and librarians for this student group. This will all be explored through the following research questions:

RQ1: What motivates N2-nursing students to attend the Academic Language Café?
RQ2: What are the benefits of participating in the Academic Language Café for both the N2-nursing students and coordinators?
RQ3: How might the learning environment and location of the Academic Language Café support the formation of an information ground?

The findings will be analysed to understand how the ASK service might serve as an information ground, what benefits it might provide, and how these benefits might support integration. These insights are important for deepening understanding and expanding the research base on conversation-based programming in academic libraries. They can also provide valuable guidance to other educational institutions considering the implementation of similar services.

Methods

The University of South-Eastern Norway was selected for this study as it appeared to be the only Norwegian university library offering an Academic Language Café during the research period in January – April 2023. Data collection began with observations to inform the development of subsequent methods. The study employed a mixed methods approach, integrating qualitative and quantitative data through interviews with coordinators – such as lecturers, academic librarians, and volunteers – and a survey that captured the perspectives of N2-nursing students and student assistants, who are also of foreign background. This approach allowed for a comprehensive exploration of how the academic library and its staff support the learning environment and

integration of N2-students through ASK. By combining observations, interviews, and surveys, the study utilized data triangulation to enhance the reliability and validity of its findings.

Observations
Data collection began with observations of two Academic Language Café sessions, each lasting two hours, conducted on different campuses. These sessions included a total of twenty immigrant-origin nursing students. However, coordinators noted that the number of attendees varied each week. The primary objective of the observations was to capture interactions and discussion topics without influencing the conversations. To achieve this, the researcher refrained from active participation, ensuring that attendees did not modify their topics to accommodate the researcher's presence – unless they directly asked questions about the research project.

Observations provided valuable insights for developing relevant survey and interview questions, supported by the use of an observation form (Appendix 1). Additionally, the observation phase served to introduce attendees to the study, address any concerns they might have, and build trust and familiarity. This approach helped facilitate the recruitment of participants for the subsequent survey. Observation notes were recorded during the sessions using the observation form. These notes focused on key aspects such as the nature of social interactions among attendees and the types of information exchanged. This method ensured that the observations aligned with the study's objectives, offering a comprehensive understanding of the service's impact and dynamics. Recording observations immediately also minimized the loss of important data.

Ethical considerations were addressed throughout the study to ensure the protection and respect of participants. Informational letters were distributed to provide clear details about the study's purpose, procedures, and measures taken to ensure anonymity. One of those measures was to not note down any names, only the number of participants, as the main goal was to gather data on the activities and information shared at the service, not the personal lives of the participants. Informed consent was obtained orally for this phase of the research. Despite potential biases arising from the researcher's position as a student assistant at USN's university library, concerted efforts were made to maintain objectivity and professional distance. This included implementing strategies to minimize any influence the researcher's personal experiences might have on the data collection and analysis, thereby upholding the integrity and impartiality of the research.

Mixed method survey
To gain a better understanding of students' motivations and experiences at the Academic Language Café, an anonymized online mixed methods survey (Appendix 2) was distributed among N2-students via the university's online platform. Respondent anonymity and consent were ensured by using nettskjema.no, a web-based survey tool, and by not requiring any of the students to write down either their name or email address.[1] An information letter at the beginning of the survey provided the email addresses of both researchers, allowing students to ask questions or request data retraction.

The survey was organized into five sections based on the theoretical and conceptual framework guiding the study and the initial observations. It featured a combination of closed and open-ended questions to capture both quantitative and qualitative data, as outlined by Braun et al. (2017) and Jacobsen (2022). The closed-ended questions facilitated a systematic analysis of trends and patterns, while the open-ended questions provided nuanced perspectives. These open-ended questions were

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[1] Nettskjema (https://nettskjema.no/) offers various forms for gathering data, including questionnaires with and without sensitive data, signup forms for events, and audio recordings using the Nettskjema-Diktafon phone app.

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not obligatory, so not all of the respondents have chosen to expand upon their quantitative answers. This methodology allowed for a comparison between insights gathered from library staff during interviews and students' perspectives, ensuring a thorough examination of the service's impact and effectiveness.

Despite the challenge of accurately identifying the respondent pool, as subscriptions to the service on the university's platform include both current and some non-current attendees, an estimated group of about thirty potential respondents was identified. Ultimately, eight students responded to the survey, providing data that could be triangulated with the other data collection methods.

Semi-structured interviews
Employing qualitative semi-structured interviews with nine coordinators of the Academic Language Café provided an in-depth examination of their experiences and approaches to the service. The group of coordinators are all native speakers and consists of an equal mix between lecturers from the nursing department, academic librarians, and volunteers. These interviews were guided by a structured interview guide (Appendix 3) that was developed based on the conceptual and theoretical framework of the study, as well as initial observations and relevant literature on librarians' professional roles (Johnston et al., 2022). This approach allowed for a detailed exploration of the coordinators' perspectives, offering valuable insights into their strategies, challenges, and contributions to the Academic Language Café.

All interviews were conducted online to increase convenience, and the recordings were done through the secure Nettskjema-app. Most interviewees had met with the interviewer before through the observations or interactions at the university library, and gave their consent to both participate and to record the session before the interview began. Interviews were transcribed verbatim, ensuring the anonymity of participants by using the term "coordinator" when quoting them, and excluding identifiable responses (Kvale, 2007). The transcripts, and English translations of quotes used in the article were reviewed for accuracy by the interviewees.

Data analysis
This article uses a convergent design for the data analysis, as the results from both the quantitative and the qualitative dataset will be compared (Creswell, 2022). Integrating both types of data permitted a presentation of the perspectives from students and ASK coordinators. Firstly, to manage the disparity in size between the two datasets, a descriptive quantitative analysis was employed. This method included both univariate and bivariate analysis, so relationships between data could be analysed. Drawing on literature by O'Dwyer & Bernauer (2014/2016), Jacobsen (2022), and Nardi (2018), the analysis was structured into four segments: student demographics and attendance, the learning environment, the social environment, and the experience of being an N2-student at ASK. Secondly, by employing thematic analysis as explained by Braun and Clarke (2006, 2019, 2022), recurring themes could be identified within the qualitative dataset. The analysis treated the data from surveys, interviews, and observations as a unified dataset, aligning with Braun and Clarke's six-step thematic analysis procedure (2022). These six steps include: reading the dataset and noting down initial observations; coding the data so it is aligned with the research questions; formulating an initial list of themes and codes; adjusting the themes where necessary; refining the themes and naming them; and eventually conducting the thematic analysis itself.

Limitations
This study has two key limitations. First, while the mixed method survey with N2-students allowed for some elaboration, it was limited in exploring quantitative responses in depth, and the focus on coordinators' perspectives may have restricted the number of student respondents. This has led to

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more quotes from the coordinators. N2-students' viewpoints have either been quoted when they decided to fill out the qualitative parts of the survey or summarised based on the data and conversation topics written down in the observation form. Secondly, student assistants at ASK had the flexibility to participate in the survey either as N2-students seeking assistance or as assistants providing support, depending on their needs during the session. As program participants, they were invited to complete the survey and take part in the observations. However, their distinct roles within the program may have influenced their experiences and the benefits they derived. Any potential differences cannot be distinguished from the responses of other participants. This presents an area for future research.

Findings and Analysis
This section presents findings and preliminary analysis from observations, interviews with ASK coordinators, and student survey responses, addressing the research questions. It also includes insights on the library as a location for the ASK program and the challenges encountered.

Motivations for N2- nursing students to attend the Academic Language Café
The survey findings indicate that N2-students attend ASK with expectations of improving their day-today as well as their professional and academic Norwegian, along with acquiring practical skills such as writing academic texts, exam preparation, and information literacy, including how to refer to literature and source criticism (Figure 1). One student expanded upon this by expressing:

> [At ASK] you can practise Norwegian and some of the lecturers can explain terms and themes you have questions on in a simpler way so we understand. I was someone that didn't dare to talk Norwegian out loud, [I] believed that I pronounced words wrongly, but after I started [attending] ASK I started to talk. There you have the opportunity to practise Norwegian and you can also learn to write academic Norwegian.

An ASK coordinator also emphasized the program's role in supporting students' development of conversational and academic Norwegian. They reflected:

> I think that the thing most people appreciate most is speaking the language, because many of them don't speak Norwegian at home […], they really only use Norwegian at school where they sit and listen to lectures and they say that 'I read concepts but I'm not using them.' So I think perhaps the biggest learning lies in that, that they can actually use professional terms vocally and […] simply speak nursing in Norwegian. I think that is perhaps the most important thing, at least it is what they themselves say they struggle with the most.

The observations corroborate these findings. During both observation sessions, students mentioned they had gotten comments on sentence structure or a lack of nursing jargon on their papers and hoped they could receive help as they were struggling with their use of Academic Norwegian. The coordinators assisted them, either by having a look at sections of the students' papers and analysing them together with the group, or by having the N2-students explain certain nursing vocabulary to see if everyone understood the terms in the same way.

In addition to support for improving their professional and academic Norwegian, survey findings indicate that N2-students felt their broader expectations for the ASK program were largely met, particularly regarding personal advice, source criticism and use of the university library, help with writing academic texts, and information about internships (Figure 1). One student added that they could "easily share their ideas and experiences with others at ASK".

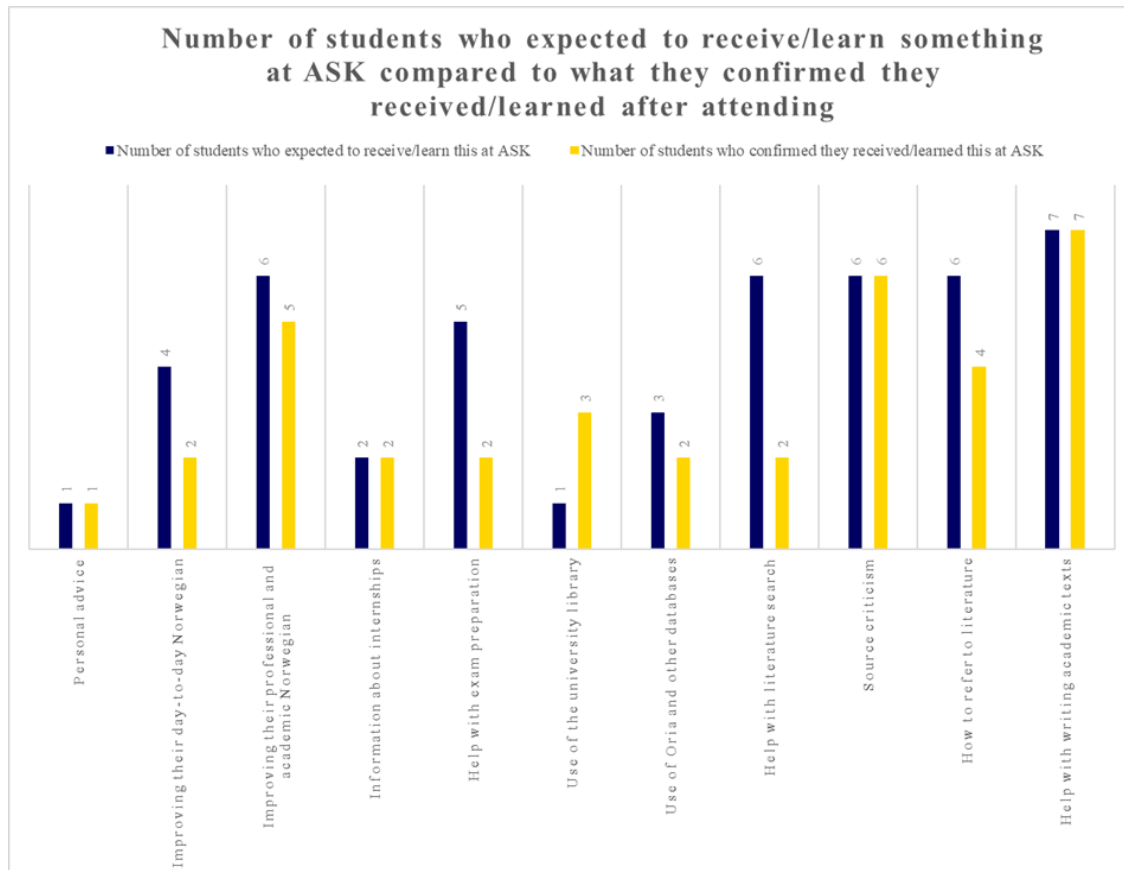**Henriksen and Johnston:** *The academic language café*

Figure 1. Number of students who expected to receive/learn something from ASK compared to what they confirmed they received/learned after attending the service.

During observations, it became clear that student assistants played a crucial role in alleviating N2-students' concerns about their studies, especially internships. For instance, one student assistant explained nursing theories that attendees had been struggling with, linking them to essential nursing techniques used in the workplace. The assistants also encouraged N2-students to familiarize themselves with these theories to better reassure patients and their families in the hospital. Coordinators highlighted the importance of clear communication to enhance patient safety, as nurses and doctors must write reports and share information effectively. One of the coordinators, corroborated the significance of student assistants:

> I believe that the student assistants have maybe been the most important [for the learning environment], because they are good students, they are engaged, they are concerned with the same student group that we are concerned with and [...] they have first-hand knowledge about what it is like to be a nursing student, which I believe has meant a lot. [...] They have experiences which makes it easier to understand the students.

N2-students indicated that they value the presence of their peers and the spontaneous, informal nature of the café, as one student expressed:

> What I like about the Academic Language Café is that you can come spontaneously and without needing to register that you will attend or that you need to say you are coming. I like it because we can discuss things together and find answers together. I think it's good when students from the

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> second and third year [bachelor studies] are there because it is easier to ask them about how [to do things] and tips and experiences.

Interestingly, a coordinator reflected on the motivations of students for participating in the program, emphasizing the importance of the café as a space for speaking Norwegian:

> And some simply come and say "I come here to speak Norwegian". And that […] makes me quite happy. Firstly, they come because they experience the service as positive. [...] Secondly, they don't have any concrete things they need help with, so maybe they experience that they've mastered that stage of their studies and that is very positive. And thirdly, they can often contribute academically by helping and guiding other students who may have come for more professional or academic content.

The survey findings also highlighted areas where the service fell short of the N2-students' expectations. Their expectations regarding help with literature search, how to refer to literature, improving their professional and academic as well as their day-to-day Norwegian, help with exam preparation, and use of Oria, a library discovery search engine, and other databases were not fully met. This suggests that while students benefit from attending the service, particularly in learning more about using the library, as during the observation students were encouraged to use the library computers to find relevant literature and navigate the bookshelves, and receiving help with their academic texts, there remains a gap between their expectations of improving their language skills through ASK and what they actually learn.

Some students and coordinators expressed concern that conversational practice was not sufficiently emphasized despite the service being an academic language café. As one of the students mentioned in the survey:

> Some of the other students just ask and talk without thinking about the others present. And sometimes the coordinators have difficulties in steering [the conversation].

One coordinator also noted a shift in focus from academic conversations to assignment assistance:

> It has become very much the case that the students work with assignments and it's the assignments they want help with. [...] I think it's a bit of a shame that the structure has disappeared and there has been too little focus on conversations and practicing speaking Norwegian.

Language learning seems to be one of the main expectations and motivations for N2-nursing students to attend the service. The sentiments shared by both students and coordinators show that the focus on and importance of sufficient Norwegian language skills are important to ensure the students professional and educational integration.

Benefits of participating in the Academic Language Café for both the N2-nursing students and coordinators
The service appears to foster social connections and friendships. For instance, students were observed engaging in personal interactions, such as hugging and discussing private matters with each other and the coordinators. Furthermore, the majority of survey respondents indicated that ASK helped them form new friendships and provided a supportive platform for sharing personal experiences. For example, one student mentioned that the service allowed them to "ask questions and get to know other students." Similarly, a coordinator noted witnessing friendships form through ASK, observing students who met at the service often walking and talking together in the library. Another coordinator highlighted that these connections extend beyond ASK, with students now

collaborating in groups outside of the service, stating that "they don't sit on their own to work because they have gotten to know each other there and help each other outside of ASK as well." These examples highlight the service's potential as a meeting place that supports both academic collaboration and the sharing of personal experiences, fostering the development of social connections.

The positive impact of more advanced students, who also serve as student assistants, was also noted by coordinators, as mentioned earlier when referring to them having experienced the same difficulties the N2-students have. Social connections also appeared to form between students and ASK coordinators. Students were observed staying at the library after service hours to inquire about coordinators' holidays and well-being. In addition, during the observation some coordinators made small talk with the students and started joking around when facing technical issues while failing to share a text on screen, referring to other humorous digital difficulties they faced in lectures during Covid. These social connections between the students themselves, as well as with the coordinators indicate the possible benefit of generating both bonding and bridging social capital.

ASK also seemed to provide a supportive space where students can share difficult personal experiences, such as encounters with everyday racism. During an observation of one of the services, a student mentioned experiencing everyday racism at their workplace to the other attendees. Other N2-students shared their own experiences and frustrations, and the coordinators listened empathetically. The student who initially shared their negative experience expressed gratitude for being able to tell their story and noted that the coordinators had always been very welcoming and open, indicating they felt that the environment at ASK allowed everyone to be themselves, regardless of their background.

Based on this observation, coordinators were asked in the interview if they felt ASK was a safe environment for the N2-students to talk together, as well as share thoughts, ideas and experiences. Coordinators mentioned they are committed to maintaining a supportive environment where students can express themselves without fear of judgment. One of the coordinators reflected on this commitment:

> I feel that helping to create what I hope and believe is a safe space for the N2-students is the most important thing. It's not just about participating in ASK, but also about being a familiar face in the library. When they recognize us, it might make it a little less intimidating to ask questions. Overall, we aim to lower the threshold and make it safe for them.

Some coordinators also shared their personal lives, including their families, cultures, and the challenges they faced as students. This sharing facilitated discussions on topics such as time management and balancing work, university, and family responsibilities. Many coordinators highlighted the importance of creating a space where students could connect with others facing similar challenges, with one of them stating:

> Because you can feel very small, especially if you don't know people from beforehand when you start studying. So, I believe that they like get a place to see that there are others who are as stressed and as frustrated, but also who are like as concerned of the same professional and academic things.

Additionally, sharing experiences seemed to benefit coordinators by helping them gain insights into diverse cultures and enhance their intercultural understanding. One of the coordinators commented that "it has simply been an enrichment" when referring to conversing with students who had a different cultural, ethnic, or religious background. They also reflected on the gratification of

witnessing moments of realization in students, which provides feedback on the effectiveness of their teaching methods and also fostering a deep sense of satisfaction from their students' progress.

These findings exemplify how attendees bring diverse perspectives to the language café, facilitating both formal and informal information exchange through social interaction. This supports the potential of the service to function as an information ground, where the sharing of personal experiences and academic knowledge occurs naturally, fostering connections among participants.

The learning environment and location of the Academic Language Café
A Supportive Learning Environment
At ASK, coordinators intentionally avoided replicating the traditional classroom environment, which is often characterized by passive listening. Instead, they embraced sociocultural learning theories to create an atmosphere that fosters conversational engagement, a sense of support, and a welcoming environment – elements crucial for effective learning. A coordinator highlighted the significance of this more social learning environment in encouraging students to open up and engage in conversations. They observed that: "when they have a safe fellow student next to them, they are often very open, and the chatter flows easily."
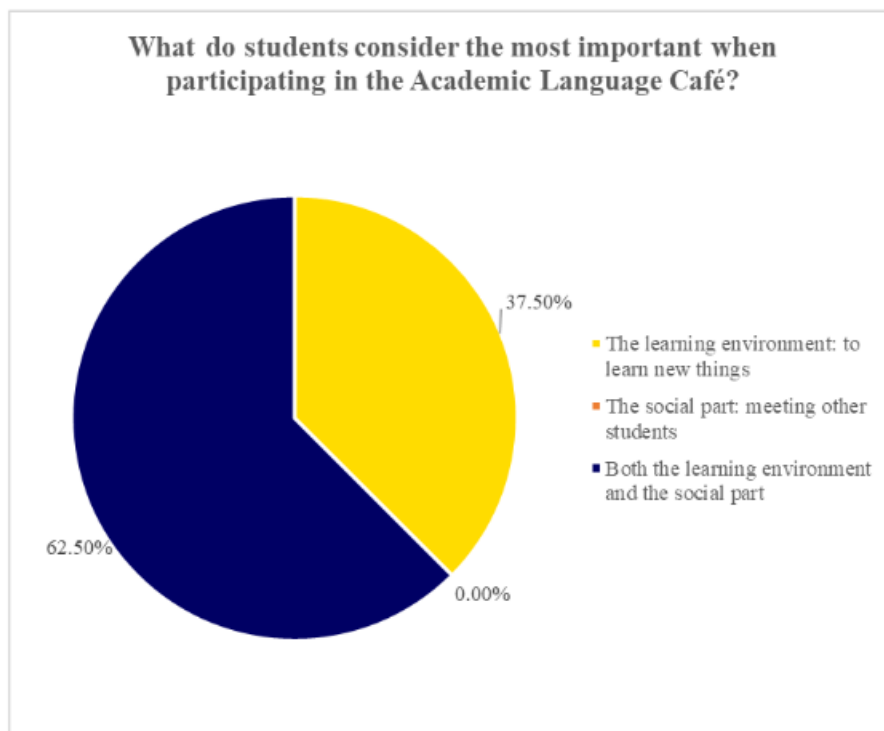

Figure 2. What do students consider to be most important when participating in the Academic Language Café.

When surveyed about what N2-students valued most when attending ASK, more than half indicated that both the learning environment and the social part of the service were the most important for them to participate in the service (Figure 2). The remaining students identified the learning environment as their primary reason for participating, with none stating that they attended solely for the social part and meeting other students. This suggests that while attendees are primarily motivated by the desire to learn, they also appreciate the opportunity to make new friends.

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Library as a Location, Accessibility and Attendance

As the service is held across different campuses, with varying setups from open spaces in the university library to more secluded staff rooms, the location influences both the service's accessibility and the number of participants. In the survey, students generally indicated they preferred to attend at the library because it was more convenient due to its easy access after classes and the availability of academic resources and literature. The general atmosphere of the library and the service also seemed important to the students. One student mentioned, "It is easier to find the books you need; there is a good atmosphere, and it is very central." Another student appreciated the hospitality, saying, "I like that they bring coffee and that they are so nice."

All of the students who answered the survey and studied at a campus where the service was being held at the university library, answered in the survey that they liked that ASK was being held at the university library. During the observations, students often went to the shelves to find a book coordinators or fellow students had recommended, or to find a book that would assist them in understanding a concept better that was being explained at the service. The advantage of being able to learn together at ASK, was also represented in the survey as all students agreed that studying with and taking part in the service together with their fellow students helped them to learn new things. This could indicate the formation of bonding social capital, as well as a social and cognitive benefit to the information being shared at the language café, opening up the possibility for the service to be an information ground.

However, the choice between open and closed spaces at the library showed mixed reactions. Some students valued their privacy, especially when discussing sensitive topics, and preferred enclosed spaces to prevent outsiders from overhearing. Others appreciated the openness of the library, as it lowered barriers to participation and ensured a more relaxed and inclusive environment. For example, during one of the observations a student shared their stories freely with others at the table, and did not seem to mind that they were sitting in the library where others could hear them. Yet, during the other observation, one of the students asked the coordinators if it was alright to close the door while they were sitting in a group study room, because they did not want outsiders to overhear what they were talking about.

Despite efforts to accommodate students' schedules and learning needs, challenges such as time constraints and stress persist, leading to lower attendance at the Academic Language Café. For example, during the observations some N2-students noted difficulties balancing their studies with family responsibilities. A coordinator echoes this:

> I think there are many of the N2-students who actually want to be there, but don't have the time. [...] We tend to have good attendance in autumn, especially at the start, and then they get caught up in all that they have to read and learn.

There have been proposals to integrate support services more directly into practical nursing training at the university, such as in simulation centres. This would provide an opportunity for or both native and N2-students to practice nursing terminology before starting their internships, promoting more inclusive practices.

Discussion

This study explored the motivations and experiences of N2-nursing students attending the Academic Language Café. Below, the results are discussed in relation to each research question.

RQ1: What motivates N2-nursing students to attend the Academic Language Café?

It appears that ASK offers a much needed learning environment for the N2-nursing students that addresses both their academic and social needs. The main motivation for the students seems to be to learn and improve their day-to-day and professional Norwegian, which is essential not only for their professional and academic integration, but also for successfully completing their studies, as highlighted by Jonsmoen and Greek (2017). Survey responses and observations indicate that students particularly value the opportunity to practice Norwegian in an academic yet informal setting, where they can discuss nursing, educational, and personal topics with both their peers and coordinators.

This focus on language skills and academic support directly aligns with the Norwegian government's framework for nursing studies, which requires nurses to comprehend and apply new research in the medical and nursing fields, as well as to communicate effectively with patients (Kunnskaps-departmentet, 2008). By providing an arena where students can practice Norwegian and enhance their research skills, ASK can be seen to not only meet the students' expectations but also contribute to fulfilling these governmental requirements.

ASK effectively supports both the professional and social integration of N2-students by fostering an inclusive environment where students can make personal connections through both bridging and bonding social capital. Evidence of this is seen in how N2-students share not only the challenges they face but also engage in light-hearted interactions with the program organizers, highlighting how bridging social capital allows attendees and coordinators to find commonalities and establish meaningful connections. Additionally, several students have expressed their appreciation for the spontaneity and welcoming atmosphere of the café, noting that it provides opportunities to collaborate, discuss various topics, and form new friendships. This, in turn, enhances their social capital and promotes greater integration within the academic community.

These findings are consistent with previous research on conversation-based programming in public libraries (Johnston, 2019; Johnston & Audunson, 2019; Salinas et al., 2019; Vårheim, 2009; 2014), which underscores the value of such initiatives in fostering both learning and social connections. Students at ASK not only benefit academically but also build social ties by engaging with more experienced peers and coordinators. This dual focus on academic support and social integration reflects ASK's comprehensive approach to addressing the diverse needs of N2-students, ultimately enhancing their overall university experience.

However, while ASK successfully meets many of the students' expectations, it appears that students desire an even greater focus on improving their Norwegian language skills and information literacy skills, as both are crucial for successfully completing their studies. This sentiment is echoed by coordinators, who wish to see students using professional terms more frequently but have observed that the service has increasingly shifted towards assisting with assignments rather than enhancing N2-students' Norwegian language proficiency. Additionally, students reported that the improvement in library-related skills, such as referencing, database use, and search strategies, fell short of their expectations when they first began attending the service.

Another challenge mentioned by both coordinators and N2-students is the difficulty of finding time to attend the service, given the need to balance work, family responsibilities, coursework, and participation in the Academic Language Café. This struggle with time management aligns with findings from Frisnes et al. (2020), Jonsmoen (2021), and Lundestad (2015), who note that N2-students often require additional time to complete their studies due to various factors. Although these time constraints lead to lower attendance, the Academic Language Café strives to counter this by making the service as open and accessible as possible.

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RQ2: What are the benefits of participating in the Academic Language Café for both the N2-nursing students and coordinators?

On the one hand, the findings suggest that N2-nursing students' social integration is increased, and they are both motivated and encouraged to improve their Norwegian language skills. On the other hand, student assistants contribute their knowledge on topics and skills most relevant to the N2-students, such as nursing theories and their application in practice. In contrast, the coordinators bring their expertise in educational resources, assignments, and information literacy skills. In addition, they also gain an understanding of different cultures and enhance their knowledge of creating and maintaining supportive learning environments for N2-students. Accordingly, the findings suggest that student assistants develop their Norwegian language and mentoring skills, while coordinators benefit by observing the effectiveness of their teaching methods with N2-students and by enriching their knowledge of the social, cultural, and political backgrounds of the students participating in ASK. As a result, all groups benefit from their involvement in ASK in different ways, but they all have the possibility to generate bonding and bridging social capital through fostering social connections and friendships.

In addition to connecting with fellow students, many participants mentioned in observations and surveys that they felt comfortable being themselves at the service and sharing personal stories with everyone there, including the coordinators. This also reflects the creation of weak ties and an increase in their bridging social capital, aligning with findings from earlier studies on public libraries by Johnston (2019), Johnston and Audunson (2019), and Vårheim (2009; 2014). However, opinions vary regarding the structure of the Academic Language Café. Some students and coordinators feel that there is too little structure, while others believe that conversations should flow more freely to replicate a café atmosphere, complete with coffee and tea. Therefore, carefully considering the types of activities offered will be important, as they determine the level of structure within the program.

RQ3: How might the learning environment and location of the Academic Language Café support the formation of an information ground?

Throughout the research process and by taking a closer look at the N2-students' motivations and expectations, as well as possible benefits of attending the service, it became apparent that ASK could potentially be seen as an information ground, based on Fisher and Naumer's (2006) seven propositions. N2-students mainly attend the service to improve their Norwegian skills, but start to serendipitously share information, such as personal stories and their experiences and challenges as nursing students, with other attendees and coordinators. Conversation and social interaction are key, and both the N2-students and coordinators bring their different perspectives and experiences to the forefront, supporting the information exchange. By exchanging knowledge and information that benefits their learning and integration in both a formal and informal manner, the service is turned into a social gathering which facilitates both bridging and bonding social capital.

In addition, the Academic Language Café as an information ground can emerge anywhere, and is not necessarily confined to the university library, or one specific campus, when it comes to the physical environment. Students attend the service at different campuses, libraries, group and staff rooms, but by being positioned around a large table, facing one another while drinking coffee and eating snacks, information can be shared easily between participants. However, the findings indicated students preferred attending the service at the library, be it in a group room or in a more open environment, as it was more convenient for them to attend after class. Furthermore, N2-students mentioned that they enjoyed the atmosphere of the library and added it was easier to access books and other resources discussed at the service, which can be seen as an associated benefit of the location. In spite of this, it seems that no matter the physical space, the attendees are likely to benefit effectively,

socially, and cognitively from the service since they are able to make friends and increase their bonding social capital.

To illustrate further how the Academic Language Café can be seen as an information ground, Pettigrew's (1999) original model was modified below (Figure 3):

INFORMATION GROUND

PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

- University library / staff room / group rooms at university library

- Everyone facing each other to engage in conversation

- Coffee, tea, snacks and sweets

N2-STUDENTS' SITUATION

- Desire to improve their Norwegian language skills

- Require help with exams and assignments

- Interact with others and share personal stories

STUDENT ASSISTANTS' SITUATION

- Knowledge of skills required to graduate

- Knowledge of internships

- Often N2-students themselves

- Experienced the same challenges before

- Norwegian language skills

ACADEMIC LANGUAGE CAFÉ ACTIVITIES

- Waiting for others and engaging in conversation

- Attending to share information, stories, and ideas

- Ask questions

- Playing word games *ALIAS*

COORDINATORS' SITUATION

- Knowledge of referencing and search techniques

- Knowledge of nursing and/or academic requirements

- Experience with studying and being a student

- Knowledge of the professional and educational field
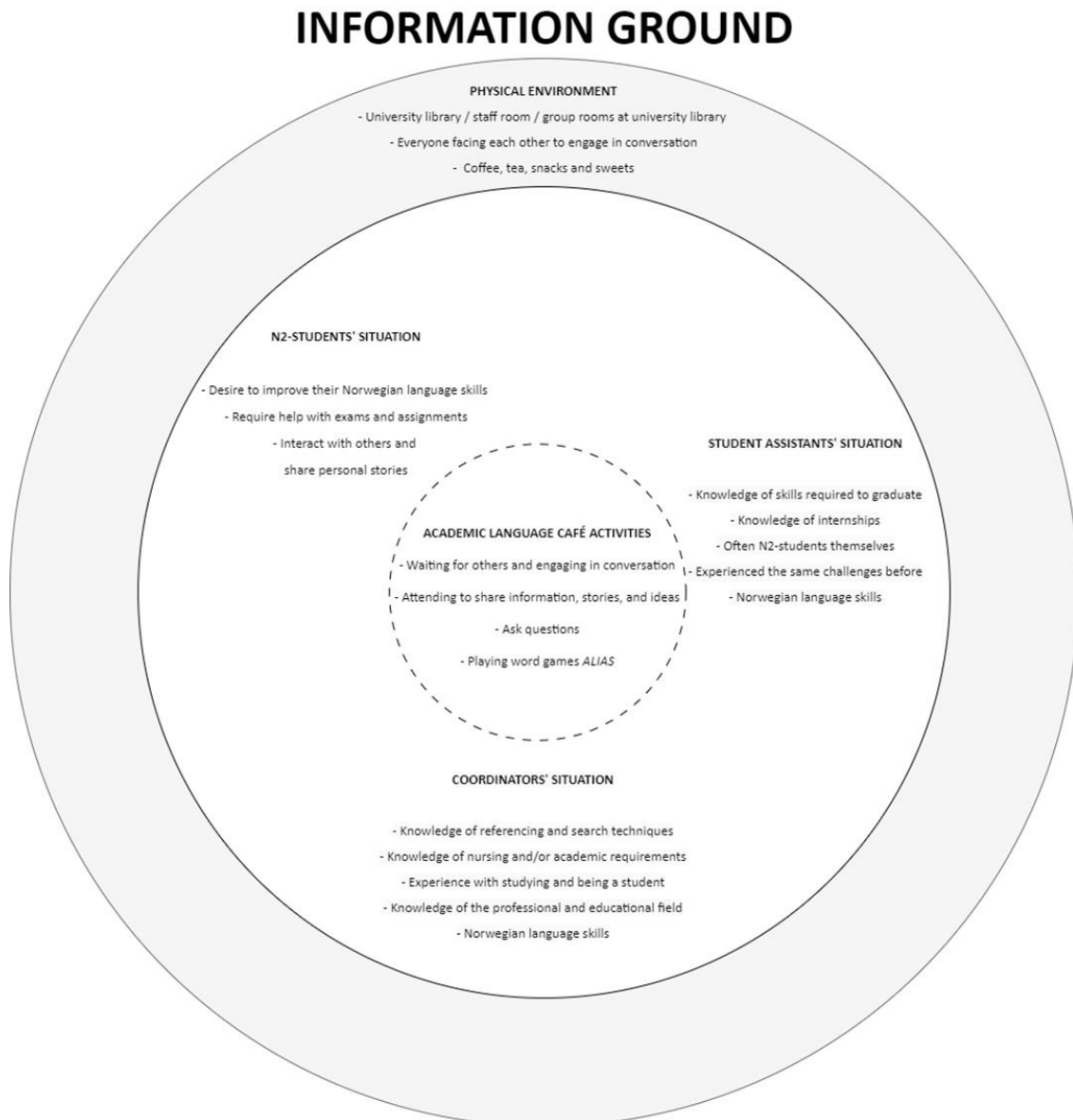
- Norwegian language skills

Figure 3. A model of ASK as an information ground, based on Pettigrew's (1999, p. 813) model of community clinics as information grounds, and Henriksen.

Conclusion and future research
The findings suggest that the academic library, its staff, faculty, and other coordinators have the potential to support N2- nursing students' academic and professional integration by supporting language proficiency and informal sharing of information through the service of the Academic

Language Café. Most students attend the language café because they want to improve their Norwegian language skills, but some also attend for the social atmosphere the service provides. Through conversations with both coordinators and peers, the students' social integration can therefore also be increased, though to a lesser degree. Nearly all students mentioned they had made friends at the service, and friendly interactions were observed between both attendees and coordinators, indicating a sense of trust and suggesting the benefit of a creation of bonding and bridging social capital as well as weak ties, much like conversation-based programming at for example public libraries (Johnston, 2019; Johnston & Audunson, 2019; Salinas et al., 2019). When applying Fisher and Naumer's (2006) seven criteria for identifying information grounds, with the data gathered, the service can also be seen as an information ground where alongside the main goal of improving their Norwegian language skills, N2-students shared and received information about internships, personal experiences, different cultural backgrounds, exam preparation, academic writing, and source criticism. However, as this research was based on N2-nursing students, it is difficult to determine if this is also the case for any other similar services organised. Therefore, future research could study different student groups and their perspectives. In addition, there were considerate gaps between what students expected to learn and what they actually learnt. A more extensive dataset with for example interviews with students and student-assistants could be included in future studies related to this topic. Lastly, the changing role of academic librarians, and how services like ASK are influenced by this, could be a subject for future research.

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