

**UNIVERSITY OF TARTU  
DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH STUDIES**

**TWO ONLINE LEARNING OBJECTS FOR ESTONIAN  
ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHERS ON  
LGBTQ+ INCLUSIVITY IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE LESSONS  
AND REPHRASING INSTRUCTIONS FOR QUEER-  
FRIENDLY LESSONS**

**MA thesis**

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**TARTU  
2026**

## ABSTRACT

This thesis aims to create online learning objects that provide teachers with the necessary information to feel comfortable addressing LGBTQ+ topics at school and to address possible misconceptions, with everyone in the class feeling respected and seen. The thesis is divided into two main chapters. The first chapter provides an overview of the current situation of students' mental health, as well as the opportunities and potential challenges for increased inclusivity in activity instructions for LGBTQ+ students. The second chapter presents the format, the structure, the content, and the aims for each of the learning objects' chapters.

Keywords: English as a foreign language, LGBTQ+ learners, learning objects for foreign language teachers, safe learning environment, rephrasing instructions

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

LGBTQ+ lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and all other members of the community who do not identify with any of the letters in the acronym

EFL English as a Foreign Language

## INTRODUCTION

State, municipal, and, to a degree, private schools are funded by government-allocated funds (European Commission 2023). The financial dependence on the government means that the ideological leaning of the elected government can reflect itself in schools. Estonia, as a member of the EU, must adhere to the EU's policies on gender and inclusion. The European Institute for Gender Equality (2024: 6-7) reports gender inequality in government, economics, and socially related decisions, and includes Estonia as it is a part of the European Union. In Estonia, the 2025 Gender Equality Index presented that “33 % of women have experienced physical and/or sexual violence by any perpetrator since the age of 15” which is 2% higher than the EU average (European Institute for Gender Equality 2025: 8). Additionally, the public opinion on gender roles in Estonia presented a worrying statistic with younger men believing that it is acceptable for the man to control their wife’s money as well as the presence of gender inequality in childcare and domestic tasks (European Institute for Gender Equality 2025). The presence of inequality between various majority groups also inhibits the establishment of equality between majority and minority groups.

As the European Institute for Gender Equality presents its results according to gender binary, which is the belief that there are two genders (Estonian LGBT Association n.d.), the results reflect the inequality between men and women. In this thesis, the use of binary gender terminology is limited to instances where the data availability requires it. It is recognized that the use of gender binary may further perpetuate concepts that alienate people who identify themselves differently and is thus used minimally. However, it should be noted that gender binary is, to date, the predominant approach to gender used in surveys, academic literature, and mainstream media, which limits the inclusiveness of the language used in the thesis. Considering that gender binary and heteronormativity, which is the automatic belief that everyone is heterosexual (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights – FRA 2009,

MindOut 2021, Prout at Work-Foundation n.d.), are often intertwined, the mentioning of one of the ideas automatically includes the other in this thesis unless told otherwise.

Only 29% of the members of the Estonian parliament (European Institute for Gender Equality 2025: 6), as well as only 11% of the board members of Estonian public broadcasters, are women (European Institute for Gender Equality, 2024: 6-7). Such distribution in the aforementioned workspaces creates a world where parliamentary decisions and decisions, for example, on the easily accessible online content being shared on the internet, are influenced by the opinions and experiences of a majority group. The impact of male-dominated leadership is demonstrated by the findings from the International Civic and Citizenship Education Study (Ümarik et al 2022: 56), which reports that close to half of the eighth-grade boys feel that men are better suited for leading positions in politics, as opposed to 10% of the girls. Since 2016, the opinion of boys on the importance and role of women in politics has been declining, signaling a worrying trend (Ümarik et al 2022: 56). According to Saar (2023), the prior difference in world views between Estonian-speaking and Russian-speaking schools has now turned into a gap between the more liberal girls and more conservative boys. These patterns reveal how the inequality of representation for leading positions is also reflected in the youth of Estonia.

Wescott et al (2024) report, based on various interviews with teachers in Australia, that manfluencers such as Andrew Tate influence the way that boys see society. Manfluencers are men on social media who are “male influencers who espouse misogynistic content and beliefs” (Renström and Bäck 2024: 1787, Lott et al 2025). The inequality is possibly further ingrained by the tradwife movement distributed through various means of online media, such as TikTok or Instagram, according to which a woman is subservient to men and is supposed to take care of the home as well as raise children (Proctor 2023, Woolf et al 2025). In contrast, the man works to provide for the family (Proctor 2023, Woolf et al 2025). Based on Sykes and Hopner

(2024: 455), in some cases, the tradwife movement promotes extreme right-wing opinions, such as “fascism, anti-LGBTQIA+ activism, antisemitism, chauvinism, xenophobia, antiglobalism, nativism, and anti-immigration, as well as racial or ethnic supremacy”. With the conservative opinions of the tradwife movement and the objective of the manfluencers to restore a state where social power is held exclusively by men (Dickel and Evolvi 2023), the hope for a revival of traditional family values and societal roles creates a hostile environment for the LGBTQ+ community.

The existence of a hostile environment for LGBTQ+ people in Estonia can be observed from the survey of LGBTQ+ people from 2023, which was conducted by the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA). The results of the study reveal that in comparison to the rest of the European countries from the survey the situation in Estonia is significantly better with only 9% of the participants reporting physical or sexual violence due to their sexuality or gender identity (FRA 2024a: 66). The percentage of harassments is, however, higher, at 48% (FRA 2024a: 69). The same survey highlighted the issue of LGBTQ+ people not feeling safe in public spaces, by stating that 63% of Estonian participants “avoid holding hands in public with same-sex partners ‘often’ or ‘always’ for fear of being assaulted, threatened, or harassed” (FRA 2024a: 60). A survey of 561 Estonian LGBTQ+ students shows that varying degrees of physical violence is not limited to incidents abroad. 20% of the participants reported having their things damaged, 19% had experienced violence such as pushing due to their sexual orientation or gender expression, and 6% had experienced more severe violence, such as being hit, beaten, or attacked with a weapon (2018).

Bearing in mind the discomfort and danger that the LGBTQ+ community feels everywhere, it is more important than ever that addressing hostile comments or actions against LGBTQ+ youth becomes the norm and that this behavior is also demonstrated to the students by the adults in schools (Estonian LGBT Association 2018). To counteract the possible negative

influence of social media, students should be equipped with the necessary vocabulary and general knowledge to interact with the world around them respectfully and to enable constructive yet safe conversations (Paiz 2019). LGBTQ+ allies, individuals who are not a part of the community but actively support members of the community (Human Rights Campaign 2023, MindOut 2021, Prout at Work-Foundation n.d., We Are Family n.d.), and others in possession of polite and inclusive language create a healthier learning environment for all students. The knowledge of inclusive language is where the foreign language lessons can contribute to a more accepting future. This thesis aims to provide options for modifying the already existing activities through changes in the activity instructions. Moreover, the learning objects aim to provide teachers with the necessary information to feel comfortable addressing LGBTQ+ topics at school and to address possible misconceptions, with everyone in the class feeling respected and seen. This thesis is divided into two chapters. The first chapter provides an overview of the current situation of mental health in students and presents the opportunities and potential challenges for increased inclusivity in activity instructions for LGBTQ+ students. The second chapter centres on the format, the structure, the content, and the aims of the learning objects, and analyses the feedback received from testers.

# 1. THE CURRENT SITUATION OF LGBTQ+ STUDENTS IN SCHOOLS

## 1.1 LGBTQ+ STUDENTS IN SCHOOLS

### 1.1.1 THE STATE OF MENTAL HEALTH IN STUDENTS

School attendance for basic education is compulsory in Estonia (Republic of Estonia Ministry of Education and Research 2019), resulting in young people spending a considerable amount of their weekdays at school. Students spend approximately 1,575 days at school from the time they enter until they complete their basic education. For a young and impressionable person, these days have a lasting impact, whether positive or negative. Since students cannot choose whether they attend school or not, it is crucial that every child feels safe and accepted by teachers and schoolmates.

According to the Estonian LGBT Association's 2018 survey, which included 561 participants, for over half of the students from the survey, a safe environment is not a part of their reality. The online survey by the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (2024b) reports that 28% of the students felt secure about their rights and safety being protected by an adult at school. These numbers are sufficient to signal that this is a topic that still needs more attention. However, it must be noted that the topic of LGBTQ+ students' safety in schools has been getting more attention. An example would be the exhibition "See on fucked" from 2022 in Solaris shopping center, which aimed to highlight the experiences of LGBTQ+ children at school (Estonian LGBT Association 2022). The exhibition was created by the Estonian LGBT Association in collaboration with the company Optimist and artists Karl Joonas Alamaa and Vira Takinada. The exhibition aimed to demonstrate real stories of LGBTQ+ youth behind the numbers in statistics of bullying and violence at school. The stories could be read on shirts placed on colorful paper mannequins in the middle of the shopping center. As a child's time at school should provide them with a stable and positive environment to support their development, avoiding the formation of any prejudices towards minorities should be an

essential part of the education.

The mental health of students is a topic that receives increasing attention, especially considering the COVID-19 epidemic and the subsequent online lessons. According to the Estonian Institute for Health Development's (EIHD) survey and the Estonian Children's Mental Health Research Consortium's survey (ECMS), which both look at the well-being of Estonian children, the school-aged children in Estonia struggle with their mental health to varying degrees. Both surveys present the results of their findings on the topic of health behavior as observed in boys and girls. The gender binary used in both surveys limits the language that can be used in this thesis to present the findings accurately. The EIHD surveys indicate an improvement in the mental health of boys with 2.5% fewer depressive episodes (Oja et al 2019, Piksööt and Oja 2023). Yet, the mental health of girls has worsened, with the number of depressive episodes experienced during a year being 5.1% more (Oja et al 2019, Piksööt and Oja 2023). The difference between teenagers is supported by Yoon et al (2023) and Campbell et al (2021). Yoon et al (2023) also provide a possible explanation for the discrepancy by stating that girls are provided the opportunity to express their feelings through words. In contrast, boys are more likely to express their feelings through physical outbursts and misbehavior (Yoon et al 2023). Overall, the percentage of girls experiencing depressive episodes is higher than that of the boys (ECMS 2024, Oja et al 2019, Piksööt and Oja 2023).

As the mental health and well-being of LGBTQ+ youth in Estonia are not well-researched, data collected from other countries needs to be used. The experiences of LGBTQ+ people do vary based on their location, but the main problems remain the same. When comparing the results of the EIHD study from 2021/2022 and the results of the 2022 survey conducted by The Trevor Project, a non-profit organization aimed at ending suicide amid LGBTQ+ youth, the differences are noticeable. When the percentage of students between 11 and 15 who experience depression is at 23.2% or 45.1% (Piksööt and Oja 2023), the rate of

LGBTQ+ students between 13 and 17 experiencing depression is at 61% (The Trevor Project 2022). Similar results can be observed in the survey conducted by the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in 2021, according to which 52% of LGBTQ+ students reported poor mental health in comparison to the 22% of their heterosexual counterparts. The fact that more LGBTQ+ children are suffering from mental health issues than heterosexual children is also supported by the survey of the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration from 2021/2022 (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services 2023). Despite the geographical and cultural differences, the discrepancy between heterosexual and LGBTQ+ youth's mental health reveals the need for further attention towards inclusivity.

In addition to paragraphs 19 and 20 of the Constitution of the Republic of Estonia (1992), which grant the “right to free self-realisation” as well as “the right to liberty and security of person”, paragraph 28 states that “[e]veryone has the right to the protection of health”. Moreover, the United Nations *Convention on the Rights of the Child* “recognize[s] the right of the child to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health and to facilities for the treatment of illness and rehabilitation of health” (1989). It is thus evident that a child is entitled to the necessary help. In Estonia, people with restricted active legal capacity, which includes children, who are capable of making judgments, can seek out psychiatric help independently (Parliament of Estonia 2006, 2021, Parliament of Estonia Press Service 2021). When examining the availability of mental health support for young people, the survey shows that 60% of the LGBTQ+ youth who sought help were unable to receive it (The Trevor Project 2022). The number has slightly decreased in 2023 to 56% (The Trevor Project 2023). The reality is that in Estonia, there is a shortage of clinical psychologists (Einmaa 2025, Pärli 2024), which again makes it more difficult for anyone to access help. In addition to the inaccessibility, further reasons why LGBTQ+ people may be hesitant to seek help in the healthcare system, according to a study of LGBTQ+ people of various ages in Great Britain from 2018, include the danger

of being outed, the use of discriminatory comments from healthcare workers, the lack of understanding of their specific needs or inappropriate questions and curiosity (Stonewall 2018). Even though this thesis focuses on LGBTQ+ youth in Estonia, the problems faced by LGBTQ+ adults in healthcare would likely also exist for minors.

As the general attitudes are often reflected in the way laws are created or modified, one way of relating these results to the situation in Estonia is by comparing the legalization of same-sex marriage with other countries. Parliament representatives are elected by the people, which means that the decisions made by the parliament should reflect the beliefs of the people. Gay marriage was legalized in England and Wales in 2013 (Conservative and Liberal Democrat coalition government 2013), whereas the change to the laws allowing gay marriage in Estonia was approved in 2023 (ERR 2023). The 10-year difference gives reason to believe that the problems noted in 2018 in Great Britain are likely to be present in Estonia in 2025.

The 2021 U.S. Surgeon General's Advisory on the mental health of young people notes LGBTQ+ youth are at increased risk for mental health issues during the pandemic due to their loss of access to services and support they may have received at school (Office of the Surgeon General 2021). The prior observation signals that supportive schools play a significant role in the mental health of young people and that the loss or complete absence of these types of support systems has a damaging effect on the students. Accessing the necessary safe and professional support outside of school is often very difficult for LGBTQ+ youth. Thus, it is essential to create a school environment where all students, including LGBTQ+ students, feel safe enough to ask for and receive help when needed.

### 1.1.2 THE IMPORTANCE OF INCLUSIVITY

Considering the rise of far-right politics in Europe (Kassam 2025), it is understandable why people within the LGBTQ+ community would feel uneasy. Thus, it should be, particularly

now, unacceptable to ignore or overlook the fact that many LGBTQ+ students do not feel safe at school, as this could result in varying levels of bullying and the use of derogatory terms at school remaining unaddressed. In addition, invisibility within the school environment is reportedly another factor that makes LGBTQ+ students feel unwelcome or unimportant in that space (Page 2017, Estonian LGBT Association 2018, Nemi Neto 2018). Bullying in its various forms, along with a discriminatory learning environment, negatively impacts a child. A significant result of bullying and discrimination in the school context is avoidance of any school-related activities, which include after-school activities and classroom learning (United Nations Free & Equal 2017, Estonian LGBT Association 2018). Children who have experienced bullying or any discriminatory actions are more likely to achieve lower academic results, which then goes on to affect their future possibilities negatively (United Nations Free & Equal 2017). Thus, the acknowledgment of possible shortcomings in schools leads to an equal opportunity for future success for all students.

Bullying can take various forms, such as the use of derogatory language by teachers or students and physical altercations of varying severity (Estonian LGBT Association 2018, Patterson 2013). These harmful ways of indicating non-acceptance will lead to a higher likelihood of the child developing severe mental health issues, some of them being “anxiety, fear, stress, loss of confidence, low self-esteem, loneliness, self-harm, depression and suicide” (United Nations Free & Equal 2017: 2). According to the Trevor Project, the LGBTQ+ youth report a range of negative experiences at school: 53% stated that they were “verbally harassed because people thought [they were] LGBTQ”; 20% “experienced unwanted sexual contact because people thought [they were] LGBTQ”; 15% “believe[d they were] disciplined more harshly because teachers/staff thought [they were] LGBTQ”; 12% “left school because the mistreatment was so bad”; and 9% were “physically attacked because people thought [they were] LGBTQ” (2023: 14). The examples provided reveal the severity of the issue.

People and their worldviews seem to be more accepting nowadays than they were 50, 20, or even 10 years ago. As of 2023, same-sex marriage is legal in Estonia, and with 55 members of the parliament voting for and 34 against this amendment, it is a sign of improvement (ERR 2023). The legalization of same-sex marriage, however, has not removed the very real sense of danger that LGBTQ+ students feel during their everyday lives. 37% of LGBTQ+ people of all ages reported “experience[ing] interventions to have their sexual orientation or gender identity changed” (FRA 2024a: 93). For a young person who lacks freedoms that come with financial and legal independence, living with such psychological abuse can have a lasting impact. Should similar situations occur in schools, students are left with no space to be themselves and feel truly safe.

As making children feel safe at school requires the cooperation of the entire school, it may seem like something that should begin on the administrative level. However, foreign language teachers can also start the process of developing a more accepting and inclusive school that is safe for everyone. Kaiser (2017) and Paiz (2019) both agree that, for the children to be able to safely and respectfully discuss any LGBTQ+ topics, they must have the language for it. For respectful discussions, teaching the differences between the language used for expressing opinions and the language for insults is required (Bollas 2021). An example of the necessary respectful language is the normalization of gender-neutral language by the teacher’s demonstrations or by providing a space for the use of gender-neutral pronouns (Tarrayo 2023, Tarrayo and Salonga 2023). Covering the issues in foreign language lessons allows for the LGBTQ+ students to find and express their identity in the foreign language environment, while also providing other students the basis for any future respectful and informed encounters with members of the LGBTQ+ community or LGBTQ+ issues (Paiz 2019, Nemi Neto 2018). Thus, the importance of the contribution of each teacher is of consequence.

Flynn et al (2024) report the ability to converse with people safely as one of the causes

for positive emotions among LGBTQ+ youth. Safe and respectful conversations also include LGBTQ+ inclusive or gender affirming language, such as using the chosen name of the person or using correct pronouns (Flynn et al 2024). Other causes for joy stated by Flynn et al (2024) are the positive representation of the LGBTQ+ community in the media, as well as the interest and openness of non-LGBTQ+ family or friends in consuming media around LGBTQ+ topics. Textbooks and workbooks, which belong to print media and are often consumed by students, are intended to assist the teacher by saving time on creating all the materials used in the lesson. With the need for positive examples, there are multiple studies (Paiz 2019, Ruiz-Cecilia et al 2021, Singh et al 2025, Trinh and Tinker Sachs 2024) signaling the lack of LGBTQ+ inclusive examples in textbooks. According to Paiz (2019), Ruiz-Cecilia et al (2021), Singh et al (2025), as well as Trinh and Tinker Sachs (2024), the EFL books include examples of traditional families with a mother and a father and more traditional gender roles and gender expressions. For students relying on the media for positive reassurance, having teachers as examples of authority teaching with books without LGBTQ+ examples may signal to LGBTQ+ students that they are unimportant and thus invisible or even that people of authority disapprove of their identity. According to Bollas (2021), the lack of LGBTQ+ examples will leave the students lacking an ideal in the foreign language to aspire to. The lack of examples will decrease the motivation of the students and their success in language learning (Bollas 2021).

Although LGBTQ+-related topics could and should be covered by foreign language teachers in their lessons, not all the responsibility can be placed on the teachers. Commercial publishers are also responsible for any lack of inclusivity in learning materials (Paiz 2018). Introducing inclusive materials in foreign language lessons is crucial as heterosexuality is the automatically perceived sexuality in the classroom (Paiz 2018). Moreover, for many textbooks, the gender binary is still the predominant or even only language used, leading to no options for gender inclusivity (Ulla and Paiz 2023). The lack of inclusive materials results in the fact that,

the few times that LGBTQ+ related topics are covered in the lessons, they either knowingly or unknowingly reinforce the negative stereotypes around the topic due to the lack of informative materials to support the teachers (Paiz 2018). Similar situations of unknowing reinforcement of stereotypes to Paiz (2018) were observed during the Estonian LGBT Association survey (2018), according to which nearly half of the participants stated that LGBTQ+ topics were either never addressed in their school or had been presented in a negative light. This finding is supported by the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights' survey (2024b), based on which half of the Estonian participants did not cover any LGBTQ+ topics at school. Hence, to support the teachers, it is also the responsibility of publishers to assist the development of inclusive teaching by providing the materials.

As education is vital for any child to ensure a successful foundation for their future, the classroom and school in general should not be a place that a young person avoids due to bullying (United Nations Free & Equal 2017, Estonian LGBT Association 2018). Despite the Estonian LGBT Association's 2018 survey's results being now seven years old, it is still unlikely that the problem of safety for LGBTQ+ students in schools has entirely disappeared. It is, therefore, necessary for the school administration as well as for the teachers to think of ways to make the school and the classroom a safe space for everyone.

### 1.1.3 OPPORTUNITIES FOR IMPROVEMENT

#### 1.1.3.1 IMPROVEMENT WITHIN THE SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT IN GENERAL

Various studies (Estonian LGBT Association 2018, Patterson 2013, Kaiser 2017, Paiz 2019) show that there are ways to improve inclusiveness and make LGBTQ+ or any other minority students feel more accepted. The Estonian LGBT Association (2018) and Patterson (2013) suggest that one way of making LGBTQ+ students feel more comfortable is by establishing laws, rules, or guidelines that have been agreed upon and have been made official.

Formally banning any bullying and discrimination based on gender or sexuality provides students with a feeling of safety and offers them a framework they can rely on for protection.

In addition to rules, laws, and guidelines, there are other ways for schools to support all their students. According to the Estonian LGBT Association (2018), creating a safe space requires involvement and support from all staff members. The school management, guard, medical staff, and teachers can create a secure environment by using inclusive and neutral language when addressing LGBTQ+ topics (Estonian LGBT Association 2018). This kind of support helps to increase confidence and reduce depression rates among LGBTQ+ students (Estonian LGBT Association 2018). When a teacher or other staff member normalizes LGBTQ+ inclusive language, it supports LGBTQ+ students by creating a space of inclusivity, which an LGBTQ+ student would not feel comfortable enough to establish on their own (Kaiser 2017, Tarrayo 2023).

Another way to enhance the sense of safety among LGBTQ+ students is by creating safe spaces where they can express themselves and be talked to using inclusive language (Tarrayo 2023). As noted above, it is essential to teach LGBTQ+ related vocabulary to children because this allows them to explore their questions, ideas, and their identities in a way that does not discriminate against any party (Kaiser 2017, Paiz 2019). Healthy conversations among diverse groups and not staying only within one's own group are the basis for a safe school environment (Dentato et al 2016). Patterson (2013) suggests that various clubs or after-school activities for LGBTQ+ children or their allies offer children safe spaces to discuss their experiences with people who can relate to or sympathize with them.

There are many different minority groups whose issues are important and should be discussed actively. The multitude of minority groups can create a competition for visibility among all the various communities and their problems, and thus, lead to topics such as sexuality and gender identity receiving less attention than they need (Ferfolja and Robinson 2008). The

strive towards awareness emphasizes the importance of visibility for all minorities to foster a sense of belonging (Page 2017). In the context of Anglo-American culture in particular, it is important not to address topics such as disability, race, alternative family models, gender, and sexuality only during specific times such as Pride Month or Black History Month (Barnes and Carlile 2018). Such limited attention alienates minorities further as it presents these topics as issues which, in turn, makes the minority groups stand out more and creates more negativity around the topics (Barnes and Carlile 2018). A similar concern is raised by Moore (2020: 122), who considers “[h]eteronormative marginalization” as a phenomenon that can occur when educational materials attempt to create inclusivity by including “non-heterosexual representations but do so in a way that frames them as essentialized, potentially controversial, and/or rare”, thus unintentionally potentially achieving the opposite.

#### 1.1.3.2 IMPROVEMENTS WITHIN A LANGUAGE LESSON

When teaching a language, teachers may unknowingly reinforce binary or heteronormative language usage. One example is the use of gendered third-person singular pronouns she/her and he/him (Bollas 2021). Moore (2016: 96) points out the need to introduce students not only to “linguistic competency” but also to “sociolinguistic competency” because this can help to avoid unnecessary discomfort on the part of the student and allows them also to use a more gender-neutral pronoun, such as the singular they/them. Another example for the use of binary language in a foreign language lesson is using the phrase “ladies and gentlemen” (Rhodes 2019:164) or “boys and girls” (Barnes and Carlile 2018: 74). Heteronormativity can manifest itself also in various instructions and typical foreign language activities, for example, discussions on dream partners, division into groups based on the students’ gender, or exchanges on the topic of free-time activities, which can lead to students feeling the need to lie as they are afraid of others learning about their sexual orientation or gender (Kaiser 2017). Within this

thesis, tasks are means of language learning where the primary focus is on the content, not on the form of the language used (Shehadeh 2024). According to Shehadeh, tasks also include multiple language skills, practice authentic communication, and include “high-order [...] thinking skills” (2024: 8-9) as presented in Bloom’s Taxonomy (Bloom et al 1956). Exercises are defined in this thesis as language learning instruments that focus on the form of the language used and target a single language skill and “low- [...] order thinking skills” (Shehadeh 2024: 8-9). In this thesis, the term activities is used as a general term for both tasks and exercises. To avoid reinforcing gender binary, as suggested by Rhodes (2019:164), one could use more inclusive, non-gender-specific language, such as “people” or “folks”. These small changes can have a significant impact on LGBTQ+ students since they signal that everyone is welcome and accepted in the classroom.

Page (2017: 682) suggests “queering the classics or engaging the closeted canon” to diversify EFL lessons. This approach allows the teacher to use authors and literary works that they are already familiar with and have worked with, allowing them to use already existing materials (Page 2017). This approach would mean that in the case of authors such as Oscar Wilde and Emily Dickinson or literary works such as J. D. Salinger’s *The Catcher in the Rye*, topics connected to gender and sexuality are not avoided but added to the conversation (Page 2017). Analyzing literary works through the lens of sexuality and gender is beneficial to everyone in the class because it increases the visibility of the topic (Page 2017). Additionally, introducing students to new perspectives allows them to develop their critical thinking skills (Tarrayo and Salonga 2023). The inclusion of gender- and sexuality-related topics amongst other issues in analyzing literary works helps to remove their stigmatization.

Asking and answering questions in pairs or small groups to practice comprehension and language production can be found in various textbooks and workbooks. As it is often easier for people to talk about themselves, many of these questions include a personal element. However,

Rhodes (2019) states that adult LGBTQ+ foreign language learners feel compelled to keep personal information hidden from the rest of the class out of fear of being rejected. This is supported by Kaiser (2017), who states that some LGBTQ+ students feel the need to lie in the lesson to avoid outing themselves, and by Moore (2016), who observed students being annoyed when asked personal questions they could not answer truthfully. Rhodes (2019) highlighted that maintaining the secrecy about their sexuality is especially difficult because of the emphasis on communication in foreign language lessons. As a result, seemingly easy tasks, such as answering questions about one's life, can become much more difficult for LGBTQ+ students. Nelson (2009) places the responsibility on the teachers and material developers to create activities that allow for, but do not require, the inclusion of personal information. No activities or questions should force the students into "a confessional mode" (Nelson 2009:214) where the only options are either to lie or not participate. Inclusive activities should allow students who, for various reasons, prefer not to share personal details to still participate without having to lie.

Feeling seen and safe positively influences what a student can achieve (Barnes and Carlile 2018). To establish visibility and safety, it is important not to ignore topics such as gender because understanding different words, their impact on others, and how to be respectful in the target language creates a space for diversity (Banegas and Govender 2022). Even a small change can improve how LGBTQ+ students feel in the classroom.

#### 1.1.4 POTENTIAL CHALLENGES

To include and teach LGBTQ+ related topics, a teacher must either be competent in the topics or have adequate materials that the teacher can depend on. Banegas et al (2020) and Tarrayo and Salonga (2023) present teachers' lack of understanding of the topic as one of the possible challenges in incorporating LGBTQ+ issues in foreign language lessons. According to Ulla and Paiz (2023) and Tarrayo and Salonga (2023), teachers reported either receiving no

teacher training on LGBTQ+ topics or insufficient training for them to feel comfortable covering the topics in lessons. Without the reassurance of any materials or knowledge on the topic, it is rational that teachers do not feel comfortable or prepared for the ensuing arguments (Tarrayo et al 2021) or discussions. With the already extensive workload of the teachers (Paiz 2018, Banegas et al 2020), demanding teachers to educate themselves on the topic and requiring them to create materials will considerably hinder any progress.

An inclusive classroom should be a safe place for everyone. Bollas (2021) concurs that heteronormativity in a foreign language lesson can lead to adverse outcomes in how successful LGBTQ+ students are in language acquisition. To achieve inclusivity, it is also vital to consider balance when addressing heteronormativity since the exclusion of all heteronormative examples can lead to a counterproductive result (Bollas 2021). Thus, a teacher should include heterosexual but also LGBTQ+ examples to ensure that all students in the classroom have an ideal in the foreign language to work toward. Moreover, there may be students of various backgrounds in one classroom, and not all the students may approve of LGBTQ+ examples. Alternatively, Barnes and Carlile (2018) and Moore (2020) both state that the inclusion of LGBTQ+ topics and their presentation as problematic issues further establish LGBTQ+ topics as negative or controversial. To minimize any possible conflicts, an LGBT+ education charity in the UK called Schools OUT has produced the “VisiAble Method” (the classroom 2026a). According to the “VisiAble Method,” the first step is “Usualising,” which means that the learner is introduced slowly and indirectly to the topic, but no in-depth knowledge is required (the classroom 2026b). As children learn based on the examples of the adults or figures of authority around them, the frequent inclusion of LGBTQ+ examples teaches the student implicit acceptance and acclimatizes the students to the topic (the classroom 2026b). The second step, “Actualising,” includes the examination of the topic explicitly (the classroom 2026c). The balance between heterosexual and LGBTQ+ examples, as well as the progressive and slow

inclusion of LGBTQ+ topics in lessons, should decrease conflicts within classrooms.

## 1.2 MAKING INSTRUCTIONS MORE LGBTQ+ INCLUSIVE

### 1.2.1 THE BASIS FOR INSTRUCTIONS

It is challenging to find clear guidelines on how to create adequate activity instructions. As a result, teachers form instructions based on their knowledge and preferences. Nevertheless, there are some key principles to keep in mind when preparing to instruct students before activities.

To successfully give instructions, a teacher must first be aware of the goals they are trying to achieve. Goals are typically set by teachers when creating the activities, which, according to Goodwin et al (2022), makes the goals more impersonal and therefore less effective for the student. The importance and effectiveness of students creating their own goals is also supported by Locke and Latham (2019). Allowing every student in the group to develop their own goals is not always realistic, but it may be more profitable, especially in the case of less motivated students, to guide them to the goals and not impose the goals on them (Goodwin et al 2022). As students sometimes tend to set unrealistic goals for themselves, it is the teacher's role to remind the students and themselves that the effectiveness of the goals and the learning process does not depend on how ambitious the goals are (Goodwin et al 2022). Effective instructions are, therefore, based on having a goal and allowing for students' input as much as possible to help the students feel like they are included in the learning process, which may help with learning motivation and effectiveness.

It is difficult for a student to understand what their teacher expects if the goals set are too general (Goodwin et al 2022, Gregory et al 2015, Locke and Latham 2019, Midgette et al 2008). As effective learning requires students' input, it is essential for students that they understand clearly what they are expected to do, how they should do it, and how they know

they have met the expectations (Goodwin et al 2022, Gregory et al 2015). The teacher should also acknowledge that verbal or written instructions by themselves may not be sufficient for all students. An effective strategy to ensure that everyone understands the goals equally is to demonstrate the activities to the students (Goodwin et al 2022). Students may eventually figure out what is expected through trial and error, but this approach is ineffective and may result in missing some goals (Goodwin et al 2022). The clarity of the instructions can also be influenced by the language used by the teacher (Gregory et al 2015). The use of subject-related terminology is not problematic because the automatic recall of concepts from one word or phrase helps the student to concentrate on applying that information, for example, to analysis or discussions (Goodwin et al 2022).

Yet, it should be kept in mind that many of the mental processes and recall of concepts that come automatically to adults may not be known to students, meaning that it is the teacher's role to guide the students with the help of clear instructions (Goodwin et al 2022). In some cases, this may require dividing the learning process into smaller parts to ensure that the student is successful (Goodwin et al 2022). As mentioned above, providing clear goals as well as specific written and verbal instructions in a language that the students understand well ensures the students' success in activity completion.

Almost every teacher has experienced the frustration of having to repeat instructions multiple times because students are not paying attention, as the topic does not interest them. It is also not uncommon for a student to listen to the instructions but then do something entirely different due to a lack of motivation to focus on what is expected. As a teacher and an adult, it may be challenging to grasp the students' interests, which can lead to activities that are based on the teachers' interests as opposed to the students' (Goodwin et al 2022). This may cause feelings of disappointment when their planned activities or lessons do not evoke the same emotions in their students. According to Gregory et al (2015) and Goodwin et al (2022),

creating a personal connection with the topic increases students' motivation and their commitment to the learning process, which in turn contributes to academic achievements as much as teaching quality. Gregory et al (2015: 98) introduce the idea/concept of "student-centered focus" in designing activities, lessons, or curricula, which means focusing on "how it can support *learning* rather than how it can make sure *teaching* happens".

Activity instructions are highly dependent on the activity and the goals it should achieve. Thus, it is important first to define the goals and the necessary steps to achieve these goals before focusing on how to phrase the instructions. Allowing for a degree of personalization (Goodwin et al 2022, Locke and Latham 2019) as well as considering the students' interests in creating the goals (Goodwin et al 2022, Gregory et al 2015), increases their effectiveness. The goals are much more achievable when they are clearly defined and ensure that students understand what is expected of them (Goodwin et al 2022, Gregory et al 2015, Locke and Latham 2019, Midgette et al 2008). Clarity can also be influenced by the language used (Gregory et al 2015) or by a lack of guidance on the appropriate process for completing the activity (Goodwin et al 2022). All these aspects contribute to students being motivated to pay attention and to participate in an activity when they understand what is expected of them and they feel like their efforts matter.

### 1.2.2 FORMULATION OF INSTRUCTIONS TO INCREASE INCLUSIVITY

Teachers often rely on textbooks and workbooks to source materials for their lessons. A problem arises when these resources are not created with different minorities in mind. The results of the Estonian LGBT Association survey (2018) further support this concern by stating that almost half the participants had either never experienced lessons where LGBTQ+ topics were covered or had encountered lessons where these topics were covered in a neutral or negative light. Paiz (2017) suggests that one reason larger publishers have not focused more on

inclusion is financial. It would not be as profitable for bigger publishers to diversify their materials (Paiz 2018). This leaves a teacher, who usually is pressed for time (Paiz 2018), in a position where they can either ignore the issue, hope to find materials online, or create their own materials.

For the purpose of creating activities that do not require the LGBTQ+ students to share anything that they are uncomfortable with (Kaiser 2017, Moore 2016, Rhodes 2019) and that include the students' interests for increased effectiveness (Goodwin et al 2022, Gregory et al 2015), answering questions as a fictional character that everyone knows well, instead of answering the questions about oneself, may be a solution for the situation. As the aim of many activities is to get the students to talk in the target language as well as to be more engaged and contribute more, allowing the students to talk about something that they like will help with that. This can be achieved by instructing the students to answer questions either by enabling them to choose the characters or by having the teacher choose the characters. For this to be successful, a teacher must know their students and their interests.

Alzubi et al (2025) studied the effectiveness of collaborative learning in improving students' speaking skills. They found that practicing talking in groups can increase students' confidence, make them feel more comfortable, and enhance the sense of belonging (Alzubi et al 2025). Answering questions in pairs or as a group as characters that everyone is familiar with, or likes, combines all the following criteria: collaborative learning to increase the feeling of belonging (Alzubi et al 2025), the inclusion of personal interests to increase motivation (Goodwin et al 2022, Gregory et al 2015), and the practice of English through talking. As these adaptations only require changing the instructions, it is a good option for creating a more inclusive learning environment for everyone.

Most activity instructions are provided by teachers, meaning that the teachers model a specific type of language use. An example of a teacher influencing the kind of language being

used in the lesson can take place when dividing students into groups, during which a teacher may unknowingly reinforce binary or heteronormative language by asking the students to find a partner of the “opposite gender/.../” (Barnes and Carlile 2018: 74). The solution to these situations is to avoid using gendered words (Rhodes 2019). This means that instead of using “boys and girls”, a teacher would refer to them as “students” (Barnes and Carlile 2018: 74) or use words such as “people” or “folks” (Rhodes 2019:164). It is also possible that the student in the classroom may not identify as LGBTQ+ themselves, but someone in their family does. As the topic of family is a frequent topic of classroom discussion, teachers should use inclusive language such as “parents or carers” instead of words such as “mums and dads” (Barnes and Carlile 2018: 74). In addition to creating a more accepting environment for LGBTQ+ families, it also acknowledges the diversity of family structures.

Textbooks and workbooks often function as the central part of the EFL teaching process in schools, which inevitably increases the importance of the language used in textbooks and workbooks. As school should be a safe space, where children can learn about the different kinds of people that exist, helping the students to grow into nondiscriminatory people (Paiz 2019), the materials should support these efforts. Sadly, this is not often the case due to, for example, the lack of LGBTQ+ representation (Jehle et al 2024, Moore 2020, Paiz 2018) or also the representation of gender stereotypes (Jehle et al 2024). Since many textbooks are created using the gender binary (Jehle et al 2024), this is also the language that will be used currently around this topic. Jehle et al (2024) found in a study that gender stereotypes can still be observed in various European textbooks, for example, in the choice of jobs that the characters in the tasks are pictured, which suggests to the students that certain roles are better suited for a specific gender (Jehle et al 2024). The continued portrayal of characters that are based on gender stereotypes can influence the beliefs of a child (Kneeskern and Reeder 2022). In these situations, it is up to the teacher to notice these stereotypes and to make sure that the stereotypes

are not perpetuated. A way of doing this is by providing examples of “counter-stereotypical role models” (Jehle et al 2024: 15). By identifying and addressing stereotypes in the learning materials, teachers can support students in critical thinking and acceptance.

As *I love English* textbooks are widely used in Estonian schools, they provide excellent examples for various improvement opportunities. The need for positive and diverse role models can be observed in the *I love English 4* (Kurm and Soolepp 2015) chapter that covers the topic of doing things yourself, where it is only girls that are pictured knitting and sewing dresses, while only boys are used in a dialogue on the subject of making a kite and later in the chapter are pictured with the kites (Kurm and Soolepp 2015: 18-19, 22).

Both Kätlin Lehiste (2014) and Roosi Talviku (2015) have analyzed the topic of gender in the *I love English 5* textbook by Kurm and Soolepp from 2008 in their Master’s theses. Lehiste (2014) and Talviku (2015) both state that, in comparison to other EFL textbooks made in Estonia, *I love English 5* includes more gender-neutral characters. Despite the *I love English 5* textbook used for this thesis being published in 2016, the findings from Lehiste (2014) and Talviku (2015) still apply. However, the ILE 5 textbook from 2016 also includes examples of gender-neutral characters, such as “ticket seller” (Kurm and Soolepp 2016:54), “Vikings” (Kurm and Soolepp 2016:31-32), “farmers” (Kurm and Soolepp 2016:31), “travelers” (Kurm and Soolepp 2016:32), and “seller” (Kurm and Soolepp 2016:106), which are accompanied by pictures or characters with gendered appearances. For example, the text including the gender-neutral characters “Vikings”, “farmers”, and “travelers” is next to pictures of Vikings who could be characterized as more traditionally male based on their beards and moustaches (Kurm and Soolepp 2016:31-32). In like manner, the “ticket seller” (Kurm and Soolepp 2016:54) and “seller” (Kurm and Soolepp 2016:106) are next to pictures of more stereotypically female-looking individuals. It is possible that the individuals pictured do not follow the more stereotypical gender expressions, and thus the more feminine-looking “ticker seller” (Kurm and

Soolepp 2016:54) and “seller” (Kurm and Soolepp 2016:106) with their long hair may instead identify as gender neutral. However, for 6<sup>th</sup> or 7<sup>th</sup>-grade students, expecting all of them to notice and understand these nuances may not be realistic.

Other examples of gender roles also include that women are presented as teachers, actresses, and salespeople, while men are represented as doctors, 3D artists, cooks, and engineers (Kurm and Soolepp 2015: 23, 39, 96, 100-101). To diversify the role models provided in *I love English 4* (Kurm and Soolepp 2015), the teachers could present the students with research opportunities, for example, on famous teachers, engineers, cooks, doctors, and 3D artists, while emphasizing the requirement of examples from various genders. This would guide the students towards a future of endless possibilities.

All the abovementioned changes require that a teacher analyze the materials that they use in their lessons by focusing on LGBTQ+ inclusivity. Some of the changes that can be done are the inclusion of exercises, where a student does not have to include any personal information since not everyone feels safe to do so (Kaiser 2017, Moore 2016, Rhodes 2019), paying attention to the words one uses (Barnes and Carlile 2018, Rhodes 2019) and addressing gender stereotypes and providing good alternative role models for everyone (Jehle et al 2024). As the visibility of LGBTQ+ topics is vital in creating a feeling of belonging (Estonian LGBT Union 2018, Nemi Neto 2018, Page 2017), making these changes will create a positive and welcoming learning environment not only for LGBTQ+ students but for everybody.

## 2. CREATION OF TWO ONLINE LEARNING OBJECTS FOR EFL TEACHERS

The link to access the two learning objects created as a part of this thesis can be found under Appendix 1.

### 2.1 ONLINE LEARNING OBJECTS

#### 2.1.1 ONLINE LEARNING OBJECTS' FORMAT

The success of learning objects is dependent on how user-friendly they are. As the teaching and learning process today is heavily entwined with the computer and the internet, computers have embedded themselves into education to the degree that students as well as teachers use various electronic devices daily. This frequent use of devices, such as computers, tablets, phones, etc., is a reason for creating online learning objects instead of in-person courses. Making the learning objects easily accessible will hopefully help spread this information to as many teachers as possible.

The chosen platform for the learning objects is Google Sites due to two main reasons. Firstly, creating a website is easily and freely accessible to anyone with a Google account. After the website has been published and set as public, the website is accessible without a Google account. Secondly, it is easy to work with even without previous experience in designing websites. All the pictures added are free stock photos or royalty-free images taken from either *pixels* or *Unsplash*. The creators of the cover photos are provided under references. The creators of all other used pictures are accessible by clicking on the image, which is also offered under references. Both learning objects are accessible within one webpage because having to switch between different sites or having to look up and find the various sites is tedious for the user. An unpleasant user experience may distract the user from the content of the page. Furthermore, it may lead to the user not finishing both learning objects and thus leaving the website without having received any or minimal information. The examples for practice purposes have been chosen from *I love English 4* (Kurm and Soolepp 2015) because the textbooks from this series

are widely used in Estonia and because this book is aimed at sixth-grade students who are more aware of gender and sexuality than younger students.

### 2.1.2 LEARNING OBJECTS' STRUCTURE

Both learning objects are structured based on Gagné, Briggs, and Wager's "Principles of Instructional Design." The reasoning behind choosing this specific structure is the fact that Gagné and his lesson structuring is taught to students as a part of the Teacher of Foreign Languages studies, meaning this is the structure that I am most familiar with and have used the most during my own teaching and lesson planning. According to Gagné et al (1992), the learning process should be made up of nine instructional events, which ensure that the learner is present with their thoughts, is making connections based on their prior knowledge, retains the new information, revises the learnt knowledge, and can receive feedback.

By following Gagné et al (1992), the first step of the learning object deals with gaining the attention of the learner. One suggested way of doing that is by asking questions that are connected to the interests of the learner (Gagné et al 1992). As these learning objects are mainly aimed at foreign language teachers who feel like their knowledge on LGBTQ+ topics is not sufficient, and who would like to support their LGBTQ+ students more, the common interest will be connected to the topic of English as a foreign language lessons and LGBTQ+ inclusive language. Trying to appeal to the learners' more personal interests is, in this case, impossible.

The next step in structuring the learning objectives is making sure that the learner is aware of the objectives, as this helps them to understand what is expected of them (Gagné et al 1992). However, as the learning objects include more than one objective, it is advised to additionally form a goal to ensure that the learner knows what they are working towards and when they have achieved it (Gagné et al 1992). This means that at the beginning of each learning object, there will be clearly stated objectives that will lead towards a general goal.

The third stage, according to Gagné et al (1992), is the process of accessing or recalling any previous knowledge that the learner may have within the topic. This part is crucial because it is extremely rare that any knowledge is acquired without any prior knowledge that the new information could connect to (Gagné et al 1992). One suggested option for this stage would be a line of questions about things that the learner will probably already know (Gagné et al 1992). For the two learning objects, the process of recall is initiated by questions, interactive activities, or short summaries of topics. For the questions and the interactive activities, the answer is provided in a way that the learner will have the option to answer the questions or do the activity before seeing the answer. This way, they will still receive the required information should they have forgotten it or not know it in the first place. If the learner knows the answers, it will provide them with the feeling of success.

It is only after these previously mentioned three stages that the new information can be presented to the learner (Gagné et al 1992). Attention should especially be paid to the format in which the new information is presented, because small changes may alter the skill that is being learnt (Gagné et al 1992). Gagné et al (1992) provide the skill of orally answering questions in a language as an example, which would require the questions to also be asked orally and in that specific language and not, for instance, in a written form. According to Gagné et al (1992), the new information must be presented in a variety of forms and examples. In the case of the two learning objects, the aim is to prepare foreign language teachers for real-life situations in classrooms. To follow this specific requirement, a teacher should be able to try out any new skills in a live lesson environment. Due to the learning objects being online, this is not possible. To compensate for the lack of an appropriate format, the teachers will be able to practice resolving realistic situations.

The fifth event of instruction is the guidance that a teacher should provide during the learning process (Gagné et al 1992). The aim is to have the students find their way to the

solution with the help of guidance from the teacher (Gagné et al 1992). The type of guidance, as well as the frequency of guidance, will depend on the learner (Gagné et al 1992). As the guidance required for the learners of the learning objects would be varied, providing it to every learner would be unrealistic. However, there will be some activities where some clues will be provided to aid the learner, should they require it. The following step will include the learner demonstrating the acquired skills or information, followed by feedback and assessment of the performance (Gagné et al 1992). The learning objects are designed to enable the learners to practice as many of the skills as possible. Despite providing the learner with practice opportunities, the skills are primarily for in-person situations, limiting the possibility for individual feedback and valid assessment.

The final event of instruction is the contribution to a higher probability of information retention (Gagné et al 1992). According to Gagné et al (1992), the optimal method includes the periodic revision of the information in a different context from the one used during skill acquisition. In the learning objects, the chapters end with a quiz or an activity aimed at revising information from the entire chapter.

To ensure that the learning objects and all the chapters are created intentionally and with specific aims in mind, learning objectives are formed for all the chapters. The learning objectives are worded according to Bloom's Taxonomy (Bloom et al 1956) due to its widespread use. Akin to Gagné, Briggs, and Wager's "Principles of Instructional Design," Bloom's Taxonomy has been taught to future teachers during teacher training and is, thus, very familiar to me.

## 2.2 THE FIRST LEARNING OBJECT: *LGBTQ+ INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE*

The first learning object comprises three different chapters. The learning object aims to provide the learner with information to increase inclusivity in a foreign language lesson setting.

The first chapter provides an overview of LGBTQ+ terminology and LGBTQ+ history. The second chapter addresses pronouns, which are fundamental for English as a foreign language teachers. The third and final chapter explores the significance of inclusivity in schools. The three chapters should collectively support the learner in addressing LGBTQ+ related topics in a school setting.

### 2.2.1 THE FIRST CHAPTER: *LGBTQ+ WHAT IS IT?*

The first chapter aims to guide the learner towards recall and recognition of LGBTQ+ related terminology. The learner is also able to apply any new acquired knowledge in various activities. To conclude the terminology part of the chapter, the learner is asked to assemble their own list of terminology from the provided materials that they themselves find useful. The history part of the chapter provides the learner with opportunities to recognize historical events as well as assess their knowledge of LGBTQ+ history.

Terminology is a part of the foundation for engaging with new topics. It is, therefore, vital to include a dictionary with some of the more commonly used LGBTQ+ terminology. As the same terminology will be used in both learning objects, it should be placed at the beginning of the first learning object. The choice of words is based on which words were used the most in various glossaries and dictionaries. The aim of the list is not to overwhelm the user with terminology, and for this reason, the number of words on the list remained around twenty-five. Should the user be more interested in the topic, they have the option to look up other words from the list of references.

The definitions are not just taken from one source, but they are assembled from the information from seven different sources. All the sources are provided by organizations that advocate for LGBTQ+ rights or provide help and support for the LGBTQ+ community, which increases the credibility of the sources. To ensure a balanced and as accurate of a definition as

possible, the organizations come from different countries: the United Kingdom (MindOut), the United States of America (Human Rights Campaign, The Trevor Project, We Are Family), Germany (Ministerium für Soziales, Gesundheit, Jugend, Familie und Senioren des Landes Schleswig-Holstein, PROUT AT WORK – Foundation) and Estonia (Estonian LGBT Association).

The embedded activities are all created with *learningapps.org*. The selection is based on my personal preference and prior experiences, which have validated the efficacy and the straightforwardness of the use of the website for the teacher and the learner. The situations used to describe LGBTQ+ terminology for the second exercise are formed with the aid of artificial intelligence (AI). For foreign language teachers who are required to constantly think of new sentences or situations for various activities, AI can be a valuable tool to save time and potentially generate more creative sentences or situations. For the second exercise from chapter one, AI is provided with the list of terminology from a previous part of the same chapter and asked to create descriptions to which a specific term from the list would apply. The suggestions from AI are analyzed and modified before being used in the learning object. The descriptions allow the learner to match real life with the terminology.

When discussing LGBTQ+ topics, one of the more frequent points that is talked about is that LGBTQ+ people are born this way. Due to the significance of this point, I felt it necessary to add it to the first chapter to broaden the learners' understanding. The TEDx video by Karen Gee-Atwood, a professor of psychology, provides the learner with a clear overview of the specific topic, and the questions based on the video should enable the learner to revise the information at a pace that they feel more comfortable with, should the pace of the video have been too quick for them. The answers for the questions are provided in a collapsible group for the answers to not be immediately accessible but so that the learner can check their answers and be certain that their information is correct.

The chapter ends with a section on the history of LGBTQ+. As there have been LGBTQ+ people as long as there have been people, it is impossible to provide a complete overview of LGBTQ+ history. However, to best support the learner in engaging with the topic in the future, some knowledge of the history of LGBTQ+ is necessary. The learner is first allowed to recall any previous knowledge by placing events from the past on a timeline. The learner also has access to a timeline compiled from various sources. The events on the timeline are chosen to address two predominant ideas in Estonia. Firstly, the timeline aims to show that there have been LGBTQ+ people in the past, since one of the damaging ideas that can be heard quite often is that LGBTQ+ related topics are just a trend. Secondly, a concept heard frequently in Estonia is that LGBTQ+ people can exist, but that they should do it behind closed doors, thus reinforcing that public LGBTQ+ events, such as, for example, the Pride parade, should not exist. To demonstrate the need for visibility, the timeline includes events illustrating the suppression and violence experienced in the past and what was required to gain freedom. The timeline will not convince someone with convictions, but will hopefully initiate an analysis of alternative thoughts to their own ideas.

### 2.2.2 THE SECOND CHAPTER: *THE POWER OF PRONOUNS*

The second chapter aims to have the learner recognize and explain a more specific topic within the larger LGBTQ+ topic, namely the topic of pronouns. The learner then practices the use of some more or less common pronouns with the help of a gapped text. To conclude the chapter, the learner is asked to examine their own previous actions with pronouns and complete a quiz based on the whole chapter.

After informing the learner of the content of the chapter, two subtopics of pronouns are addressed through videos. The first discusses the importance of correct pronouns, the second the history and controversy around the use of they/them in the singular. In cases where an

individual has no personal contact with any LGBTQ+ topics or people of the LGBTQ+ community, it may be challenging to understand the importance of inclusivity. The use and discussions around the use of various pronouns can be considered superfluous. In the first video Sam Brinton, the head of advocacy and government affairs for The Trevor Project, shares their experiences on the importance of pronouns. Hearing an individual's experiences can make a topic less impersonal. One of the widespread notions follows the idea of the pronouns they/them being intended exclusively for use in plural forms. Hannah McElhinney and Rudy Jean Rigg from Rainbow History Class, which shares information on queer and trans history, talk about they/them pronouns and present a more diverse perspective on the history of the pronouns.

One of the notions that can be observed in society is that the use of alternative pronouns to he/him and she/her is a trend, and that the youth is trying to overcomplicate the use of pronouns. To contradict this notion, the data from the Trevor Project is used. Various examples are provided to the learner to support them in respectfully obtaining others' pronouns. The learners are then introduced to neopronouns and are provided with gapped texts about various people, where the appropriate pronouns need to be applied based on the provided information. With a view to maintaining a balance between real life and anonymity, the illustrative pictures next to the gapped texts are created with the use of AI. The data put into AI dictated a uniform single colored background, in addition to people of various ages, gender expressions, and backgrounds. Additionally, AI is used to assemble a rough draft of the texts used later as gapped texts. The content, the pronouns used, the location, and the number of gaps are revised. The extent of the revisions in the final gapped texts is based on the appropriateness of the original texts created by AI. The chapter concludes with a reflection on the topics covered in the chapter by means of questions and a quiz.

### 2.2.3 THE THIRD CHAPTER: *CREATING A SAFE SPACE*

The third chapter aims to have the learner recognize and discuss two essential reasons

for the importance of inclusivity: safety and mental health. To connect the information from the chapter to the learner's real life, they are asked to hypothesize their responses to real situations and compare their automatic response to the response they would give after working through this chapter.

To keep the learner engaged with the topics and not overwhelm them with long texts, the relevance of both the issues of safety and mental health is presented with the help of videos. Both videos are followed by either a quiz or a small task to ensure that the learner is mentally engaged with the content of the video and that they remember the main concepts from the video. The video used to emphasize safety is from the Human Rights Campaign and presents the stories of eight different young people. The personal stories require the learner to think about LGBTQ+ youth as individuals and not as one anonymous group. The second video is from a hospital in the United States of America, the Mayo Clinic. This specific video was chosen due to its concise overview of the topic of mental health within the LGBTQ+ community. Subsequently, a video on the topic of concealing one's identity is shown to the learner to further emphasize the need for visible support. The three videos together provide a general foundation for the learner, exemplifying why the topics of safety and mental health significantly influence the well-being of LGBTQ+ youth.

After reading about tips for increased safety and mental well-being and the consequences of inaction, the learner can focus on connecting the theory from the chapter with real life. The activity includes four different situations that can occur at school. The situations and the possible answers are created with inspiration and some aid from AI. AI is instructed to provide various scenarios where a student is bullied using language or ideas harmful to LGBTQ+ people. The example scenarios provided by AI are analyzed, and the four most common scenarios are created. A similar process is followed for the answers. The scenarios aim to have the learner first provide their usual solution and then assess the situation again,

keeping the new information from the chapter in mind. This process would allow the learner to emulate the thought process they could later use in practice.

As a revision, the chapter is concluded by a quiz. The quiz provides the learner with the opportunity to re-examine the content from the whole chapter. After finishing this chapter, the learner should be able to recognize situations that require a teacher's intervention, be able to address the problem, and be aware of the importance of not ignoring derogatory sayings or actions.

## 2.3 THE SECOND LEARNING OBJECT: *REPHRASING INSTRUCTIONS*

The second learning object is divided into two chapters. As a result of working through the first chapter, the learner should be able to recognize possible flaws in instructions. The second chapter focuses on the possible LGBTQ+ related improvements that the learner could make in already existing activities. The two chapters combined should provide the learner with the necessary information as well as allow for numerous practice opportunities to encourage the learner to use the information in practice.

### 2.3.1 THE FIRST CHAPTER: *THE BASIS FOR CREATING INSTRUCTIONS*

The first chapter of the second learning object instructs the learner to identify which elements from the text on creating instructions are present in their own work. The chapter continues with the learner assessing their previous work for possible improvements and constructing improved instructions. The learner designs completely new activities and their instructions with the information from the chapter. Finally, the learner will evaluate and compare instructions to match them with the improvement options.

The chapter first instructs the learner to compile a list of requirements that they usually follow when creating instructions. After being introduced to three aspects that are beneficial in forming instructions, the learner is guided through the process of creating more inclusive

instructions. The process begins with a review of the activities that the learner already uses. The learner then needs to locate instructions that include all or some of the mentioned concepts. This activity guides the learner towards good instructions that they already use, and thus provides the learner with the feeling of achievement. The positive emotions are there to motivate the learner when they need to start improving and modifying the activity instructions that they are currently using. The task of creating entirely new activities allows the learner to implement all the aspects of the chapter.

To further practice the recognition of possible areas for improvement, the chapter ends with an activity where the learner is required to match instructions with the potential points of weakness. The instructions, the accompanying student groups' descriptions, and the potential flaws are assembled with the aid of AI. The input data includes the age of the students and their interests. AI is instructed to provide instructions from the teacher and a description of the potential areas for improvement. The information from AI is first assessed and modified where needed before being used in the learning object. As the assembly of activities, as well as the instructions, demand practice, the various activities, in addition to the theoretical background in the chapter, aim to support the learner.

### 2.3.2 THE SECOND CHAPTER: *INCREASING INCLUSIVITY*

The second chapter of the second learning object aims for the learner to analyze the provided exercises and plan an alternative instruction to create more inclusive lessons. The chapter concludes with the learner revising the content through true or false statements.

The final chapter of the two learning objects focuses on exercises from the *I love English* textbooks. The choice of this specific series of textbooks originates from the fact that they are the only English textbooks created in Estonia, and they are used a lot in various schools, making it more likely that the learner has had previous contact with the series. Before any practice, the learner will have access to three different tips to make some of the exercises from *I love English*

more inclusive.

Not all the activities and their instructions from *I love English* need modification. To practice the recognition of possible needs for improvement, the learner is provided with seven different exercises and is then asked to identify the aspect that could be improved on, as well as generate a more inclusive version of the exercise. The chapter ends with a set of 14 questions for the learner to recall the information from the entire chapter. After finishing the chapter, the learner should be able to recognize possibilities for improvement in activities and should be able to create more inclusive materials by just modifying the instructions.

## 2.4 FEEDBACK FROM TESTERS

The learning objects were tested by two different English as a foreign language teachers to enable a larger variety of opinions. Both testing teachers have been teaching for more than five years and are currently working as teachers. The teachers were provided with the link to the learning objects and were given two weeks to work through the materials and provide their feedback for possible improvements.

The first teacher stated that the learning objects should include more specific and concise learning outcomes for the teacher to know in advance what exactly they are investing their time in. They speculated that a combined learning outcome for the two learning objects, separate outcomes for each of the learning objects and their chapters, and the relevance of the information in practice would motivate teachers since they would know the benefits of dedicating their time. Furthermore, it would allow for adaptivity by the teacher being able to personally decide which aspects of the learning object they would need further help with.

The teacher also highlighted the chapter on pronouns. In the chapter, the learner is introduced to neopronouns. The testing teacher expressed that, in the current arrangement, the importance and the frequency of the use of neopronouns are exaggerated. They suggested

emphasizing that the information on neopronouns is there for the learner to be prepared for neopronouns should they encounter them in their work. This would alleviate the resistance of the learner to the new information, should they already be overwhelmed by everything. A statement before the neopronouns would be helpful in motivating learners who are, for the most part, more opposed to the idea of alternative pronouns.

The last suggestion by the first teacher concerned the final tests for each chapter. The testing teacher believed that each learning object should conclude with a collective test. It is rare for topics to exist as separate units. It is more likely that the issues are interwoven with each other, which means that the best preparation for the learner for real-life situations would be by testing their knowledge on either each learning object separately or even on both learning objects. Thus, the teacher suggests adding tests that combine more than one topic to mimic the situations a learner may encounter.

The second teacher proposed that each chapter include an approximate time it takes to finish. Teachers who already have insufficient time for their work and are likely stressed and overworked will be more reluctant to commit to something without first knowing the amount of time it requires. Thus, even an approximate time needed to complete the learning objects will increase the probability of a teacher opting to use their free time for the learning objects.

The second testing teacher was satisfied with the categories, but pointed out the different length of the first chapter of the first learning object. The chapter is made up of two topics: LGBTQ+ terminology and LGBTQ+ history. They suggested instead dividing the chapter into two parts and creating a chapter for each of the topics. This way, the chapters are all more uniform.

One way to engage with the learning objects is on a computer. In relation to the fact that many teachers are managing multiple responsibilities at once and their free time is limited, a teacher may also decide to engage with the learning object on their phone. Despite the current

learning objects being available on a smartphone, the existing content is optimized for computer use. On a smartphone, the majority of the information is still accessible, but the activities created on *learningapps.com* are difficult to use. This may end in a teacher omitting the activities and failing to benefit from the practice opportunities. Thus, it would encourage the use of the learning objects if all the elements were user-friendly on different types of devices.

## 2.5 CHANGES MADE BASED ON THE FEEDBACK

The two testers highlighted various shortcomings, all of which would notably improve the quality of the user experience. Regardless of wishing to enhance all the indicated shortcomings of the learning objects, it is infeasible within the current time frame. The modifications were selected from all the recommendations based on how much more appealing they would make the learning objects to busy teachers.

The adjustments made based on the feedback from tester number one consist of more concise learning outcomes and specifications to the chapter on pronouns. The learning outcomes for the chapters are included in the written part of this thesis, but are not included in the same format in the learning objects. To clarify the value gained from the learning objects for a teacher, so that they are aware of what they are investing their time in, the learning outcomes for the chapters will be accessible at the beginning of each learning object. The second suggestion is incorporated by adding a defining sentence before the information on neopronouns. One sentence is sufficient to indicate to the learner that the info is there to acquaint the learner with the background on neopronouns. To optimize the learning objects for the target audience, which is teachers with limited time, the second tester suggested adding a rough estimate for each chapter. Consequently, being aware of the time needed, a teacher can determine independently when and how many chapters they can study at once.

Exchanging *learningapps.com* for alternative online platforms is a good suggestion, but,

as I am currently not aware of the best alternative, modifying the activities on time for the thesis defense would be infeasible. This change could be implemented at a later time. To ensure the success of the modifications, I would have to be more knowledgeable in the options for creating online materials to make a more informed choice that would be user-friendly for a variety of devices. The recommendation to create a summative assessment for each learning object could potentially be beneficial for the learner. However, the skills practiced as part of the learning objects are varied, and assessing the skills with a singular version of evaluation will be unable to adequately assess the learners' knowledge. Thus, creating a singular summative assessment for each learning object would not achieve more than could be achieved by separate evaluations. The rationale for a combined chapter on LGBTQ+ vocabulary and history is based on the understanding that both topics are necessary to establish a foundation for the subsequent chapters. As the focus of the learning objects should be LGBTQ+ students, separating the vocabulary from the history would emphasize other aspects of the LGBTQ+ community and deviate from the focus.

The feedback from both testers is essential in creating materials for a diverse body of people, as I, as an individual, have limitations in how well I can consider all facets of the learner's needs. The choice for incorporating suggestions stems from one of the main aims of the learning objects. With the prerequisite of people engaging with the learning objects being that it should be appealing for a busy teacher, the modifications seek to increase the learner's access to information for the learner to determine how to best interact with the materials.

## CONCLUSION

Every child has the right to go to school and feel safe, and the responsibility for achieving a safe learning environment rests with the adults around children. With increasing conservative beliefs and extreme cases such as manfluencers gaining more traction within today's youth and potentially endangering all minority groups, it is of paramount importance that LGBTQ+ inclusivity be taught from early on. Ignoring topics and communities perceived as not adhering to the social norms exacerbates the fear of the unknown. Instead, teaching children the appropriate language with the aim of them being able to have respectful and tolerant conversations with everyone will hinder many possible conflicts (Kaiser 2017, Paiz 2019, Nemi Neto 2018). For conversations in a foreign language, it falls to the foreign language teacher to support the students in the acquisition of the necessary vocabulary. Yet imposing these expectations on already strained teachers without additional support is unwise. With many textbooks omitting LGBTQ+ inclusive materials (Paiz 2019, Ruiz-Cecilia et al 2021, Singh et al 2025, Trinh and Tinker Sachs 2024), an alternative approach is required to support the teachers. Due to this, the aim of this thesis is to offer an alternative source of support to English as a foreign language teachers.

To meet the needs of teachers with limited time, the learning objects can be accessed remotely. Teachers unacquainted with the LGBTQ+ topic are less inclined to engage with the topic with their students if they themselves do not feel they are informed (Banegas et al 2020, Tarrayo and Salonga 2023, Ulla and Paiz 2023). Thus, the context needs to be established prior to any language teaching specific information. The first learning object, LGBTQ+ Inclusive Language, presents the teachers with LGBTQ+ vocabulary, LGBTQ+ history, pronouns, and insights into creating a safe learning environment. The second learning object, Rephrasing Instructions, centers on creating and rephrasing activity instructions to create a more inclusive learning environment. The teachers can practice recognizing potential shortcomings and

rephrasing instructions on examples from *I love English 4* and *I love English 5* by Ülle Kurm and Ene Soolepp. It should be emphasized that these specific textbooks are not chosen due to their being inadequate, but instead due to the widespread use of *I love English* books in Estonia. The two learning objects together help to equip the teacher with the necessary information to become more accustomed to discussions on LGBTQ+ topics.

An inclusive and safe learning environment requires collaborative effort. This thesis focuses on one group of people who can contribute to better learning environments. However, despite this thesis and the learning objects aimed at foreign language teachers being necessary, without additional support and action from other school staff, the learning objects can be insufficient to prevent all conflicts. Although even minor improvements contribute to more tolerant people, the advancement of inclusive practices by various groups is required to achieve the goal of a safe learning environment for every student.

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## APPENDICES

### APPENDIX 1

Link to the Learning Objects

The two learning objects created as a part of this thesis can be accessed with this link.

<https://sites.google.com/view/lgbtq-inclusivity-in-efl>

## RESÜMEE

TARTU ÜLIKOOL

ANGLISTIKA OSAKOND

**Liisa Frosch**

### **Two online learning objects for Estonian English as a foreign language teachers on LGBTQ+ inclusivity in foreign language lessons and rephrasing instructions for queer-friendly lessons**

Kaks internetis kättesaadavat õpiobjekti eesti inglise keele kui võõrkeele õpetajatele võõrkeele tundides LGBTQ+ kaasava keele kasutamiseks ning juhendite ümbersõnastamiseks eesmärgiga saavutada kväär sõbralikumad tunnid

Magistritöö

2026

Lehekülgede arv: 56

Annotatsioon:

Antud magistritöö eesmärk on koostada kaks internetis kättesaadavat õpiobjekti, mis annaks õpetajatele vajaliku informatsiooni, et tunda ennast mugavamalt tegeledes kväär teemade ja võimalike valearusaamadega koolis nii et kõik tunneks ennast mugavalt ja et neid austatakse. Magistritöö on jaotatud sissejuhatuseks, kaheks sisupeatükiks ning kokkuvõtteks. Sissejuhatus annab eelnevate uuringute põhjal ülevaate erinevatest murekohtadest, mis panustavad kväär inimeste ebamugavustundes või isegi ohutundes ning selgitab kooli ja võõrkeele tundide rolli kväär õpilaste toetamisel. Esimene peatükk annab ülevaate õpilaste praegusest vaimse tervise olukorrast ja võimalustest ning takistustest ülesannete või harjutuste kväär õpilaste jaoks kaasavamaks muutmiseks. Teine peatükk kirjeldab õpiobjektide formaati, ülesehitust, sisu ning kõigi õpiobjektide peatükkide eesmärgi. Magistritöö tulemuseks on kaks õpiobjekti, mis on veebilingi teel internetis kättesaadavad kõigile.

Märksõnad: inglise keel võõrkeelena, LGBTQ+ õpilased, õpiobjektid võõrkeeleõpetajatele, turvaline õpikeskkond, tööjuhendite ümbersõnastamine

## **Lihtlitsents**

### **Lihtlitsents lõputöö reprodutseerimiseks ja lõputöö üldsusele kättesaadavaks tegemiseks**

Mina, Liisa Frosch,

1. annan Tartu Ülikoolile tasuta loa (lihtlitsentsi) enda loodud teose

Two online learning objects for Estonian English as a foreign language teachers on LGBTQ+ inclusivity in foreign language lessons and rephrasing instructions for queer-friendly lessons,

mille juhendaja on : *Lect.* Liina Tammekänd PhD,

1.1. reprodutseerimiseks säilitamise ja üldsusele kättesaadavaks tegemise eesmärgil, sealhulgas digitaalarhiivi DSpace-is lisamise eesmärgil kuni autoriõiguse kehtivuse tähtaja lõppemiseni;

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Liisa Frosch

Tartus, 12.01.2026

**Autorsuse kinnitus**

Kinnitan, et olen koostanud käesoleva magistritöö ise ning toonud korrektselt välja teiste autorite panuse. Töö on koostatud lähtudes Tartu Ülikooli maailma keelte ja kultuuride instituudi anglistika osakonna oma õppekava magistritöö juhendist ning on kooskõlas heade akadeemiliste tavadega.

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Liisa Frosch

Tartus, 12.01.2026

Lõputöö on lubatud kaitsmisele.

[Juhendaja asetäitja allkiri]  
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