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Bohmian Dialogue Supporting Student Well-being in a Higher Education English Course

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the impact of a university language course—*Dialogue: Constructive Talk at Work*, based on Bohmian dialogue—on student well-being. Bohmian dialogue aligns with principles of Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT), which are known to support well-being. A mixed-method design without a control group was used. Quantitative data from 125 students were collected using the Satisfaction with Life Scale and the Acceptance and Action Questionnaire for University Students. No statistically significant changes were observed at the group level, potentially due to low post-intervention participation (41.6%). However, qualitative analysis of student blog posts revealed increased awareness related to the course themes. This suggests that dialogue-based language instruction may support well-being over time. The findings highlight the potential of integrating dialogue approaches into foreign language education to enhance student well-being in higher education. Such integration demonstrates how language teaching can contribute to broader educational and psychological outcomes in academic settings.

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Well-being has singly been acknowledged as an important aspect of working life since the 1990s (Danna & Griffin, 1999). Recently, universities have also acknowledged student well-being in their strategies (e.g., University of Jyväskylä, 2020). There clearly is a need to consider well-being in academia, as several studies have reported that a growing number of students are struggling with well-being issues such as psychological distress, burnout, depression, and anxiety (Auerbach et al., 2018; Backhaus et al., 2020). The COVID-19 pandemic caused the situation to deteriorate even more (Buizza et al., 2022). Addressing well-being issues in higher education is now more important than ever, as psychological distress may be a significant burden, impairing students' academic performance, social functioning, and capacity to learn (Hauschildt et al., 2015; Houghton & Anderson, 2017).

Up to this point, efforts to promote student well-being have been concentrating on creating tools and materials to enhance students' understanding of mental health. The current task would be to enhance educators' skills to create educational settings and methods that more effectively foster students' mental well-being (Baik et al., 2019). Academic educators play a crucial role in enhancing student mental well-being because they design and deliver academic curricula, which offer significant potential to promote student well-being through innovative teaching methods and designed learning environments that provide psychological support for students (Baik et al., 2019; Houghton & Anderson, 2017). Baik et al. (2019) emphasize that supporting students' well-being does not require that academic instructors become mental health experts but rather entails incorporating curriculum and teaching strategies influenced by psychological principles and research. Mercer et al. (2018) bring up the concept of Positive Language Education (PLE), which arises from the combination of positive education and language education. According to them, there are good reasons for language teachers to participate in promoting well-being as a 21st century life skill in conjunction with fostering linguistic skills. Mercer (2021) advocates English Language Teaching (ELT) to make well-being a priority for research and practice.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Psychological well-being

Research into well-being reveals that there are various ways to define *well-being* (e.g., Diener, 1984; Prilleltensky et al., 2015; Ryff & Singer, 1998). In this paper, we focus on Huppert's (2009, p. 137) definition: "Psychological well-being is […] the combination of feeling good and functioning effectively. Sustainable well-being does not require individuals to feel good all the time; the experience of painful emotions (e.g., disappointment, failure) is a normal part of life, and being able to manage these painful emotions is essential for long-term well-being." According to Huppert (2009), the concept of feeling good comprises not only emotions such as happiness and contentment, but also interest, engagement, and affection. Functioning effectively incorporates the development of one's potential, having some control over one's life, a sense of purpose (e.g., actions toward valued goals), and positive relationships. Huppert (2004) maintains that interventions that promote positive actions and attitudes play a key role in enhancing well-being. One such intervention is Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT).

2.2. Acceptance and Commitment Therapy

ACT is a cognitive behavioral therapy approach that enhances well-being through increased psychological flexibility (Hayes, 2004), which has been considered the fundamental aspect of health (Hayes et al., 2012; Kashdan & Rottenberg, 2010). Psychological flexibility refers to the ability to adapt to changing circumstances, which can help individuals lead meaningful and psychologically healthy lives (Hayes et al., 2006).

ACT employs six core principles to help develop psychological flexibility (Hayes et al., 2012): *Values* refer to discovering what is most important to oneself. *Committed action* entails setting goals based on values and executing them in line with values. *Contact with the present moment* refers to being in the here and now (e.g., mindfulness). *Cognitive defusion* involves creating distance

between us and our thoughts and feelings so that they exert less impact on us. *Acceptance* entails allowing difficult thoughts and feelings to come and go without struggling with them. *Self-as-Context* or *Noticing self* is the perspective from which we can observe and accept all our changing private experiences.

Several studies have found that higher levels of psychological flexibility lead to improved psychological well-being and quality of life (Hayes, 2019). Furthermore, ACT has been found to be beneficial in enhancing student well-being (Brandolin et al., 2023; Räsänen et al., 2016). Referring to the Finnish context of decreased student well-being, Fagerlund and Laakso (2021) put forth that students need skills of resilience and psychological flexibility. Thus, including well-being in the higher education curriculum could help students develop these skills.

In this paper, we will give an example of how foreign language education could play a key role in promoting student well-being in higher education by integrating approaches to communication and human interaction that have been proven to support students' well-being. We suggest that as part of language education, a holistic approach to interaction, such as Bohmian dialogue, might contribute to enhancing well-being among higher education students.

2.3. Bohmian dialogue

The world has become smaller through technological advances, and communication has become quicker, but not better. On the contrary, as David Bohm (1917-1992) pointed out early on, it has become more and more difficult for people and nations to understand each other. Bohm, a quantum physicist and philosopher, approached dialogue with the aim of understanding how thought functions not only in individual minds but also in systems such as societies. Bohmian dialogue practice is an activity in which a group of 15 to 40 people voluntarily meet without an agenda, sit in a circle, and create dialogue. At the beginning, a facilitator might need to catalyze group participation, but the group should become independent of the facilitator as soon as possible. To engage in meaningful dialogue, participants should be able to observe their thoughts, just as they are aware of their bodily reactions. According to Bohm (1996), self-perception of thought is possible in a similar way to how it is possible to be aware of bodily movement. Real dialogue starts to happen when participants are aware of their thought process and the process in the dialogue, and when they trust each other.

Awareness grows as participants in a dialogue group check their assumptions without holding on to or suppressing them but rather letting them be without judgment and without reacting to their thoughts. Nobody defends their views or tries to persuade others; instead, everybody listens to other viewpoints with an open non-reacting mind and with an awareness of their own and the collective thought process merely observing it as if from a distance. Although thoughts can be individual, Bohm (1996) points out that upon closer examination, thoughts are not individual in their general form. People pick them up from the surrounding culture. Just as language is collective, so are thoughts. Therefore, it is meaningful to be able to observe one's thoughts as part of a common pool of thoughts or knowledge that humankind has developed throughout history. When everybody in the group feels accepted and able to participate in dialogue without the need to convince or persuade others, shared common meaning emerges. Sharing meaning about significance, purpose, and value is essential within cultures, but as Bohm pointed out, it has always been a challenge to Western society. Furthermore, Bohm stresses the importance of understanding that a dialogue group is not a therapy group. There is no aim to cure anybody, although that might happen in the process (Bohm, 1996).

2.4. Aim of the study

Based on these observations, Bohmian dialogue, which aims to improve quality of life by improving communication between people, shares many aspects of developing psychological flexibility, which is a key concept in ACT: noticing the

thoughts, emotions and bodily reactions going on in the dialogue, without carrying out the impulses (*Present Moment*). Thoughts are not repressed or followed, they are simply noticed, but not fully identified with (*Present Moment, Defusion*). There is an observer, "I", who is suspending the reaction or action (*Self-as-Context* or *Noticing self*). Values guide one's actions, providing direction and purpose (*values*). Therefore, our goal was to examine whether a university C1 CEFR-level (Common European Framework of Reference for Languages; Council of Europe, 2001) English foreign language course for work-life purposes – *Dialogue: Constructive Talk at Work*, based on Bohmian dialogue – would impact students' well-being, such as contributing to healthy interaction within a group of students and functioning as an intervention that enhances general well-being in the language classroom, thereby also promoting language learning.

Thus, this paper seeks to examine whether general well-being, as measured by university students' life satisfaction and psychological flexibility, could be promoted in a learning and teaching context – in this case, in the context of teaching English as a lingua franca through Bohmian dialogue. In addition, our aim is to explore how students' blog posts portrayed their well-being. The research questions are as follows:

1. Does the dialogue course impact on students' well-being, as measured in terms of life satisfaction and psychological flexibility? (quantitative study)
2. How do the students' reflections in their blog posts depict their well-being, as analyzed using a theoretical framework combining Bohmian dialogue and ACT concepts of well-being? (qualitative study)

We used a mixed-method approach to study the effects of the dialogue course on students' well-being to get a broader understanding of the complex phenomenon in this transdisciplinary study, drawing on research on language education, applied linguistics, and psychology.

3. Methodology

3.1. Recruitment and setting

The data of this study were collected at a Finnish university language center between the second period of the 2018 fall semester and the first period of the 2020 spring semester. During this time frame, seven groups of students (n = 144) took the *Dialogue: Constructive Talk at Work* course, which was an elective, two-credit course with four 45-minute lessons over six successive weeks (24 hours total). During the first session, the teacher informed the students about the research and invited those willing to participate to sign an informed consent form and fill out the self-assessment questionnaires. All students were aware that participating in the study was voluntary and that they could end their participation at any time. Participation did not affect passing the course in any way. The elective dialogue course was open to all degree students.

First, life satisfaction and psychological flexibility levels in a sample of students who took part in the course were examined. Second, the course participants were given a voice through a theory-based content analysis of their blog posts on the course themes and activities shared in the course learning environment. Altogether, 125 students filled out the pre-measurement questionnaires, but only 52 participated in the post-measurement (see Figure 1). For the qualitative part of the study, the students were asked at post-measurement whether they would give permission to allow their reflections in the Moodle course blog to be used anonymously for research purposes. Altogether, 105 students in the seven groups signed the informed consent form. Ultimately, 31 students filled out both the pre- and post-measurements, as well as granted permission to use their reflections on the course topics in the blog posts. The reflections of these 31 students were included in the qualitative analysis of the present study.
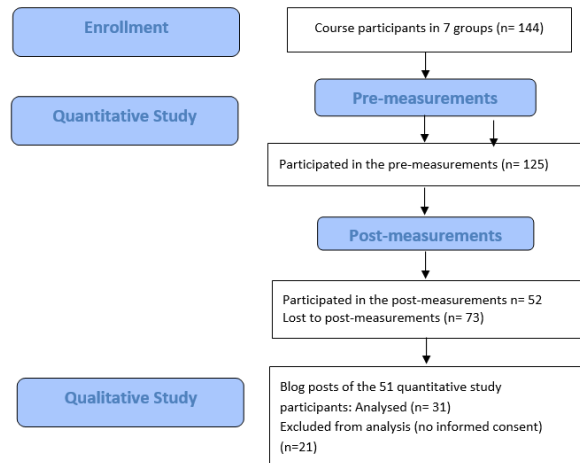
Figure 1
Flow of participants

3.2. Participants

Out of the 125 students who participated in the pre-measurement, 80 (64%) were female and 44 (35.2%) were male. One student refused to answer the binary gender question. The participants' mean age was 24.6 (SD = 5.24). The Finnish students (n = 109, 87.2%) were all degree students. Most international students came from other European countries (n = 8, 6.4%) and Asia (n = 7, 5.6%). Nearly half (n = 58, 46.4%) had studied for three to four years. The participants represented a wide variety of academic fields, but most (n = 37, 29.6%) were studying social sciences. Table 1 summarizes the characteristics of students who participated in both the pre- and post-measurements (n = 52). This student profile was similar to that of the original group of students.

Table 1
Participant characteristics for students who participated in pre- and post- measurements

Baseline characteristics	*(n = 52)*
Age	
M (SD)	24.7 (SD = 5.06)
Min-Max	20-44
Gender	
Female	35 (67.3%)
Male	17 (32.7%)
Years of study	
1-2	15 (28.9%)
3-4	30 (57.6%)
Missing data	7 (13.5%)
Major subject	
Social Sciences	17 (32.7%)
Education	9 (17.3%)
Business and Administrative Sciences	5 (9.6%)
Communication and Information Studies	8 (15.4%)
Mathematics and Computer Science	7 (13.4%)
Humanities	5 (9.6%)
Health Sciences	1 (1.9%)
Area of origin	
Finland	43 (82.7%)
Europe	5 (9.5%)
Asia	3 (5.7%)
South America	1 (1.9%)
Native language	
Finnish	43 (82.7%)
Other	9 (17.3%)

3.3. The Constructive Talk at Work course

The dialogue course was based on Bohm's (1996) dialogue approach and its formulations by Bohm's followers (Ellinor & Gerard, 1998; Isaacs, 1999). The goals of the C1-level course were stated in the course description as follows: After completing the course, the students will know how to use strategies to enhance dialogue and constructive communication at work, understand and know how to overcome barriers to effective communication, and have knowledge and tools to reflect on and develop their own communication skills. The main dialogue themes introduced and practiced during the course were *values*, *suspending judgment, checking assumptions*, *inquiry and reflections*, *listening and voicing*, and *non-verbal communication*. Table 2 provides an overview of the course themes, content, and homework.

Table 2

Structure and format for the course Dialogue: Constructive Talk at Work

Theme	Module content	Home assignment
Session 1: Pre-Assessment	Informed consent Pre-measurements	
Session 1: Course Introduction and Values	Introduction Course goals Bohmian dialogue: An introduction A five-minute mindfulness exercise: A sitting meditation Value card activity: Introducing one's own core values Dialogue on creating teamwork values for the group	Reflection on the session in the course blog Group values Read: Schein (1993). On dialogue, culture, and organizational learning. *Organizational Dynamics, 22*(2), 40–51.
Session 2: Suspension of judgment	Mindfulness exercise Dialogue on Schein's article in small groups and together Becoming aware of one's judging process and inner dialogue Exercises in pairs and small groups: Talking and listening without judgment Check In Practicing dialogue and working on the group task Check Out	Reflection on the session in the course blog Try this: Practicing suspension of judgment (Ellinor & Gerard, 1998, pp. 72–73) Read: Stone, M. (2002). Forgiveness in the workplace. *Industrial and Commercial Training, 34*(7), 278–286.
Session 3: Checking Assumptions	Mindfulness exercise Dialogue on the homework in small groups and all together Becoming aware of one's assumptions Exercises in pairs and small groups: Finishing sentences and having dialogue on automatic assumptions Check In Practicing dialogue and working on the group task Check Out	Reflection on the session in the course blog Try this: Assumption hunting (Ellinor & Gerard, 1998, pp. 91–93)

Table 2 (continued)

Structure and format for the course Dialogue: Constructive Talk at Work

Theme	Module content	Home assignment
Session 4: Inquiry and Reflection	Mindfulness exercise Dialogue on the homework in small groups and all together Becoming aware of the power of questions and reflections in communication and interaction Exercises in pairs and small groups Check In Practicing dialogue and working on the group task Check Out	Reflection on the session in the course blog Try this: Inquiry and opening the field of perception (Ellinor & Gerard, 1998, pp. 116–117)
Session 5: Listening and Voicing	Mindfulness exercise Dialogue on the homework in small groups and all together Becoming aware of different levels of listening (listening to oneself/inner dialogue, another, and collective) and voicing (balance and the dark side of voicing) Exercises in pairs and small groups: Cocreating conversation Check In Practicing dialogue and working on the group task Check Out	Reflection on the session in the course blog Homework on either listening or voicing (what is your challenge?), write it down and reflect on it in your blog post.
Session 6: Nonverbal Communication	Mindfulness exercise Check In Practicing dialogue and finalizing the group task and publishing it in the blog in the course blog Dialogue on the homework task in small groups and all together Nonverbal communication exercises: Music, movement, and collective art Check Out: Giving Presents	Reflection on the session in the course blog Self-assessment: Why do I think I passed the course? Reflect on course goals, requirements, and your contribution to the blog.
Post-measurements	Post-measurements Informed consent on use of the blog posts	

3.4. Measures and analyses

The quantitative part of the study included measurements of life satisfaction and psychological flexibility. Students were asked to report their life satisfaction using the Satisfaction With Life Scale (Diener et al., 1985), comprising five items, each answered on a five-point Likert scale (1 = completely disagree; 5 = completely agree). Higher scores indicate higher satisfaction with life.

The Acceptance and Action Questionnaire for University Students (AAQ-US) measures psychological flexibility/inflexibility in university students (Levin et al., 2019). The AAQ-US comprises 12 items that can be summed up to create a total AAQ-US score (minimum: 12; maximum: 84). Lower scores indicate more psychological flexibility, whereas higher scores indicate greater psychological inflexibility. The AAQ-US is a reliable and valid measure of psychological inflexibility/flexibility among university students (Levin et al., 2019).

Quantitative analyses were conducted using IBM SPSS Statistics 26. The students' satisfaction with life and psychological flexibility levels were examined using means and standard deviations (paired-

samples t-tests) at both measurement times (pre- and post-measurements).

In the qualitative part of the study, the reflections of the course topics in the blog posts by 31 students were analyzed using a direct approach to content analysis (see Hsieh & Shannon, 2005) by creating a theoretical framework that integrated two theoretical approaches: the Bohmian dialogue approach and the ACT Model of Behavior Change

(Hayes et al., 2012). Common categories in the two approaches were recognized, and for the analysis, those categories that overlapped with the dialogue course themes were used to code the sample data from the 31 students' blog reflections. The analysis focused on four main themes from the dialogue course and their link to ACT, as presented in Table 3.

Table 3
Course topics with the theoretical framework

Course Theme and Focus	Link to ACT (Hayes et al., 2012)
Values: Reflecting on one's own values and creating values for group meetings/working together.	Values: Being clear about what you choose to value in your life and acting accordingly (committed action).
Mindfulness: Awareness that allows us to notice what is happening from moment to moment.	Present moment: Paying flexibly attention to what is happening in the present moment.
Suspension of judgment: Becoming aware of one's judgments, including inner dialogue /Suspending carrying out our impulses and suspending our assumptions/ Thoughts are to be observed, rather than fully identified with.	Self-as-Context (Noticing Self): The perspective from which you can observe your changing thoughts (judgments, impulses etc.). Defusion: Seeing each of your thoughts as just one of many ways to think about things. Present moment and Acceptance: Taking a non-judging attitude to your thoughts, emotions and bodily sensations.
Checking Assumptions: Becoming aware of one's assumptions/ Not trying to change or defend anything, just being aware of it.	Self-as-Context (Noticing self): The perspective from which you can observe your changing thoughts (judgments, impulses etc.). Present moment: Taking a non-judging attitude to your thoughts, emotions and bodily sensations.

4. Results

4.1. Quantitative findings: Life satisfaction and psychological flexibility

The quantitative findings revealed that students' satisfaction with life and psychological flexibility did not significantly change between pre-measurement (start of the course) and post-measurement (end of the course). Students' satisfaction at the group level (*mean:* 25.50) was close to "Satisfied "at pre-measurement (26–30 points = Satisfied; Diener et al., 1985) and increased slightly at post-measurement (*mean:* 25.63). However, their psychological flexibility decreased (inflexibility

increased) slightly at post-measurement (*pre mean:* 36.92; *post mean* 37.31), both indicating average psychological flexibility. However, these changes were very small and can be viewed as being within normal variation.

4.2. Qualitative findings: Students' reflections on the course topics

To address the second research question regarding how the students' reflections depicted their well-being, we conducted a comparison of the course topics based on the Bohmian dialogue approach with the ACT concept of psychological flexibility, designed to enhance well-being. It is

important to note that our analysis here does not encompass all the similarities between the course topics and ACT concepts. In this section, we focus on reporting students' reflections on values, mindfulness, judging, and assumptions, as these four aspects are central to psychological flexibility and may consequently contribute to improved well-being.

Values

During the first session, the students were first asked to consider their five core values with the help of value cards, then decide on five values for the whole group that would guide them in working together on a working life-related group assignment that they would brainstorm and implement together through dialogue. The topic of values was reflected on by nearly 84% (n = 26/31) of the students. Most students reflected on the values exercise with appreciation:

The value conversation was, in my opinion, interesting and very inspiring, it was great to hear your ideas about basic values. I myself had been thinking lot's of values lately, so it was good to talk about them. (S2) Then when we talked about our values, we had to analyze ourselves and choose what was the most important values for us. I think that forced us to think deeper in our lives to find our most important values. Personally, it made me analyze my feelings and what I value the most in life. (S13)

Three main aspects came up during the reflections on value dialogue's effects. First, the topic of values affected the atmosphere positively. The students perceived the atmosphere as safe and reported that this made it easy for them to talk within the group; thus, they felt more confident:

To reach this atmosphere of security I think especially the joint establishment of important values did its bit. (S14) On my opinion it was good thing to talk about our values, I think that it was really good way to break the ice. I also liked that we made our group own values, because now it's much easier to come to the class. (S11)

Our first session's topic was values and we discussed of them in little group and also the with the whole group. Dialogue in both the little groups and with the whole group was good and it was comfortable to say anything. (S12)

Choosing and expressing group values together made a meaningful impact on interactions within the group. A feeling of inclusion became possible, and the group also lived according to its values:

Our group had five values: cooperation, respect, humor, responsibility and creativity. I think we respected our values. Our behaviour and group task combine all the values. I am very proud of our group. We worked as a team, we listened and respected each other, we were creative and everybody did their part. (S6).

These values reflections suggest that values had a positive impact on creating a safe and respectful atmosphere in the group. The students not only reflected on what values were important to them individually and as a group but were also able to act in line with their values (committed action) which is congruent with the ACT approach. Earlier research suggests that considering values has some important benefits, including improved academic performance and motivation, coping better with stress and improving intergroup and interpersonal relations (Cohen et al., 2006; Cohen & Sherman, 2014).

Mindfulness

The mindfulness exercise was introduced to the students during the second half of the first session (see Table 3). After that, each session started with a five-minute sitting meditation. Out of the 31 students, nearly 60% (n = 18) made a positive comment about the exercise:

Hopefully everyone else also felted that they are in safe environment to speak without pressure like I felt. One thing that made it possible was that mindfulness exercise, good that tomorrow we start with that. (S2)

I learnt that mindfulness exercises help you to focus on tasks at hand more easily and I will definitely use it in the future as well. (S12)

I loved the meditation exercises we did, it was something different and nicely put one in the mood for some peaceful dialogue and group work. (S31)

Four of the students who viewed mindfulness as beneficial also found it challenging:

I must say that I am surprised how much I enjoy doing the mindfulness exercise. I am so busy with studying and all other stuff, that relaxing and trying to clear my mind, is just what I need now. But I have noticed that I have hard time to let go of my thoughts. I might start saying to myself: "don´t think, relax,   clear your mind" and then I judge myself for not being able to fully commit. I am my biggest judge. (S6)

First we did mindfulness exercise where we sit quietly and focused our breathing. It was pretty hard to clear your mind and just concentrate to your breathing. My thoughts wandered around and I lost my concentration. I hope that I can improve next time! (S10)

These reflections indicate that when reflecting on the mindfulness task, the students became aware of the present moment and also noticed their thinking process. The plan to continue practicing might help promote their psychological flexibility skills.

Judging

The topic of the second session was suspending judgment. A reference was made to the mindfulness exercise that guided the participants to let go of any thoughts that might come up during the sitting meditation. For homework, the students were asked to observe their own judging process during the week. All the students wrote about the theme of judging and demonstrated awareness of their judging process in their reflections. Several (n = 8/31) became more aware of how they judged themselves and others, and how these judgments may lead to negative consequences:

Our homework, paying attention to my judgments made me see that I am the greatest judge of myself. It was very good to notice it so that I can start changing the way I think of myself. When I caught myself thinking negatively of myself, I became ashamed. It was hard to see that I have been actually thinking that way without even noticing! I

want to rather encourage myself than push me down. (29)

From the homework I begin to be more aware of my judging process. On some occasions, I could have a long internal dialogue going on in my head and turn them into self-judgments and judgments of others. My opinions often set in stone. But then, I will feel miserable because self-judgment tends to bring me depression and judging others can ruin the relationships. As a solution, I believe by replacing judgments with curiosity and approaching situations with empathy and compassion will break off irrational opinions and thinking. (S5)

Another frequent way that the students (n = 14/31) reflected on the topic was to describe how their judging process can affect their behavior:

I realized that being judgmental could be very harmful to communication. For example, if I already think that some politician is wrong or stupid or "bad person", I am likely to expect that everything they say is stupid or wrong before I have even listened to them. (S16)

I also found the idea of letting go of one's judgement of others during our meetings important since it usually is the (possibly imagined) judgement of others toward you that might be a hindrance to one's success in a social environment - especially if one must perform or speak in front of an audience. (S31)

Some reflections extended beyond the self and the immediate group:

After the second lesson I started to think why do we judge? What does judging tell about that person who judges? I would like to think that judgement is consequence from some root cause inside us. To find and handle this root cause we could get rid of judging and grow as a human beings. (S7)

The topic of the second lecture was judging. It is hard sometimes not to judge someone, but I think the less we judge, the better place world becomes. That is, if the target of the judgement hasn't done anything to hurt others. I think it is good to judge unwanted behaviour and show that it is not acceptable. I think that a good cure for judgement is self-awareness and meditation. (S14)

The above blog extracts show that the students were noticing their way of thinking and giving

indications that they might change their behavior. This could lead to cognitive defusion, which refers to the ability to create distance between themselves and their thoughts and feelings. Cognitive defusion is one of the six core principles contributing to psychological flexibility.

Assumptions

The topic of assumptions was introduced during the third session. The students were encouraged to become aware of their assumptions and check them, as assumptions often become facts in the mind of the thinker. All the students, except the two who missed the session, reflected on the topic in their blog posts and made two realizations on assumptions. First, there were realizations on how one's own assumptions can affect one's behavior:

For homework I decided to observe my feelings of discomfort and fear. In situations where I got these kinds of feelings I usually had an assumption that there would be negative consequences. These assumptions were mostly based on my past experiences or on someone else's past experience. I feel that my assumptions can hold me back in many situations and make me stressed. (S21)

I try to be more reflective on my perception and why I have certain assumptions about people. By doing this I realized that really often judging starts with my own mind and does have great impact on my mood and reactions. By starting to be more reflective, doing suspension, not reacting emotionally and do instead inquiry it is easier to me to have a good communication and dialog with people. (S17)

Second, there were realizations on how assumptions can affect communication in general:

The theme of the last class was assumptions. I really enjoyed being able to think about this topic and realize how much we end up doing it in our daily lives and how much it impacts our actions and our relationships with other people (S15).

We agreed on the fact that assumptions affect our communication. For example, assumptions about age or gender can have an impact on the way you talk to someone. We often talk to older people

differently than we talk to younger people because of our assumptions (about) them (S27).

A third aspect that came up in the reflections was how sharing one's thoughts about the topic helped in understanding different perspectives:

Understanding dialogue as a process where all the parties involved focus on their underlying assumptions and feelings seems like a good starting point for better understanding both ourselves and thus also others. This in an idea that I've tried to put into practice in my everyday life for some time now. (S23)

However, people would have various dimensions of expression and behaviours in different situation. For example, when meeting their best friends or relatives, silent people might feel comfortable to express their point of views, and thereby possibly becoming talkative at that moment. In short, assumption can help us get familiar with new things or people easily, but it might not be the real case. Therefore, I don't think assumption is totally detrimental to us, but we really have to stay alert on if it leads to a prejudice. (S18)

The above extracts demonstrate once more that the students enjoyed reflecting on their thinking. They were analytical, critical, and even philosophical when noticing their thoughts and feelings. To summarize, engaging with the four dialogue themes aligned with Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) appeared to support students' well-being by enhancing their awareness of personal values, judgments, and assumptions. The mindfulness exercise further contributed by fostering a calm and focused environment for dialogue practice. Figure 2 illustrates the key elements through which the dialogue course may have influenced students' well-being.
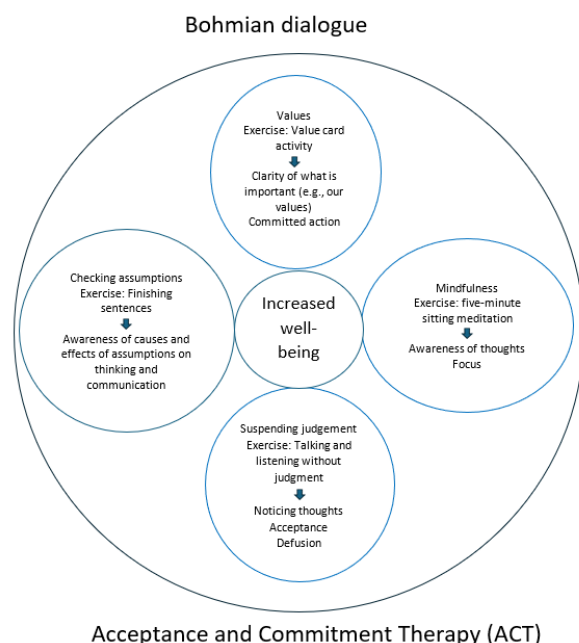
Figure 2
Summary of Bohmian dialogue themes overlapping with ACT, including examples of related activities and observed student outcomes.

5. Discussion

The results from the quantitative analysis – which answered our first research question concerning the impact of the dialogue course on students' well-being, measured in terms of life satisfaction and psychological flexibility – did not indicate any significant changes at the group level. The reason for this could be that the student sample was not clinical and had relatively average psychological flexibility, and because the students expressed a relatively high level of satisfaction with life at pre-measurement. This result aligns with findings from earlier studies, as the average psychological flexibility (AAQ-US) score in a US sample was 41.53 (SD = 13.34), suggesting that the US students reported slightly more psychological *in*flexibility (see Levin et al., 2019). However, the qualitative analysis of the students' blog reflections on the four course themes, values, mindfulness, suspension of judgment, and checking assumptions, completed the picture, indicating that the students' awareness of the four themes increased. It is possible that

increased awareness may have a positive impact on student well-being in the long run.

The student reflections on the first course theme, values, revealed that the dialogue on individual and group values affected the atmosphere positively and created a safe space for dialogue and a feeling of inclusion. Similarly, ACT uses values work with clients, including students, to find direction in life (i.e., what matters the most in life) and it has also been demonstrated that short values exercises can exert positive effects on academic performance (e.g., Cohen et al., 2006). The students' reflections seemed to confirm the benefits of the values exercise in the dialogue group. The feeling of a safe, inclusive atmosphere made it easier for the students to interact with each other in English, as a *lingua franca*. This is important because there is plenty of evidence indicating that students experience anxiety when learning and using a foreign language. For example, in their meta-analysis of research conducted on the relationship between anxiety and second language achievement, Teimouri et al. (2019) found evidence of negative effects from anxiety on language learning. Sharing one's individual values in a group, creating common group values, and respecting these values throughout the dialogue course potentially reduced the students' tension and anxiety. This may have increased the students' well-being when communicating through English in the dialogue group.

Regarding the second course theme, mindfulness, the positive effects from mindfulness practice found in earlier research on university students (Brandolin et al., 2023; de Bruin et al., 2015; Oberski et al., 2015) were found in the students' reflections. Hayes (2019) points out that in ACT, mindfulness exercises are one way of creating a sense of psychological safety and connection with oneself. The students reported that after the sitting meditation at the beginning of each session, they felt less pressure, and it was easier for them to focus and easier to start the dialogue. Although not all students reflected on the mindfulness practice, it is notable that participation in the exercise was voluntary, yet everybody wanted to participate. Both values and being present (mindfulness) are part of the commitment and behavior change

processes in the ACT model (Hayes et al., 2012). The student reflections may indicate some benefits, although the quantitative measurements did not capture the possible budding change.

The themes of suspending judgment and checking assumptions both relate to the ACT concept of noticing self and cognitive fusion (Hayes et al., 2012). The students' reflections show that it was possible for them to realize how they judged themselves in communication situations. In ACT terms, this realization may have made the students aware of cognitive fusion. Cognitive fusion refers to being so tightly stuck in our thoughts, judgments, and evaluations that we become "fused" to them (Livheim et al., 2016). In the state of cognitive fusion, we cannot separate ourselves from our thoughts. We take our thoughts literally, and they start to dominate our behavior (Hayes et al., 2012). One example in English language education would be when a student sticks to the thought that "my English is so bad" and, therefore, avoids situations that require using the language. Becoming aware of their judging processes and assumptions, the students may have started an acceptance process that might lead to *defusion*, in other words, becoming aware that thoughts are just thoughts (Hayes et al., 2011; Hayes et al., 2012). Instead of making judgments about us and other people, we can just examine these judgments and reflect where they come from and how useful they are in helping us live meaningful lives.

Several aspects of Bohmian dialogue were not directly a session theme but still were an integral part of the course approach. These included, for example, an atmosphere of trust, support, and collaboration. The course also developed the students' teamwork skills, which became apparent in reflections such as: "Everyone worked together with everyone. We were equal to each other and open to listen to different ideas. Responsibility showed in willingness to contribute" (S29). Furthermore, the dialogic practice seems to have improved the students' self-confidence: "[--] this course [--] was a great way to boost my confidence, as well as understand the complexity of a good dialogue better" (S26).

One important aspect contributing to well-being in class is the teacher's role. In traditional language classrooms, students are accustomed to being taught by a teacher who is an expert in the language and an authority. In the dialogue course, apart from being the language expert, the language teacher is a facilitator guiding the dialogue process and giving space and agency to students. In Bohmian dialogue, the facilitator's role is not central, but rather the idea is to break away from it (Bohm, 1996). In the dialogue course described in this paper, the teacher introduced the mindfulness exercise, the dialogue themes, and exercises. After that, the teacher simply needed to encourage the students to practice their dialogue skills in English while working together on a group task that they defined themselves. When the students had the space for the dialogue, the teacher's role then became that of an observer: "We did not need a teacher to give us orders but were able to make this project using dialogue" (S29).

This study contains a number of limitations. Regarding the quantitative part, this was not a randomized controlled trial comparing a group of students who participated in a dialogue course with a comparison group. In a real-life teaching context, however, creating a proper quantitative research design is very difficult, if not impossible. The absence of a control group limits the ability to attribute observed outcomes solely to the intervention, as other influencing factors cannot be ruled out. Consequently, conclusions regarding the course's impact should be interpreted with caution. Furthermore, a considerable proportion of students (41.6%) did not complete the post-intervention questionnaires, despite having completed the course. A larger sample with a higher post-measurement response rate would likely yield more accurate findings, as the lack of statistically significant results may be attributable to insufficient statistical power. Future research is needed to validate the effects of the model preliminarily examined in this study. Additionally, the sample was predominantly composed of highly educated female students, which restricts the generalizability of the findings. To enhance external validity, subsequent studies should aim to include a more diverse participant pool, particularly increasing

representation of male students and individuals from varied educational and demographic backgrounds. We also did not employ a relevant well-being construct (e.g., the Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-Being Scale) to measure well-being. Measuring well-being can be done in several ways, and in the present study, we decided to rely on life satisfaction and psychological flexibility measures. Assessing the long-term intervention effects on well-being would require monitoring the effects across several levels of well-being (Kinnunen et al., 2020). In addition to measuring different dimensions and aspects of well-being, the study would have benefited from a course that lasted longer than six weeks. Furthermore, future studies should examine individual differences in more detail. As for the qualitative part of the study, the analysis covered only the four themes described in the theoretical framework (see Table 3). The qualitative analysis indicated potential benefits of the dialogue course. However, to generalize the findings, the study would have benefited from stronger quantitative support. While the qualitative results suggest that the course may support student well-being, a more rigorous study incorporating a broader range of psychological assessments would help clarify the impact of Bohmian dialogue practices within an English language course in higher education.

6. Conclusion

This study offered an example of how student well-being can be supported in an advanced English course in higher education. The dialogue approach used here can be applied to other advanced foreign language courses as well. Bohmian dialogue approach is not culture dependent; rather, the participants co-create their own culture in the dialogue circle. This method allows for the use of various languages as the focus is on enhancing understanding between people without judgment. Therefore, Bohmian dialogue can be utilized in non-European and non-English-dominant contexts. In addition, dialogue exercises may be adapted to various language proficiency levels**,** making the

approach inclusive and accessible. Still, more research is needed to understand how language learning can help develop well-being skills through both language use and learning. English language teaching, in particular, has the potential to enhance students' emotional engagement, openness, and sense of connection. One student reflected this in a blog post: "I have seen only few courses where people are excited and involved also emotionally. One reason why people has been so involved may be openness. On those courses we have talked and shared stories from real life and strong and difficult emotions has been involved. Somehow, I can understand why such course becomes important for many people but how is possible that English course cause similar feeling of good connection." (S30) This quote suggests that university students are open to engaging with emotional content. They are also willing to reflect on well-being in an English course that uses the Bohmian dialogue approach.

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