The use of online learning tools in practicing oral communication skills:

a case study of upper secondary school students'

learner experiences on using Voxopop

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Tutkimuksen tavoitteena oli selvittää lukiolaisten *oppijakokemuksia* (engl. learner experiences) online-työskentelytavasta ja sitä, näyttäytyykö opiskelijaperspektiivistä muutostarvetta ja perusteita vaihtoehtoisten harjoitustapojen käytölle englannin opiskelussa. Vastausta haettiin kolmella tutkimuskysymyksellä, joista ensimmäisellä luotiin tutkimuksessa testatulle online-työskentelytavalle vertailupohja analysoimalla lyhyesti lukion suullisen kurssin oppikirjaa ja päätehtävätyyppejä. Toinen kysymys selvitti opiskelijoiden näkemyksiä englannin kielen käytöstä ja opiskelusta. Kolmannessa kiinnostuksen kohteena olivat opiskelijoiden raportoimat oppija-kokemukset online-työskentelytavasta. Tiedonkeruumenetelmänä olivat kyselylomakkeet, joihin opiskelijat vastasivat sekä ennen online-harjoitusten tekemistä että niiden tekemisen jälkeen. Kyselylomakkeiden tärkeimmät taustateemat olivat temperamentti, motivaatio ja kokemus tietokoneen välityksellä työskentelystä. Tutkimus toteutettiin osana laajempaa Aktiiviset oppimistilat -projektia.

Tutkimustulosten perusteella vastaajista muotoutui kuva varsin heterogeenisena joukkona. Suurin osa opiskelijoista raportoi tarvinneensa englannin kieltä koulun ulkopuolella ja luottavansa suulliseen kielitaitoonsa. Lähes kaikki kuitenkin kertoivat toivovansa oppivansa nykyistä paremmin ääntämään, mutta vain alle puolet raportoi käyttävänsä esimerkiksi online-sanakirjoja. Puolet vastaajista arvioi oppivansa parhaiten yksin työskentelemällä. Suurin osa toivoi vaihtelua englannin opiskeluun mutta vastasi pitävänsä perinteisestä luokkahuonetyöskentelystä kieltenopiskelussa teknologian käyttöä enemmän.

Online-työskentelytapaa kuvattiin pääasiassa myönteisesti. Huomattavan moni raportoi kuulleensa omaa englanninkielistä puhettaan ensimmäistä kertaa. Oli yleistä kokea online-harjoitus vastaavaa luokkahuoneharjoitusta vähemmän hermostuttavaksi ja vähemmän paineita aiheuttavaksi. Myös parempi keskittyminen, rauhallinen tilanne ja mukava vaihtelu tavalliseen olivat yleisiä kommentteja harjoituksista. Suurin osa piti harjoittelutapaa mielekkäänä ja hyödyllisenä. Yleisimmät kielteiset kommentit liittyivät teknisiin ongelmiin. Keskeinen havainto oppikirja-analyysin tuloksia ja oppilaiden vastauksia verrattaessa oli, että analysoitu oppikirja ei pääsääntöisesti tarjonnut foneettisia ääntämisohjeita, mutta lähes kaikki vastaajat raportoivat haluavansa oppia ääntämään paremmin. Lähes yhtä moni raportoi hyötyneensä mahdollisuudesta lausumistukeen online-harjoituksessa.

Kokonaisuutena voidaan todeta, että tutkimuksen perusteella äänisovellusten käytöllä vaikuttaisi olevan perustellusti paikkansa oppikirjapainotteisten opiskelumetodien lisänä. Myös opiskelijoiden kattavampi ohjaaminen hyödyntämään online-sovellusten mahdollisuuksia kielenopiskelussa vaikuttaa tarpeelliselta. Suullisen kielitaidon arvioinnin tullessa osaksi sähköistä kielten ylioppilaskoetta on ajankohtaista ja erityisen tärkeää, että lukiolaiset tottuvat online-työskentelytapaan ja oman puheensa äänittämiseen.

Asiasanat: englannin opetus, suullinen kielitaito, opetuskokeilu, online-työskentely, äänisovellus, oppijakokemus

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1 Introduction

Rapidly developing new communications media is changing the economic, political and social structure of societies around the world (e.g. Graddol 2006, 42) and influencing the ways in which people think and work. It is therefore important to develop the educational use of the digital media, too. In this thesis, online learning tools are tested in two upper secondary school groups as an alternative way of practicing oral communication skills instead of more conventional classroom working styles, often based on study books. The focus of the study is on a voice-based online tool Voxopop. The thesis is a part of a larger research project *Active Learning Spaces* at the University of Tampere. The project develops and utilizes multimodal and social interaction technologies for education based on needs of educational practitioners (University of Tampere, see also Pihkala-Posti 2013; Pihkala-Posti & Uusi-Mäkelä 2013). Technological and pedagogical innovations are planned and tested in practical real life situations in schools in Finland. The approach of the project is based on the view that modern technologies and augmented reality and environments have the potential to revolutionize the ways of education (ibid.).

The matriculation examinations, that is, the Finnish school leaving qualifications taken by upper secondary school seniors, have an important role in the Finnish upper secondary schools. The examinations, currently lacking assessment of oral communication skills, have been reported to have a strong influence on the learning content and practices, which is why oral communication skills are sometimes overlooked in language teaching (Green-Vänttinen et al. 2010, 62). Planning and testing new kinds of digital exercises is especially timely because the Finnish matriculation examination system will gradually be digitalized by 2019 (Digabi A). According to Digabi, the digitalization project of the matriculation examination, the future examinations will also test oral communication skills, starting in spring 2019 at the latest (Digabi B). The reformation also makes it necessary to update and develop the practices and learning methods used. The online exercise developed for and studied in this thesis are motivated by the upcoming changes in the matriculation examinations and

based on the suggestions for improvement expressed in previous research (see e.g. Tomlinson 2012, Pihkala-Posti 2013a, Keltikangas-Järvinen & Mullola 2014). As a future language teacher it interests me to test using new kinds of online learning tools for educational purposes.[1]

Although tech-savvy teachers have been using technology in language teaching already for many decades (Chun 2008), it is a constant worry for those who work in the field of computer assisted language learning (CALL) that the technology currently used becomes outdated (Blake 2008, xiv). As Pihkala-Posti (2012b, 118) points out, because of obvious reasons related to technological development, the use of voice applications is quite a new area in the field of language teaching. *Active Learning Spaces* is one of the first major research projects in Finland which particularly focus on voice applications. Because of the field's rapid development and the varying recourses between schools, such as Internet access in classrooms, it is likely that certain online resources, such as speech synthesizers, have not been used widely during English lessons in Finnish schools. Online learning tools could, however, enable new ways to learn and to use a language (cf. Pihkala-Posti 2013a).

On a broader scope, the aim of this study is to contribute to the research of educational online applications and their meaningful use in teaching oral communication skills in English. Moreover, I hope that the study adds to the understanding of the learner's perspective concerning the working methods in general and especially the use of the tested online working method. The topic of the study is relevant and interesting on a societal level as language teaching in upper secondary schools is facing major reformations due to the upcoming electronic matriculation examination. The online learning tools tested in this study are the voice application Voxopop, which will be introduced in Chapter 4, two online text-to-speech synthesizer applications and three online dictionaries with audio examples for pronunciation available (for links, see Appendix 4).

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[1] I became interested in the use of technology and especially the use of voice application(s) in language education on the course *Hypertext, internet and language teaching* (Laura Pihkala-Posti) at the University of Tampere in spring 2012.

My point of view in this study is learner-centered and focuses on the informants' reported experiences and views on the use of the online learning tools. The informants' oral English skills as such will not be assessed or analyzed. The experiences of learners are worth studying because the goal of improving their learning is, after all, integral in educational technology. The research of educational technology cannot concentrate only on different devices and programs and how they work. Something essential may also be discovered by studying user experiences and feelings.

The informants' experiences and views will be studied by using the survey method, more precisely questionnaires. In addition to carrying out the questionnaires, I will also briefly categorize the exercise types in the upper secondary school English study book *Open Road 8* (a course focusing on oral communication) in the empirical part of this study in Chapter 5. The study book analysis aims at illustrating the currently predominant ways of practicing oral communication skills. The study book analysis will serve as a mirror to which the working method tested in this study can be compared to. The informants' views of themselves as language users and learners and on their learner experiences on the online exercise are studied through questionnaires. I want to examine what kinds of grounds can be found for the possible need for changing or complementing the current working methods, or alternatively, for maintaining the current situation. This study aims at answering the following questions:

> Q1: What kind of exercise types are there in the selected study book (*Open Road 8*) aimed at practicing oral communication skills? How do the findings relate to the informants' answers in Q2 and Q3?
>
> Q2: What kind of tendencies can be found in the informants' reported views and experiences of themselves as English language users and learners, and their views on their preferred learning methods?
>
> Q3: How do the informants describe the use of Voxopop and the supporting online learning tools, which they were encouraged to use when practicing?

In answering these questions, I will use both quantitative and qualitative approaches.

The theory section begins with setting a general context for language teaching, proceeding to presenting the components of an individual learner experience. In the analysis, the learner experiences discovered through the questionnaires will be discussed in more detail. Finally the chapter for discussion will then form the general results of the reported learner experiences in relation to the broader context of teaching language skills.

More precisely, the structure of the thesis is as follows: Chapter 2 provides the current context of the language teaching, presenting widely-used methods and concepts in the field of language teaching, especially in relation to oral communication skills. The concept of *learner experience*, which in this study is seen to include temperamental differences, motivation and the effects of working via computer will be discussed in Chapter 3. These are the topics on which the research questions and the questionnaires concentrate. The importance of varying learning tasks and group sizes will be discussed in Chapter 3 as well. The starting point, phases, material and methods of the study will be introduced in Chapter 4. Chapter 5 is the empirical part, which presents the study book exercise type categorization and the survey data analysis and results. In addition to that, it briefly presents the teachers' feedback on the experiment and summarizes the main findings. It is followed by discussion in Chapter 6, and conclusion in Chapter 7, which briefly summarizes the topic of the study, its central results and suggestions for future studies.

2 Current context of language teaching

This chapter presents the context for the whole study by providing background and dealing with timely issues in the field of language teaching especially in Finland. I will concentrate on the factors relevant to this study: teaching, practicing and assessing oral communication skills. The first section 2.1 clarifies why it is necessary to practice students' oral communication skills and argumentation skills. The second section 2.2 presents ongoing school system reforms and currently prevalent working methods and concepts. Finally, the last section 2.3 discusses the effects of the increased media use on learning.

2.1 Motivation for teaching communication and argumentation skills

People's oral communication skills in foreign languages, or the possible difficulties with them, are a commonly discussed topic in today's international world. The language skills of the students are a common and regular target for language tests and the topic arises often in public discussion. It appears to be a widespread opinion in and outside the school environment that fluent oral communication skills should be of main importance in modern-day language education (e.g. Tomlinson, 2012; Faas, 2013; Confederation of Finnish Industries 2014). In the recent years, educational policy-makers internationally have placed greater focus on spoken language skills, which has made teaching speaking an increasingly important issue (Tomlinson 2012, 231). As English has gained importance as a global language, one factor behind this kind of development is the fact that there is a real need for English learners to reach competence for effective interaction with other English users who mostly are non-native speakers (ibid.). The direction towards an emphasis on fluent communication skills seems to be global although reasons and backgrounds for this may vary (Tomlinson 2012, 231; Faas 2013, 44). For example in Germany, there has been a contentious reformation debate among policy-makers, educators and parents across the country after it came as a shock for the country to find itself at the tail end in the first PISA results in 2001 (Faas 2013, 44). The discussion has led to various

changes, for example curriculum reformations to replace the input orientation with an output-oriented competence-based approach (ibid.). There has been a lively discussion on educational issues in Finland, too, since 2014 when Finnish students did not succeed in the PISA tests as well as before.

According to a national survey, as reported by Leppänen et al. (2011, 99-101), many Finns feel themselves more or less insecure as English users, which could have roots in negative cultural stereotypes. Many informants in the national survey felt that they speak less and their language is clumsier when they speak English than when they speak Finnish. Many also reported feeling inadequate when discussing with a native English speaker (ibid.). Historically, there is the old stereotype of *the silent Finns* (e.g. Lehtonen & Sajavaara 1985). Other stereotypes include claims that Finnish conversations remind monologues with no interruptions, no simultaneous speech or feedback and no small talk (Tiittula 1994, 95). However, Tiittula (ibid.) argued already in the mid-90s that research does not support this view, suggesting that observations of this kind were based on situations in which Finns communicate in a foreign language. According to her, "the silent Finn" stereotype has even been used to justify the negligence of oral communication skills in foreign language teaching (ibid.). Studies show that speaking foreign languages has indeed caused anxiety for many Finnish learners in the past decades (Dufva et al. 1996; Dufva et al. 2007; Härmälä et al. 2014). Many Finns reported feeling that they had knowledge of the language but no skills to use that knowledge after leaving school (Dufva et al. 1996, 56–57) and that they feel intimidated in a situation where they were actually required to use the language orally. In addition, more recent research shows that first-year university English students felt that they had not learned English oral communication skills at school (Dufva et al. 2007, 133).

In general, it is still not unusual to hear Finns being described as not being social, active and confident enough when speaking in a foreign language, even though research shows that their actual skills would allow them to perform better. General opinions and stereotypes of this kind might affect even today's learners' thoughts, for example through attitudes adopted from their parents.

Nevertheless, when purely language skills are looked at in isolation, Finnish pupils today can be considered good in English and manage well with spoken language as well, as it turns out in an assessment of learning outcomes for the advanced course in the English language at Finnish upper secondary schools (Härmälä et al., 2014), in which the sample represented approximately 6 % of the age group. As much as 77 % of the pupils attained the level of *good* performance in speaking, which corresponds grade 8 on the scale of 4–10. However, good results do not naturally guarantee that pupils also *experience* themselves as skilful.

The needs of the working life are an important perspective when evaluating one's language skills, too, as the informants in this study are on the threshold of entering working life. For example, English is spoken in almost 80 % of the Finnish industries that took part in the survey by Confederation of Finnish Industries (2014). Practical language usage and courage to use a foreign language are usually more important than grammatical correctness in workplaces according to industry surveys by Confederation of Finnish Industries (2009, 2014). Good language skills are, by the survey (ibid.), more precisely defined as a person being able to fluently take part in a conversation, express him/herself understandably and convincingly as well as inspire confidence (ibid.). In other words, it is a question of extensive communication skills, which also include cultural knowledge and ability to communicate in a dialogue as well as to argue and take part in debates (ibid.). Therefore, the industry surveys underline that from the employers' point of view, the development of practical communication and interaction skills should be emphasized in language teaching, and more opportunities to use the language in practice should be provided in order to improve Finns' language skills.

Argumentation skills are valuable in private life as well as in the working life, for example always when we need to convince and persuade others to agree with a decision, to accept an opinion or simply to believe that an assertion is true (Scheuer et al. 2012, 72). In fact, argumentation skills are mentioned among the most important working life skills by some interviewees in a study by

Confederation of Finnish Industries (2014). They are also an essential tool for rational decision making (Scheuer et al. 2012, 72). Moreover, argumentation skills are considered an important part of language skills on level B2 in the scale of the Common European Framework of Reference for languages (the CEFR), which is used as the basis for foreign language teaching in Finnish upper secondary schools. The level B2.1 on the CEFR scale is the target skills level in English oral communication after finishing upper secondary school in Finland (Takala 2003). The level B2 in the CEFR is described as follows:

> At the lower end of the band there is a focus on effective argument: account for and sustain his opinions in discussion by providing relevant explanations, arguments and comments; explain a viewpoint on a topical issue giving the advantages and disadvantages of various options; construct a chain of reasoned argument; develop an argument giving reasons in support of or against a particular point of view (Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment).

As can be seen, fluent argumentation skills have a central role in the description of the target level. Nevertheless, although an important and appreciated skill, it is not uncommon that people have problems producing, interpreting and evaluating arguments in a rational way both in informal and professional settings (Scheuer & al. 2012, 72). For example, a dissertation by Mikkonen (2010) showed that Finnish upper secondary school students do need more practice with their argumentation skills in Finnish. The study examined the structure and argumentation of letters to the editor. According to Mikkonen (2010, 207), the rationale for the study was the students' weak argumentation skills previously established by several studies as well as a general concern about the lack of time used on practicing argumentation skills with the students. Furthermore, according to The Finnish National Curriculum (2003, 91), the aim of language education is, in addition to the target skills level, for a student to be able to communicate in a way that is typical for the target language and culture. Although Mikkonen's study (2010, 207) examined students' argumentation skills in Finnish, it seems justifiable to argue that if students do not succeed well in arguing in their mother tongue, their success in arguing in a foreign language is not likely to be that good and fluent either. Furthermore, it is an

interesting question whether conversation and debate cultures in Finland and in English-speaking countries have such differences that it poses challenges for Finnish learners.

In conclusion, previous studies suggest that there is an actual need for both argumentation and oral communication skill exercises for Finnish upper secondary school students. Oral argumentation exercise are a good way to combine practicing these two important skills.

2.2 Reformations, conventions and suggestions for development in education

This section deals with different aspects of the field of education, which is sometimes claimed to be rather conventional and slowly changing (e.g. Sahlberg & Shalan 2002). It presents arguments for reforming the conventional practices of language teaching and assessment. The first subsection 2.2.1 concentrates on ongoing reformations in the Finnish school system. The second subsection 2.2.2 deals with the discussion on assessment procedures and the benefits of the digital language portfolio. The third subsection 2.2.4 discusses the study culture and the fourth subsection 2.2.4 study books and learning tasks. The fifth subsection 2.2.5 introduces the concept of authenticity.

2.2.1 School system reformations

The school system in Finland is undergoing major changes. The entire general education system is to be fundamentally reformed by 2016–2017 (Halinen 2013, 3). The changes are currently in progress and involve objectives, lesson-hour distribution, the National Core Curricula and local curricula for all the educational levels (ibid.). The update is needed for many reasons: since the beginning of this millennium, there have been many changes in the world in which school operate and society and working life require new kinds of competencies (Halinen 2013, 17). Pedagogy, school practices and, not least importantly, what is taught, should be reviewed and renewed in relation to the changes in the surrounding world (ibid.). Moreover, as mentioned in Chapter 1, the Finnish matriculation examinations in all subjects will also be gradually digitalized by spring 2019, starting in autumn 2016.

The English language tests, both the basic and advanced courses, will be digitalized for the first time in spring 2018 (Digabi 2014). Contrary to the current test type, in which the test in oral skills is separate and voluntary, evaluating oral language skills will be a part of the test for all students. There may also be multimodal elements, such as videos, included in the tests (ibid.). Examples of electronic matriculation examination exercises in the spoken production section for the foreign languages include the following (Digabi B):

1) Read aloud the sentences given / Repeat the sentences that you hear.
2) Listen to the instructions and react to the questions.

As a result, the Finnish school system is already preparing for these fundamental changes in the examinations. Since 2010, there has been a new English course on oral communication skills (ENA8) in Finnish upper secondary school syllabus (Finnish National Board of Education 2009). Developing and testing new ways of practicing oral communication skills is needed because there are such big reformations occurring in the testing procedures. According to Tomlinson (2012, 50), many classroom researchers have argued that the examinations need to change before classroom practices can or will change. It is also logical that as the whole testing system will change, the ways of teaching and practicing should also change. Thus, schools have a central role in taking responsibility for choices and action that shape our future, as Halinen (2013, 20) points out. Because of the matriculation examination renewal, especially upper secondary schools now have an excellent chance to contribute to testing a new kind of pedagogy that makes good use of technology in favor of the whole field of education (Ahtokivi 2013).

2.2.2 Assessment practices

Along with exercises and testing procedures undergoing a change, assessment procedures are meeting new demands as well. It can be considered problematic that Finnish school grades do not give explicit and transparent information on students' language skills to be accessible to further education

institutions or other entities outside the context of education (Kohonen 2005, 321). For example, the grade 8 (on a Finnish school grading scale of 4–10) might consist of very different factors depending on the teacher. Brookheart uses an apt expression of "a hodge-podge grade of attitude, achievement and effort" to describe the situation (Brookheart in Kohonen 2005, 321). Comprehensive assessment in which a student is assessed as a whole, instead of simply assessing a specific task, leaves room for free interpretation, for society's norms and expectations, and does not depend on how justified or misleading these norms and expectations might be (Keltikangas-Järvinen & Mullola 2014, 90). Therefore, more consideration should be given to the prevailing assessment practice in the Finnish education system where a student's learning process with lesson activity occupies a central position, as Mullola (2012, 76) concludes in her dissertation. The focus on lesson activity is contradictory to theories which suggest that there is no single proper way to study, learn, and complete learning tasks and processes (ibid.). In addition, Mullola (2012, 68) suggests that the results of her dissertation might reflect the so-called "halo effect", which means that based on one feature, conclusions are drawn on other features as well that have nothing to do with this particular feature (Mullola 2014, 106). According to her, this is in line with previous findings in which teacher reports have been found to be affected by teachers' impressions of students' classroom behavior and achievements (ibid.).

The national evaluation guidelines suggest that teachers assess the student's classroom behavior, working styles and learning process, as reported by Mullola (2014, 106). Mullola (ibid.) continues that it is therefore possible that a single teacher's subjective assessment has a large influence, which obviously contrasts with an effort that evaluation should be based solely on a student's actual achievement, independent of the student's temperament and personality. As a result, the halo effect could be an especially relevant problem in Finnish schools. Moreover, a recent study by Keltikangas-Järvinen and Mullola (2014, 92) offers more support for previous results finding a strong interdependence between grades and temperament views given by the teacher. Even such

temperament features like a student's mood, assessed by the teacher are related to a grade given by him/her although it should not affect the assessment and it is irrelevant to studying and skills.

Closing the gap between classroom assessment and the more official test-based assessment and successfully combining qualitative and numeric evidence as well as developing the classroom assessment theory is seen as an important challenge (Kohonen 2005, 321). It would be beneficial for students to have more alternative ways of showing one's skills besides a single test at the end of a course as is often typical (cf. Pihkala-Posti 2013a). It is problematic to strictly separate language use from language acquisition because arbitrary units measuring acquisition, for instance a written examination, may poorly indicate ongoing developmental processes that co-occur with uses of language (Thorne 2000, 228). In other words, development occurs through language use and these development processes may be most clearly illustrated in use. In a single test, situational factors may play also a significant role. Having more assessment criteria than just a written course exam can also support teachers' task of assessing the students because there is more data and evidence available. Furthermore, it is important specifically for the students' interests. For instance, a shy and inhibited student with low classroom activity with slow actions and reactions might not be visibly active in class, which is a criterion for assessment, although they would be nonetheless attending all the lessons – simply with less visible enthusiasm (Keltikangas-Järvinen & Mullola 2014, 158-159).

Individual temperament differences should be taken into account so that assessment procedures should vary as is recommended by Finnish National Board of Education as well (Keltikangas-Järvinen & Mullola 2014, 158–159). There should be different kinds of tasks and tests which affect the grade given to a student (ibid.). Students prefer different methods and display their skills in different ways (Keltikangas-Järvinen & Mullola 2014, 149). For instance, not all students thrive in a conventional written test which often has a time limit (ibid.). Instead, some students do better when being able to express themselves talking rather than writing, while some students concentrate best in

the privacy of their own home, at their own pace. When different options are offered, everyone can find options suitable for him/her among them. (ibid.)

One way to present one's skills and development flexibly and easily is a digital language portfolio, which enables recording and saving spoken production as well. For instance, the European language portfolio (ELP), based on the CEFR, attempts to record a learner's experience and achievement in non-traditional ways (Kohonen 2005, 7). The language portfolio has proven to be a helpful and authentic means of assessing oral language skills (ibid.). According to Kohonen (2005, 24–27), there are plenty of studies suggesting that the language portfolio method offers students significant possibilities to more independent and interactive language learning and underlines learners' own activity and responsibility for their studies. For example, according to a study by Perclová (2006) about the use of ELP pedagogy in Czech primary and secondary schools, most of the informants felt that working with ELP was interesting and useful. It also supported students' active involvement and study motivation. In addition, positive attitude towards ELP did not seem to be related to students' grades and also students with weaker skills experienced that they succeeded in doing portfolio exercises (ibid.).

2.2.3 Study culture

In conventional teaching, a teacher represents an intellectual and social authority in relation to the students (Sahlberg & Sharan 2002, 268). On the one hand, intellectual authority means that teachers and the study books chosen by them are the main sources of information in learning situations. This authority is further strengthened by how much a teacher usually speaks in the classroom which is up to two thirds of the time received for learning (ibid.). On the other hand, a social authority means controlling learners' behavior and controlling communication and interaction among study group members in general (ibid.). Sahlberg & Shalan continue that these practices are acknowledged and learned by students already during their early school years, and these practices are followed by

students through their time at school (ibid.). What is more, they may even have begun to think that working alone, independent of others, is a cornerstone of good studying and learning, which is why increasing collaboration in such routinized learning culture is often slow and difficult (ibid.).

An interesting perspective to the topic of study culture is brought up by Dörnyei (2007, 722), who points out that the significance of classroom norms, whether official or unofficial in their origin, is that they considerably enhance or decrease students' academic achievement and work morale. According to him, the norm of mediocrity prevails in many contemporary classrooms. With the norm of mediocrity he refers to the peer pressure put on students on not to excel or otherwise they will be called names such as "nerds" (ibid.). The study culture at home appears to affect students, too. The parents' level of education contributed to explaining the language skills level achieved by the pupils by the end of basic education (Härmälä et al. 2014, 11–13). Pupils who performed best across the skills included remarkably more children whose both parents had passed the matriculation examination compared to those whose parents had not done that (ibid.).

2.2.4 Study books and learning tasks

It is common that developments in study books run parallel to the developments in the (language) learning theory and are triggered by changes in society, although there are differences between countries (Byram 2000, 626). Taking a look back in the main directions in language teaching and exercises in the recent history, around the 1960s, monolingual approaches with mechanic drilling spoken language patterns were influenced by linguistic structuralism (ibid.). From the 1970s onwards, exercises were pragmatically and communicatively oriented. Around the 1980s, approaches influenced by cognitive science attempting to integrate the four communicative skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing) were common (ibid.). Towards the present day, constructivism-based approaches which underline the active role of the learner in constructing their own knowledge emerged.

Textbooks are used in most classrooms and foreign language courses and they play a central role there throughout the world (e.g. Luukka et al. 2008, 94-97; Tomlinson 2012, 45; Byram 2000, 626). The effect of textbooks and their exercises on teaching practices has even been called the "hidden curriculum" emphasizing their power (Luukka et al. 2008, 90). Despite that, there is surprisingly little discussion in literature on how course books should be used and how they actually are used in classrooms, according to Tomlinson (2012, 45). Moreover, many course books have a tendency to reflect what is reported to typically happen in the classrooms instead of directing teachers to rethink what they do (Tomlinson 2012, 53-54). Tomlinson continues that publishers who produce study books for commercial purposes cannot be expected to risk money to try to change what teachers do in the classroom but their interest lies rather in providing teachers with what they want (ibid.). He (2012, 55) suggests that the following features are based on what is known about what learners and teachers need and want in the classroom. According to him, tasks of this kind can be reached by:

> - giving learners opportunities to initiate interaction rather than nearly always having to respond;
> - giving learners opportunities to think before responding;
> - giving learners opportunities to plan before presenting;
> - providing more narrative texts to enjoy;
> - providing more creative activities;
> - providing more critical thinking activities;
> - stimulating the learners to take part in genuine communication for a reason, with a purpose and with intended outcomes;
> - helping teachers to use the book flexibly in ways which match their personality and beliefs. (Tomlinson 2012, 55)

Tomlinson (2012, 55) suggests that until there is more conclusive evidence on what kind of classroom behavior furthers the acquisition of communicative competence, as well as on what teachers really do and want to do in their classrooms, task features of this kind are recommended.

2.2.5 The concept of authenticity in language learning

A concept often linked to language teaching is *authenticity*. Authenticity is aimed at creating more relevant learning contexts and task for learning. To properly understand the concept, a brief note on

its etymology may be useful. Kaikkonen (2000, 53) explains that the word *authentic* has its origins in ancient Greek word *authentees* "originator, "creator" which means that something authentic has been created by someone who has set something in motion or created something. There has been a lively discussion about authenticity as the objective in language teaching internationally and in Finland. Starting from the discussion on the authenticity of texts, authenticity has been linked to learning tasks, the social context and the language learner's response, too (e.g. Little 1997, 225, Voss 2010, 127–128). Van Lier (1996, 128) suggests that authentication is a personal process of engagement: authenticity is the result of acts of authentication of the learning process and the language used in it by students and their teacher. What follows, logically, is that ways to engage learners need to be found and the learners must be given a feeling of being involved in activities that are done.

In Finnish literature on the topic, Kaikkonen (2000, 53) defines authenticity especially as meaningfulness of the studying situation and learning. Furthermore, authenticity is a learners' experience, not a fact (Kaikkonen 2002, 6). Authentic foreign language teaching and learning has to aim at creating genuine experiences of a foreign language and its use. It also has to let a student to test his/her observations and learning in as genuine situations as possible and in a genuine way, Kaikkonen (2004, 174) explains. Authenticity, being a part of something and being an active actor are closely related in how meaningful a learner considers his/her learning process to be and how much s(he) experiences to be able to affect it, argues Kohonen (2002, 20). In other words, a learner cannot be only a receiver but has to, philosophically put, be a subject of one's own learning (Kaikkonen 2000, 54), as experiencing is a bedrock of real authenticity (Kaikkonen 2000, 57). Tomlinson's (2012, 54) definition of genuine communication in his study book analysis resembles these definitions, as it also highlights the importance of learner's active role, describing genuine situations as those "in which learners speak or write in order to achieve an intended effect with the content and the language determined by themselves".

If authenticity is defined as mainly concerning learners' experience, authenticity of educational situations and the encounters in these situations, then, as a result, the teacher's skill to guide students to act with each other in an authentic way plays a noteworthy role, too (Kaikkonen 2004, 178). Jaatinen (2009, 79) suggests that teachers should deliberately leave room for a so-called area of unexpected in their teaching, and by doing so enable situations of authentic language use that arises in learning situations; in other words, encountering, thinking and storytelling. This is called authentic learning. Such situations can be considered authentic communication in which a foreign language and learner's own life encounter and create real, in other words, authentic, communication (Jaatinen 2009, 86). Taalas (2007, 426) discusses functional authenticity which is created in the situation and has a dialectic relationship with material and situational interaction. As discussed earlier in this chapter, some educational experts believe that formal learning spaces, such as classroom studies, should be closer to "real life" than to which schooling currently prepares students (Ainley & Armatas 2006, 367).

E-learning spaces have the potential to be both learning spaces and to simulate learning spaces in the so-called real life (ibid). Mishan (2004, 10) is even of the opinion that the dichotomy between so called 'real life' and 'the classroom' is thus becoming an outdated point of view as information and communication technology (ICT) have turned into a considerable part of our daily life and learners can reach "real life" with their computers (Mishan 2004, 10). ICT is considered a start of a new era also by many researchers when it comes to authenticity. For example, it has promoted the profile of authenticity and placed it in the center of modern pedagogy, as Mishan (2004, 19) believes. In addition, according to Kramsch et al. (2000, 98), the physical properties of the electronic medium and the students' engagement with it lead into a paradigm shift in interpretation of authenticity. Kramsch et al. (2000, 98), argue that the reason why the computer appeals to learners is because of its "different space and time scales, its easy intertextuality, and its speed of access", which grant agency and a stronger sense of identity to its users.

Rüschoff (2010, 130), too, thinks that computer and Internet tools have great potential for making authenticity a focused methodology (for contents, context and task) implemented for language learning. In conclusion, authenticity is potentially of major importance in developing learner autonomy because it allows learners to use real-world materials that are relevant to *their* individual interests, not just material chosen by their teacher (Reinders et al. 2012, 364). Judging by these statements, it is worth taking the concept of authenticity along with this study. At the end of the study, I am going to discuss briefly these different definitions of authenticity in relation to the present study and its results.

2.3 The effects of the increased media use on learning

Technology and media are an important part of many people's life nowadays and have had effects on ways of studying, working and communicating with other people**.** Even children use the Internet more and more nowadays. According to a national survey on media usage in Sweden, almost 100 % of the age bracket started using the Internet from the age 12 (Kjällander 2014, 10). It appears likely that the situation would be rather similar in Finland because they are both Nordic countries with similar cultures. When language and language use change and take new forms, language education should change, too, as previous research argues (e.g Luukka et al. 2008, 22; Pihkala-Posti 2012a; 2013, 83). Teachers and schools around the world appear to have, for several reasons, an increased pressure to start using information technology in education. According to Reinders et al. (2012, 1), one of the most popular and dynamic areas of education for the application of learning technologies lies nowadays within language learning.

There are several significant reasons for reforming language education and teaching oral communication skills. Firstly, there is a significant difference between Finnish students' ways to use media in school and in their free time in terms of the content and ways of using media (Luukka et al. 2008, 22). A more recent survey, carried out by The Union of Upper Secondary School Students

(2013, 19), showed that a clear majority of the students (85 %) use information and communications technology in their studies at home every week but the number is clearly smaller (57 %) when it comes to the use of it in class. As a result, this disparity between many students' school practice and their digital, hypertextual and multimodal, "authentic" world of different technological devices in which they live, confronts traditional teaching and learning situations, study books and other material (Pihkala-Posti 2012a, 2013). It can therefore be argued that many study books with only printed contents do not have as much in common with students' multimodal everyday life as might be necessary for successful learning (Lehtinen et al. 2011, 130). Taalas (2007, 421-422) argues that the materials produced for language teaching are structure and vocabulary-based. This creates a contradiction in which the teaching materials are separate from the broadening media content and the social nature of the use of technology, which are a normal part of many students' lives. Students may well want certain kind of material if knowing single structures and vocabulary disconnected from their context is in the center of what is assessed and appreciated in courses, exams and final exams. The former chairman of The Union of Finnish Upper Secondary School Students argues that solutions for finding the joy of learning, the lack of which is sometimes mentioned as a problem in Finnish schools, should be looked for in students' everyday life (Ahtokivi 2013). He, like many others, points out that the gap between using technology in a school context and outside of it in everyday life is too big for many and continues that students should have the chance to express themselves in a school environment by using the same media that they are used to using in their everyday life (ibid.).

Secondly, as a consequence of and along with the increased use of Internet and other media, processing of information and reading habits have at least partly changed (Tapscott 2009, Carr 2010, Prensky 2007, Moore 1997, Pihkala-Posti 2012a), which might well affect learning and motivation, too. Previous research proves that the human brain can change throughout life depending on environmental influences, in other words depending on what people do, Tapscott (2009, 100) explains. Prensky (2007, 43) calls this change the *retraining* of brains and points out that these new

ways of thinking are antithetic to older, more conventional ways of thinking. This is what, according to Prensky (ibid.), lies at the heart of many of today's education and training problems. As Moore (1997) argues, linear thought processes which are prevalent in educational systems can retard learning for brains that have been retrained through game and Internet surfing habits. Children who have grown up with computers think differently from those who have not done that (ibid.). According to Moore, they develop hypertext minds and leap around as though their cognitive structures were not sequential but parallel (ibid.). In Finland, Pihkala-Posti (2013, 83), for example, has discussed the same problem of formal education still being based on long linear texts for most part. Instead, new approaches need to be found and developed in order to help *the digital natives*, those grown up with digital media, to find the language classes reasonable and meaningful for them and their lives, Pihkala-Posti (2012b, 112-113) argues and calls this an e-learning pedagogy oriented towards the digital natives.

The digital natives, however, are a heterogenous group (Pihkala-Posti & Uusi-Mäkelä 2014). An interesting view on the division between digital natives and older generations is provided by Hargittai (2010, 92), as she argues that these assumptions of universally ICT-savvy young people are often not based on empirical evidence, suggesting that the division might be an outdated view. Instead, according to her results, there is remarkable variation among young people (Hargittai 2010, 109-110). Furthermore, she argues that this variation is far from being simply dependent on mere access to the Internet (ibid.). Hargittai even discusses varying "digital backgrounds" as a cause for *digital inequality,* for example if learners from privileged backgrounds gain more of the benefits of the Internet usage through more likely using it in potentially beneficial ways (Hargittai 2010, 92–93). International studies have suggested a connection between the skills involved in using the Internet, and using it in a more informed way for more varying kinds of activities, and the higher levels of parental education and the socioeconomic status (Hargittai 2001, 92).

Furthermore, it should be kept in mind that technology is not a factor that only facilitates learning and working but it also brings along undesirable consequences. Technology-based exercises and a large amount of information challenges students' self-control skills, such as the ability to organize and manage all the information (ibid.) Moreover, according to a Finnish survey on upper secondary school students (The Union of Upper Secondary School Students in Finland 2013, 11), statistically students' interest in computers and electronic study material appeared to increase while success in school weakened. In the survey, one offered explanation was that successful students estimated new technology to have a negative rather than positive effect on success in studies. Therefore, technology was considered a risk factor in its unfamiliarity (ibid.).

3 Theoretical background on learner experience

This chapter introduces the theoretical background of the topics that are of particular interest to the present study – learner characteristics and other features which have an effect on the *individual learner experience*. In addition, the last section of the chapter discusses the implications of these factors for language teaching and learning. Learners' thoughts and experiences are worth studying because as Hickey (1997) puts it, if we wish to really understand learning we need to consider the subjective experience of the learner. Thus, there has been an increasing interest in learner experience. It is based on the concept of user experience, which "includes the practical, experiential, affective, meaningful and valuable aspects of the interaction" (Vander Ark 2014). The concept of learner experience might be very useful and could, similarly to user experience, include "a person's perceptions of system aspects such as utility, ease of use and efficiency" (ibid.). In this study, learner experience in seen to include the following components: individual learner characteristics (temperament and motivation) and interaction via computer. These topics cover most of the questionnaire questions. They build the background for analyzing and understanding the informants' reported views and experiences. Some central concepts related to Computer Assisted Language Learning will also be introduced. More precisely, the learner-computer relationship and different time and space relations of online communication will be discussed in order to illustrate how online communication differs from live conversation and what kind of effects it could have on language learners.

3.1 Learner characteristics

In the following subsections, I will discuss temperament (sections 3.1.1 and 3.1.2), motivation (sections 3.1.3 and 3.1.4) and their effects on language learning and teaching.

3.1.1 Temperament

There are considerable differences between learners, as we probably all know based on our own experiences, and this section will support this argument. However, there are traits that apply to people and learning in general. Some approaches, such as suggestopedia, are based on the idea that the human brain can most easily process large quantities of new information when in a state of relaxation (Mishan 2004, 6). Nevertheless, the contention is that from the learner's perspective, conventional classroom language learning situations are stress-inducing, inhibiting the language acquisition process (ibid.). Moreover, the Finnish National Board of Education, too, mentions the emphasis of unhurried pace and peace as a factor in supporting pupils' educational growth and encouraging every pupil to learn (Halinen 2013, 34).

However, not all learners get easily disturbed and the reason for this is that the sensitivity of a set of brain systems varies between individuals (Rothbart & Jones 1998). As a result, the class environment, for example, is not the "same" for different children because it is processed and experienced differently by them (ibid.). Similarly, the same stimulus does not have the same effect for all: there are differences in how easily and intensely individuals become frustrated, fearful or positively excited and also in their capacities for attentional self-regulation (ibid.). Further, some children are more easily overwhelmed by noise and activity, for instance, and are more likely to be fearful than others (ibid.). This kind of fear, however, could be described more suitably as discomfort than as actual fear. Nevertheless, it may even affect processing of cognitive material and make it more challenging.

Children's varying temperamental reactions "form the basis for children's affective memories and evaluations of the classroom and their classroom habits" (Rothbart & Jones 1998). Rothbart & Jones suggest that children's inhibitions and shyness are somewhat stable personal characteristics. This is why I assume that there can be differences of this kind also between the informants of this

study who are young adults. According to Keltikangas-Järvinen & Mullola (2014, 19), too, these differences, typically, emerge at an early age, are hereditary and stable at least to some extent.

3.1.2 The effects of temperament on learning and teaching

Temperament would not be as significant if there was not the so-called snowball effect: for example, failure is followed by disappointment and decreasing motivation, which in effect might even lead to a drop in school attendance (Keltikangas-Järvinen & Mullola 2014, 41). This is why for example shyness might have long-lasting effects which may even be multiplied if it prevents a learner from showing one's skills in classroom situations of different subjects. Visible activity levels during lessons might be given surprisingly heavy importance when assessing a student (cf. e.g. Pihkala-Posti 2013a).

Although there have not been many studies on the topic to date, it has been discovered that there is a distinct connection between temperament and the grade received in school subjects. According to Keltikangas-Järvinen & Mullola (2014, 62), there are hardly any previous studies on the relationship between temperament and a school grade in a foreign language before that of theirs. They continue that the reason is that studying foreign languages starting from the young age is not as important in many other countries as it is in Finland (ibid.). It turned out in their own studies that among different school subjects, the relationship between temperament and the grade was the strongest in foreign languages (Keltikangas-Järvinen & Mullola 2014, 75). Being reserved (shyness) affected grades for all subjects, however, in foreign languages the effect could be as much as half a grade.

Previously, boys have been found to be more pressured than girls to change their inhibited, shy behavior (Mullola 2012, 62). This, according to her, appears to have been the case for a long period of time in the Finnish cultural and educational climate. Nevertheless, being active was found to be as problematic for the learner as being shy. The result is similar to international studies: school system

does not reward being active but it rather harms the student (Keltikangas-Järvinen & Mullola 2014, 86). Being active causes particularly much harm to boys and especially in foreign languages. Active students are considered difficult because they can be noisy, restless, curious, quickly interested in new things, easily bored, poor at putting up with routines and they can make careless mistakes (ibid.). Nonetheless, they might be very talented in many ways (ibid.). Keltikangas-Järvinen & Mullola (2014, 90) argue that the school world has taken a long step towards a society in which neutral personality traits are strongly valued without valid reasons. Although temperament can be seen as a non-academic factor in the educational process, it affects academic outcomes strongly (Leino & Mullola 2014, 753). Both social and temperamental aspects are important if the aim of education is to understand and respect students' individual differences (Leino & Mullola 2014, 759).

It is not unusual for teachers to think that their way to teach, which might be the most natural for the teachers themselves, is also the most natural way to study and learn for their students (Keltikangas-Järvinen & Mullola 2014, 55). This is not a trivial matter because according to preliminary results of an ongoing research, the current system for choosing the students for a teaching practice as a part of their university studies favors individuals with notably high social skills who are ready to meet and try new scenarios (Keltikangas-Järvinen & Mullola 2014, 113). A social teacher and a social student quickly form a good interaction because a social student behaves in a way that is familiar and understandable for a social teacher. This good interaction can result in the student's good grades, according to previous studies (Keltikangas-Järvinen & Mullola 2014, 117). Moreover, it has been found out that in addition to the relationship being good or better in comparison to teachers and students with different temperaments, there is even more teacher-student interaction between the teacher and students whose temperament the teacher has assessed positive, Keltikangas-Järvinen & Mullola (2014, 54) point out. Furthermore, their interaction is more diverse and includes more social teaching, such as pedagogical conversations, encouragement, guidance and asking questions (ibid.). In other words, it is possible that teachers are more in contact with the students they can

subconsciously relate to in terms of temperament. This reduces understanding for shy and inhibited students who are then marginalized in many ways when a teacher finds enough students who behave like him/her in classroom (ibid.). International studies have shown that students with different types of temperaments do get teaching of different kinds from the same teacher although this is not likely to be a deliberate choice from the teacher (Keltikangas-Järvinen & Mullola 2014, 118). Students should not be divided into temperament-based study groups but instead, the tests and tasks that determine a grade should vary in their types (Keltikangas-Järvinen &Mullola 2014, 132-134).

The possibility to follow one's own temperament and behavioral style in studying is seen as the most effective way for every student, while strong demands and strict expectations related to learning styles and processes might even be detrimental, Mullola (2012, 76) summarizes. For example, somebody might learn best if there is a chance to stop studying for a while if needed (Mullola 2014, 94). Grein (2013, 31) deals with the same topic of different learners, and divides them into introverts and extroverts. According to Grein (ibid.), extrovert students might be more willing to take risks and experiment with language than introvert students. Introvert students, on the other hand, would often want to get to know the subject first on their own instead of a group when solving a language task (Grein 2013, 31; Pihkala-Posti 2014, 2015 in press). Moreover, introvert students are more reserved in communicative tasks but positively stand out in written exercises (Grein 2013, 31). Strongly introvert students may get very stressed if they have to solve an oral exercise suddenly without time to prepare. Stressing can even become so overwhelming that one gets a blackout and it becomes impossible to even solve a familiar task that one knows and has learned well (ibid.) In addition, Kohonen (2009, 21) points out that a learner's studying history, such as one's learning experiences, ideas and impressions of oneself as a language learner, guides his/her language learning and that a shy language learner, who avoids communication situations, loses important chances for interactive learning.

3.1.3 Motivation

The psychological term *motivation* is a multidimensional construct with different theories of it and different components to it. Simply put, it is the force behind behavior which explains why people do things (Lee 2005, 330). Another way to describe motivation is a "set of learner characteristics" as Ainley & Armatas (2006, 366-368) put it. Motivation explains, for example, *why* one decides to do something, *how hard* it is going to be pursued by him and *how long* he is willing to sustain the activity Dörnyei (2001, 7). Moreover, motivation is an essential part of human learning (Järvelä 2006, 3) and especially prized in learning situations (Lee 2005, 331). Motivation is generally considered to have behavioral, cognitive and affective dimensions (Lee 2005, 331). According to Dörnyei (2001, 2), the term *motivation* emphasizes one basic aspect of human mind and this aspect has to do with what people *want/desire* (conative/behavioral functions) in contrast to their *rational* thoughts (cognitive functions) or feelings (affective functions).

However defined, there are close interactions between affective, cognitive and conative processes. Motivational and volitional processes characterize learning constituted by a continuous interplay between an individual and the context (Op't Eynde et al. 2001, 164). Among motivational processes that color the interactive relationship between the learner and the learning environment are *interest*, *anxiety*, *curiosity* and *achievement goals* (Ainley & Armatas 2006, 368). That is why a student must be seen as a whole human being with emotional and social aspects and not only as a cognitive actor, as a data processor (Kaikkonen 2004, 174).

3.1.4 The effects of motivation on learning and teaching

Students with different motivational profiles perceive certain features of their classroom environment differently (Tapola 2013, 47). Furthermore, as the hypothesis for situational interest being formed in interplay between the student and the task features, these results also point out how motivational tendencies shape students' interpretations: there may be differences in how interesting the task is

experienced to be by the students (ibid.). There appears to be a relatively high stability in students' consecutive motivational states (Tapola 2013, 50). The findings suggest that the positive reactions or experiences boost each other, whereas the decrease in one of the constructs resulted in a concurrent decrement in the other (ibid). Although the mechanism remains unclear, it is likely that the simultaneous and successive processes of persistence, experiences of mastery and positive emotions facilitate the mutual activation. On the other hand, experiences of frustration and negative emotions following unsuccessful trials with the task may mediate the more counterproductive relationship (ibid.). The series of case-studies by Järvelä & al. (2000) have shown that there are learners who benefit from the change into a different or a new pedagogical context.

If we want to advance understanding of motivation in collaborative learning, both social and individual processes are to be considered (Järvelä et al. 2010, 15-16). Järvelä & Niemivirta (2001, 123) present different dynamic levels of classroom social context: individual student's construction process, the social dynamics of classroom context and the cultural conventions at home and at societal level. According to them, these also offer different channels for examining student motivation. When it comes to group tasks, it is an important notion that every member in a group is "a self-regulating agent with unique cognitions and emotions" (Järvelä & al. 2010, 15-16). At the same time, motivation is a process of engagement and participation in a social activity (Järvelä et al. 2010, 24). It is therefore not decontextualized and static but situated and dynamic, in other words ongoing, constantly shaped and reshaped (ibid.). As a result, this can cause challenges to motivation in social interactive contexts.

The nature of learning contexts influences students' motivation and the social features of the context also play a crucial role in fostering motivation (Lee 2005, 333). Moreover, classroom learning structures can affect motivational beliefs and learning. Competition can promote social comparisons and heighten awareness about performance evaluations, turning attention away from learning and the task at hand (Lee 2005, 334). Students' more stable motivational structures and their situational motivational reactions are shaped by peers, the classroom social networks and climate, teacher and

student relationships, the school ethos and parenting and cultural norms (Tapola 2013, 56–57). In addition, she also mentions the phenomenon of *socially shared motivation* (ibid.). According to Tapola (ibid.), it has been suggested that students' interactions with other students during task engagement might have an influence on the arousal and maintenance of interest experiences. Furthermore, the social aspects of collaboration have an influence on students' motivation according to Rasku-Puttonen (2005, 100) as well. When students can choose, they commonly wish to work with their friends and achieve good learning results (ibid.). However, the company of other students is not always learning promoting. Järvelä & Niemivirta (2001, 122) mention as an example the kind of students who may get too socially-oriented in classroom situations, which distracts their task involvement.

The developing learning spaces have an effect on motivational research as well. Learning spaces that are very different from traditional learning practices challenge motivational research to change, too (Järvelä & Niemivirta 2001, 124). This is because many traditional elements in motivational theories (such as how challenging the exercise, aims, feedback, social comparison and consequences) change fundamentally when moving from a traditional classroom situation to innovative, technology-based learning spaces (Järvelä & Niemivirta 2001, 106-108).

It appears that exercises utilizing information and communication technology offer situations which enable different learners to progress according to their own individual skills (Järvelä 2006, 63; Pihkala-Posti 2014, 2015, in press). It is also possible to create more positive experiences on managing and understanding the task, which can fortify motivation to learn. Internet exercises might also affect students' motivation because as the learning environment is usually open, "empty", it is possible to build and organize exercises and study materials based on the interests of the student (Järvelä 2006, 76). This would be desirable also because there is a lot of material in students' own lives that they bring into learning situations. Therefore, more learning situations could and should be built on that material, however, teachers may find it challenging to listen to it and let it be a part of

their teaching (Jaatinen 2009, 76). Components of motivational teaching practice listed by Dörnyei (2001, 29), which are especially relevant for the experiment in this study, include the following: *presenting tasks in a motivating way, increasing the learners' self-confidence, protecting the learners' self-esteem and allowing learners to maintain a positive social image* and *promoting cooperation among the learners.* Also a *novelty element* is according to Dörnyei (2001, 76) among the most motivating features of task content.

3.2 Interaction via computer

Computer Assisted Language Learning, the learner-computer relationship and time and space relations of communication will be discussed in this section (subsections 3.2.1, 3.2.2 and 3.2.3). They shed light on what kind of an effect interaction via computer may have on learner experience.

3.2.1 Computer Assisted Language Learning

The connection between language learning and use of computers has been studied in particular within the field of Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL). Levy (1997, 1) describes CALL as "the search for and study of applications of the computer in language teaching and learning" and it can be located at the crossroads of various disciplines (Gruba 2004, 624). The main interest of technology in (language) learning has nowadays moved from technical to pedagogical possibilities (Selander & Åkerfeldt 2008). The modern view of second language acquisition is socio-cognitive, that is, language skills develop in social interaction (Gruba 2004, 627). Moreover, the principal learning objective of CALL can be seen to be learner agency (ibid.). In effect, present-day CALL sees the computer as a "toolbox" and a platform of social spaces instead of seeing it as an information carrier or a workstation like the earlier approaches (Gruba 2004, 627). The potential advantages of CALL, as listed by Reinders et al. (2012, 363) are presented in Table 1 below, summarized in order to present an overall picture.

Organizational advantages
Access. That is, access to resources that was previously impossible (making learners less dependent on for example unavailable/scarce teacher support).
Storage and retrieval of learning behaviour records and outcomes Learning and teaching materials (likewise learning records) can be easily stored. This gives insight potentially both inside and outside the classroom, making it possible also for learners to be aware of their own usage of those resources.
Sharing and recycling of materials. Creating, sharing and updating material is easy and learners can take part in this process which gives them control that they do not have in more traditional environments.
Cost efficiency Technology may lower the cost of education by making learners less dependent on teachers. Sometimes also providing language materials in easily reproducible digital format can save money.
Pedagogical advantages
Authenticity. For discussion in this study, see 2.2.5.
Interaction. For discussion in this study, see 3.2.2 and 3.2.3.
Situated learning Technology makes situated learning easier. Situated learning can help in getting the classroom and the target language context nearer each other. The students are more in charge of their learning as they use and discover language on their own in meaningful situations.
Multimedia Producing and distributing of multimedia resources has become easier both for teachers and students because of technology. By giving learners more freedom of choice, multimedia resources also enable taking individual learner preferences and learning styles better into account (for example watching a movie with or without subtitles).
New types of activities that are impossible or difficult produce in other ways. They (for example social networking sites) make interactive language practise situations possible and can empower learners to find and interact with authentic materials without teachers' active role.
Non-linearity Content can be displayed dynamically. With the use of hypermedia, the learning material is not limited only to materials set and chosen by the teacher. Also background information and support tools are easily available.
Feedback With the help of technology, learners can easier get immediate and more personalized feedback (in varied ways, through auditory, textual and visual means), possibly also through peer-feedback as it becomes easier for the students to connect with other learners.
Monitoring and recording of learning behaviour and progress In addition to supporting teachers, also learners can benefit from actual data on their progress. For instance electronic portfolios are one example of a tool especially aimed at encouraging reflection.
Control Many CALL affordances give students more control over their learning and CALL materials can be accessed by learners where and when they want to. It is also possible to choose the level of support (for instance with or without a glossary).
Empowerment Many affordances put learners in charge of their own learning which encourages them to become more reflective and more and more responsible for their own learning processes.

Table 1. Potential advantages of CALL, adapted from Reinders et al. (2012, 363-366).

In addition to these potential advantages for all learners, students who are marginalized for different reasons, for example because of being shy or for other reasons performing poorly in traditional learning environments, are generally agreed to benefit from computer-mediated learning (Treviranus & Roberts 2006, 469).

When it comes to possible benefits of CALL specifically in teaching oral communication skills, online oral communication exercises could be a solution to the problem of not having enough time for oral communication practice during language lessons. They enable giving oral communication exercises as homework and also controlling that the exercises are actually done (e.g. Pihkala-Posti 2015, in press). This is an improvement in comparison with a more conventional classroom situation

in which it might be the student's apparent and physical attendance that matter whereas in the new kinds of learning spaces one must be mentally present – if one does not produce, one does not exist, as Matikainen & Manninen (2000) put it. Moreover, Pinkwart & al. (2012, 128) suggest related to the common problem of students' very varying activity levels in a class that one way of managing the "dominant voices" in the classroom could be taking advantage of the technology. In this way, the teacher can more easily get to know every student's ideas and potential. After this, it is possible for the teacher to tactfully invite these less active students to share their ideas with the rest of the class (ibid.).

There is some disagreement over the definition and naming of CALL and computer-based working. On the one hand, for example, Taalas (2007, 414) has argued that in order to develop the field, it would be beneficial to use the term multimodal teaching instead of CALL which emphasizes the use of technology. Further, what is often advertised as independence of time and place with CALL should in her opinion be more accurately be described as flexibility for time and place, but also as flexibility in relation to the learner's needs (Taalas 2007, 417). Kjällander, on the other hand, (2014, 12) uses the term *online learning* when discussing the exercises in her study as a considerable part of digital learning spaces nowadays take place on the Internet. A more generic term *e-learning* includes all forms of electronically supported learning and teaching, either online or not (Benson et al. 2012, 11).

3.2.2 The learner-computer relationship

The learner-computer relationship has changed significantly over the years. Starting from the one-way process in the 1980s, the computer acted almost as a tutor that patiently delivered repetitive drills, while throughout the 1990s, increasing interactive qualities making it more reciprocal (Ito 2006, 221-222). Moving towards the situation of today, the important function of the computer environment is to create "social spaces" in which people communicate and interact with each other via computer

(Gruba 2004, 630). The focus shifts from the individuals or groups engaged in communication to the process of communication itself, a fact made evident by the common preference of the term *interactivity* in place of *interaction* (Tyrkkö 2006, 126).

The learner perceives, appraises and interacts with the virtual environment (Ainley & Armatas 2006, 370-371). How students use computers and their attitude towards the place of computers in education is critical in understanding student motivation and interactivity within virtual learning environments (ibid.). The change from interaction in the physical world to the interaction with the electronic has been aptly described in the following way:

> In the transition from interaction with the physical world to interaction with the electronic, much of the ambiguity, imprecision, entropy, and indeed all the many ways in which we participate in events, and the narration of events has been turned into a binary choice, to click or not to click (Golovchinky & Marshall 2001, 171).

It appears obvious that such major changes affect people. Speedily developing technology has had an impact on students' modes of expression (Swenson & Taylor 2012, 1). Young people today may find it easier to interact with computers than in face-to-face contexts due to the almost inescapable impact and popularity of social networking sites (ibid.).

3.2.3 Time and space relations of computer-mediated communication

Computer-mediated language research represents a new and rapidly evolving field and the pragmatics of computer-mediated communication (CMC) is in the state of change (Herring et al. 2013, 3-4). Much of the present-day knowledge of the interplay between communication and computers comes from studies of text-based media, such as e-mail and text chat rooms (Jenks and Firth 2013, 217). Technological advancements have led to improvements in audio and video capabilities but research has not been able to keep the same pace. Time relations of the CMC have traditionally been divided into *asynchronous* and *synchronous communication*.

Asynchronous CMC has been defined for example as follows: it happens outside of real time, there is a time lag between the time the message is sent and replied even if the lag time is short,

someone else's message is not read as it is being created and one can take as much time to respond to the post as needed (Academic Technology 2013). Asynchronous CMC is often situated by scholars closer to the written end of the written-spoken continuum than synchronous computer-mediated modes (Herring 2010). From a learner's point of view, non-real time communicating of this kind with a time lag and possibility to answer at one's own pace allow time for important reflection (cf. Pihkala-Posti 2014, 2015 in press). There are studies which have shown that having control over the pace promotes effective learning by making it easier to match the cognitive load with the learner's pace of constructing the understanding (Ainley & Armatas 2006, 377). Because of this, asynchronic exercises might be an easier beginning when students start learning a language which could later be followed by synchronic exercises (Pihkala-Posti 2014) and it may offer best support for the development of higher-level thinking skills for example through having more time to reflect (Graham 2006; Strømsø et al., 2007).

Synchronous CMC has been described for example in the following way: it is real-time communication which takes place like a conversation and its advantages include its immediacy (Academic Technology 2013). It resembles more closely conversations so it can present more natural way of communicating and is in general more interactive than asynchronous (ibid.). More precisely, synchronous CMC allows the communicator less time to edit messages before sending them than asynchronous CMC (Herring 2010). Thus, it is more likely to compose and send them on the fly, which resembles turns in spoken conversation (ibid.). Direct feedback and support of social processes may best be supported through synchronous discussion (Graham 2006; Strømsø et al., 2007).

Research shows that both synchronous and asynchronous communication may be valuable for different pedagogical aims (Hrastinski, Keller & Carlsson, 2010). Because synchronous communication does not afford as much time for important reflection as asynchronous communication, Giesbers et al. (2014, 30) suggest that a blend of synchronous and asynchronous communication in would seem optimal in e-learning in order to in the best possible way to support

learner engagement and the quality of student learning. In Finland, for example Jurvela (2006, 81) has suggested the combination of asynchronic, synchronic and live interaction as a possibility to find flexible working methods of new kind (Jurvela 2006, 81). It is a challenging task and what is more, it is not always easy to say where the boundary of the two first mentioned goes. In a study by Haythornthwaite (2000, 206), students report using an asynchronous medium (e-mail), as a synchronous one by communicating via it in real time. Haythornthwaite explains that e-mail was used near-synchronously because participants monitored their e-mail continuously. In addition to synchronous and asynchronous communication, there is also a concept of *quasi-synchronous communication*. In 1999, Garcia & Jacobs (1999, 339) defined quasi-synchronous computer-mediated communication (QS-CMC) in a following way:

> QS-CMC allows two or more participants to communicate simultaneously by typing messages that they then post in a group posting box. This type of system is "quasi-synchronous" (rather than synchronous, like oral conversation, or asynchronous, like e-mail) because, although posted messages are available synchronously to participants, the message production process is available only to the person composing the message. Thus the process of message transmission (posting) in QS-CMC is not synchronous with message production. Because QS-CMC is a text-based medium, participants read each other's messages instead of listening to them (Garcia & Jacobs 1999, 339).

In addition to the time axis (synchronous versus asynchronous), there are also geographical dimensional aspects (space axis) (Levy 1997, 96) and it is possible to divide geographical dimension into co-located (same place) and remote (different place) (ibid). I will return to these questions in relation to the present study when introducing the use of the learning tool Voxopop in this study in section 4.2.2.

3.3 The importance of varying learning tasks and group sizes

Having to speak publicly or in front of the class may produce anxiety and nervousness for students. Studies have widely shown the harming effects of anxiety on learning and for example the inverted U-curve describing the relationship between performance and anxiety is widely known (Ainley & Armatas 2006, 370). Controllable anxiety can improve learning but as the level of anxiety gets too

high, it affects the quality of performance negatively as it diverts attention from the task (ibid.). Of all the school subjects, language learning is among the most face-threatening for students (Dörnyei 2001, 40). This is because of the pressure of having rather limited language skills with which a student has to operate and work in a classroom (ibid.). For a student whose personal identity is already fragile, being forced to "babble like a child" as Dörnyei (ibid.) puts it, might be simply too much to ask for. There is so much on which a language learner needs to concentrate simultaneously: pronunciation, intonation, grammar *and* the content (ibid.). This is why, from the learners' point of view, one cannot produce even a simple statement without taking a risk of making mistakes (Dörnyei 2001, 40). Keeping this in mind, it does not come as surprise that an influential factor that hinders second language learning achievement is language anxiety (ibid.).

Tomlinson (2012, 232-233) points out as well that speaking is a complex mental process, in which several cognitive skills are combined practically simultaneously. Such cognitive processing demands can create nervousness and embarrassment for learners. Furthermore, Tomlinson continues that it is important that teachers understand the pressures of speaking in public in order to be able to develop strategies to ease learners' anxiety (ibid.). It is not uncommon that teachers are worried about students being reluctant to speak in class and unfortunately reluctance is often interpreted as a lack of motivation (Tomlinson 2012, 232-233). However, there are several emotional and psychological factors which may cause learner resistance when it comes to speaking (ibid.). They are listed in Table 2:

1)	Spontaneous speaking involves little time to prepare, which increases both processing and production pressures. It follows that learners may need silent thinking time for some activities before being required to produce responses.
2)	Any speaking situation can produce feelings of tension, apprehension, nervousness and anxiety. For learners, without advanced command of the language, speaking in class becomes stressful, bound up with self-esteem, inhibition and risk-taking
3)	Personality traits can affect willingness to speak. Some individuals are shy, or more anxious than others. Learners who are anxiety-prone tend to resist speaking, especially in whole-class situations.
4)	Language anxiety can arise from personal or social pressure. Under personal pressure learners may evaluate themselves too negatively, so that they produce only a restricted version of their real capabilities. Social pressure comes from being overconscious of how others may evaluate performance, and fear of mockery or loss of face.
5)	There may be gender differences in willingness to speak. Some studies suggest that male learners can experience greater anxiety when they have to speak English both in and out of class. It is useful for teachers to identify whether their planned activities have psychological implications that could cause students to be reluctant to speak, rather than dismissing learner reluctance as 'lack of motivation'.

Table 2. Factors which can cause language anxiety, listed by Tomlinson (2012, 232-233).

However, although speaking a foreign language may cause anxiety for students and be potentially stress-inducing, it is obvious that it must be practiced despite that, and working together also has its advantages. Since the 1990s, cooperative learning that aims at interactive dialogue has been thought to considerably further participants' individual learning processes and mental growth (Kohonen 2002, 16). In pedagogic thinking, this has meant a transition from working alone to a cooperative and dialogic studying that highlights the importance of active interaction between the participants.

Experience and studies show that for individuals, it might be more effective and conclude in better results but also be more motivating and comfortable to work in a group than alone (e.g. Sahlberg & Shalan 2002). Promoting individual needs and aims does not have to conflict with working together or cooperatively as besides contributing to promoting important social relations, cooperation may contribute significantly to a student's individual aims (Piippo 2009, 45; Rasku-Puttonen 2005, 100). There are more opportunities for students to consider that what they do is meaningful when working together, which many students feel is the best thing in school (Piippo 2009, 64). In addition, students are a significant resource for each other in interactive studying. Cooperative working is like having mirrors in which students can reflect their language and learning skills, personality and social skills, describes Kohonen (2002, 351). Also Pritchard (2007, 5) highlights the

importance of students having a possibility to work with a peer without a teacher as the leader. Peer-to-peer dialogue is very important in language learning and the teacher's role is to initiate this dialogue (ibid.)

Online learning might reform the concept of conventional working groups by offering a possibility to be a part of a group but still work alone, for example by posting one's comments in an online conversation. Working in smaller groups via computer might be less stress-inducing. There are positive experiences in the literature about working in smaller groups or in different ways than in a conventional classroom situation. Moreover, Swenson & Taylor (2012, 50-51) report that many of their students commented about their language courses that small group chats are one of their favorite aspects of courses and that they are, according to them, much less stressful than whole-class chats. Furthermore, the students also expressed that they appreciate the opportunity to express more in-depth thoughts in smaller groups (ibid.). In Finland, a possibility to participate in a lesson from home on an Internet course seemed to get students more relaxed and more comfortable to speak (Pihkala-Posti 2012a, 118). According to Pihkala-Posti (2013, 85) one possible factor explaining this might be that it creates an impression of distancing oneself when speaking alone to a computer or communicating through an avatar (as for example in applications *Voki* and *Second Life*). In other words, one's self would not be as vulnerable to possible mistakes and diffidence (ibid.) On the other hand, for some students it might be more difficult to produce spoken or written language than in a classroom situation if the recording remained public and could be heard later by other students (ibid.)

In conclusion, the key to creating successful learning situations and positive learner experiences seems to be variation which recurs in literature and different references. Learners differ in several ways, for instance in their temperament, motivation and in how they experience working via computer. Different learners prefer to study, and will succeed in it, in different ways, which means that varying working methods need to be used and offered so that all students have similar possibilities (cf. Pihkala-Posti 2014, 2015 in press). Variation is what researchers also suggest in the light of the

results of an assessment of learning outcomes for the advanced course in the English language in Finland, that is, at the end of basic education (Härmälä et al. 2014, 11-13). The main development objectives for English language teaching at schools include the following according to the researchers: a better range of working methods applied during lessons, increased use of ICT, provision for support and improving the range of practices that promote self-regulated learning and self-assessment (ibid.).

4 The starting point, phases, material and methods of the study

I became interested in the use of voice applications on the Hypermedia course at the University of Tampere in 2012. The use of voice applications in language teaching has not been widely researched thus far, which is why the topic is still fresh and more research and development is required in the area (cf. Pihkala-Posti 2012b). Moreover, it is necessary to develop digital and online exercises as the forthcoming Finnish matriculation exam renewal will also include a digital exam section measuring oral communication skills. Currently, students need more practice in order to become familiar with the digital and online exercises and practicing based on study books is prevalent in language teaching (Luukka et al. 2008, 94-97; Tomlinson 2012, 45; Byram 2000, 626). While familiarizing myself with the topic and the relevant literature, it strengthened my preconception that there is a need for more alternative practicing methods as the online exercises would also bring more opportunities to take individual learner differences into consideration (see e.g. Keltikangas-Järvinen & Mullola 2014; Pihkala-Posti 2014).

The empirical part of the study consists of study book analysis and a teaching experiment in which the informants tested an online working method. They recorded a debate in groups of two or three members on Voxopop, which is a voice-based online tool (to be further introduced in this chapter). The teaching experiment aimed at collecting information via questionnaires on the informants' *experiences* and *opinions* of a working method as well as other background information. Questionnaires were answered by the informants as paper versions before and after doing the online exercise.

The present study consists of three parts: before the experiment, the actual experiment and after the experiment (analysis). The material, methods and the phases of the empirical part of the study are presented in a chronological order in this chapter. *Before the experiment* refers to everything that happened before the part carried out in schools (*the actual experiment*), which in turn included the

questionnaires and the online exercise. It may be helpful to summarize the phases first in a compact form in the following Table 3:

Before the experiment	**Frame for the experiment**	Analysis by categorizing the exercise types in *Open Road 8.*
	Preparing the material	Creating the questionnaires, choosing the topic of the debate and the articles for it, creating the user names and the talkgroups for the informants on Voxopop.
The actual experiment	**Informants**	Two groups (Courses EN2 and ENA6) in two upper secondary schools in southern Finland (n=51 in the first questionnaire and n=46 in the second questionnaire). The teachers and schools of the groups attended the *Active learning spaces* project.
	The first (beginning) questionnaire	The first questionnaire as a paper version at the beginning of the course (Appendix 1).
	Launching the online exercise (during the first lesson)	After the first questionnaire, during the same lesson I informed the students about the experiment, distributed and introduced the material (Appendice 3 and 4), the debate topic and the articles. The students practiced the use of the exercise site and recorded the first comments to start the exercise.
	Homework	The informants had a week to record more comments (at least 3 comments each) as homework outside the lessons.
	The second (end) questionnaire (The second lesson)	Carrying out the second questionnaire (Appendix 2) in the groups after they had done the homework. The teachers gave feedback on the online exercise, too (Appendix 3).
After the experiment	**Analysing the answers**	Analysing the informants' questionnaire answers.

Table 3. The phases of the present study.

The first section 4.1 presents the phases before the experiment: the study book analysis and preparing the material (the questionnaires, the topic debate of the topic and the articles about it, the user names and the talk groups on Voxopop). It also introduces the study book series *Open Road* and the online tools used.

The second section 4.2, firstly, introduces the informants. The groups were chosen because their schools and teachers attended the project *Active Learning Spaces.* Secondly, the section describes how the actual experiment proceeded: the first questionnaire, introducing the experiment and the material and launching and carrying out of the online exercise (during the first lesson). Thirdly, it describes practical issues related to the recordings, the second lesson and the second questionnaire. The teachers were also asked for feedback on the online exercise and it will be presented in the analysis part, too. Finally, the section introduces the analysis carried out after the experiment and clarifies how the analysis and the results will be presented in Chapter 5.

4.1 Before the experiment

The frame for the experiment and the empirical part of the study was created through a study book analysis. The study book analysis was carried out using a material-based content analysis. The aim of the analysis was to better acknowledge the scope of the practicing methods currently, and often prevalently, used in upper secondary schools. The tested practicing methods will be evaluated in relation to and reflected against the results of the study book analysis. Thus, the aim of testing the use of the online exercise is to understand what added value the use of *online learning tools* can offer for traditional exercises based on study books. *Online learning tools* in this study refer to Voxopop, speech synthesizers and online dictionaries. They are called *online tools* as the term covers all the relevant applications (cf. Kjällander 2014, 12, see section 2.3), being still more precise definition than the generic term *e-learning,* which includes all forms of electronically supported learning and teaching, either online or not (Benson et al. 2012, 11).

4.1.1 The study book analysis and the *Open Road* series

The aim of the exercise type categorization is to shed light on what kind of exercises are currently offered for practicing oral communication skills in the printed medium. The categorization does not aim at presenting numeric data in regard to how common a certain exercise type is but will simply qualitatively present what kind of exercise types there are. The main interest comes from observing whether communication in the exercises can be considered genuine, "in which learners speak or write in order to achieve an intended effect with the content and the language determined by themselves" as defined by Tomlinson (2012, 54). By having an understanding about the currently commonly used exercises available in the printed medium, it enables discussion and a better understanding on whether the online exercises could bring additional value to the more conventional ways of practicing. The exercises in the textbooks do not, naturally, directly reflect what happens in classrooms because teachers use textbooks in different ways and also use other materials.

The initial exercise type analysis was carried out with the English study book *Open Road* 8, which is a study book for the Finnish upper secondary school English course 8. Both the course and the book are aimed at especially training students' oral communication skills. The study book edition analyzed was printed in 2011 and it is in use in one of the experiment upper secondary schools. It is justifiable to use a study book by publishing house Otava because the aim is to attain information on exercises that are commonly used. The combined market share of Sanoma Group and Otava in comprehensive school and upper secondary school study books in Finland is over 90 % (The Finnish Association of Non-fiction Writers 2011). Löytty (2011) argues that biggest companies practically decide what kind of books are used in schools and how often they are revised. *Open Road* is described as "the number one series in upper secondary schools" in Otava's own study material leaflet (Otava 2014). The study book series includes course books for eight different courses and an option for digital books with the same content that can be used side by side with the printed books (Otava). Moreover, the digital books have additional features such as a possibility to emphasize parts of the texts/material, write notes on the text or listen to the chapters (Otava). The possibility to listen to vocabularies or single words is not, however, listed as a feature of the digital books (ibid.).

4.1.2 Preparing the questionnaires

Preparing the material started with planning the method of gathering data which in the present study is using self-administered questionnaires (see Appendice 1 and 2). The questionnaires are in Finnish in order to avoid misunderstandings among native Finnish speaker informants. Questionnaires were chosen as they are an efficient way of gathering more data from a larger number of informants than what is possible for by interviewing, which is suitable for the study's purposes. The informants can answer the questionnaires at their own pace and without pressure by the interviewer, which allows them more time to reflect. Information gathered through interviews would supposedly have enabled gathering more in-depth data concerning a smaller number of informants but it would not have served

the aims of this study. Instead, the aim was to test the online working method with a numerically more extensive number of students and gather a larger amount of data quickly. Although a larger sample of informants was preferred to in-depth interviews as a way of gathering data, this study does not aim at generalizations. It is a case study, which is expedient when a particular context is of interest because it focuses on a particular case more thoroughly (van Lier 2005, 195) than a study that aims at statistical findings. However, it should be remembered that educational experiences can vary notably from school to school but also from classroom to classroom within the same school (Seltzer & Rose 2006, 483). Upper secondary school students were suitable informants in this study because they had plenty of experience on studying English in school context, due to which it appeared likely that they had opinions on it. Moreover, their language skills could be assumed to be good enough to complete the exercise.

The questionnaires of the present study were composed based on the theoretical background of the study and were carried out using mixed methods. Quantitative and qualitative methods bring different aspects to the research subject. The last few decades have seen the call for bridging of the quantitative-qualitative division, which is echoed by the growing interest in mixed methods (Seltzer & Rose 2006, 477). A majority of the questions in the questionnaires in this study are closed. Respondents are asked to indicate how much they (dis)agree with different statements by using the *Likert-response sets* on a scale of 1–4 (*Strongly disagree – partly disagree – partly agree – strongly agree*). The reason for using mainly closed questions in the present study is that they "are usually a more satisfactory way of creating data" (Fowler 2009, 101). Reasons for this mentioned by him are:

> • The respondent can perform more reliably the task of answering the question when response alternatives are given.
> • The researcher can perform more reliably the task of interpreting the meaning of answers when the alternatives are given to the respondent.
> • When a completely open question is asked, many people give relatively rare answers that are not analytically useful. Providing respondents with a constrained number of answer options increases the likelihood that there will be enough people giving any particular answer to be analytically interesting.

> • Since most data collection now is computer assisted, it is much easier for interviewers or respondents to record answers by checking a provided answer than to key in narrative answers. (Fowler 2009, 101)

I chose to use four answer alternatives in quantitative questions which, according to Lavrakas (2008, 427) is the norm if an even number is used. A neutral answer alternative was left out in order to get informants to choose whether they more agree or disagree. It is usual that the "I do not know" response is a statement that informants are not willing to do the work required for giving the answer when the questions are about their own lives, feelings and experiences (Fowler 2009, 95). Sometimes, especially if the subject of the questions is further removed from the informants' immediate lives, it is possible that an informant really does not know or have enough knowledge on which to base an opinion, for example (ibid.). In the present study, however, the subject of the questions was not far removed from the informants' immediate lives but instead, everyone should be able to answer them based on their long and regular language study experience in school context. The neutral answer alternative could therefore have been too easy an answer for the informants not willing to think about their opinions.

In order to gain interpretable information, questions of agree-disagree type should be asked only about the extremes of a continuum (Fowler 2009, 104). An example given by Fowler is that it is not possible to know whether an informant disagrees with a statement such as "My health is fair" because it is good or poor (ibid.). These kinds of extremes were aimed at in forming the questions in this study. Multiple questions should be avoided because asking several questions in technically one question (e.g assuming something) makes questions unreliable (Fowler 2009, 94). Such questions were tried to be avoided when forming the questionnaires for this study. Another issue is the possibility of closed questions being subject to response distortions (Lavrakas 2008, 429). Central tendency bias can cause avoiding the extreme response categories. Because of acquiescence bias, informants may agree with statements because they wish to choose what they think is the most appropriate or the "correct" answer. It is a question of social desirability bias when informants try to portray themselves or an organization they belong to in a favorable light. These effects are attempted

to be avoided by researchers by varying statements so that some of them are expressed in a positive form while others are expressed in the negative (Lavrakas 2008, 429). Varying positive and negative forms were also used in the present study.

Although closed questions have their advantages, open questions enable getting answers that the researcher did not anticipate and reaching more precisely respondents' real views (Fowler 2009, 101). Another important point is that respondents can answer in their own words instead of having to choose a provided response. Not being given an opportunity to express one's thoughts at any point can frustrate respondents (ibid.). This is why open questions were also used in this study. Students may have experiences or thoughts about the experiment that I did not anticipate and therefore could not know to ask about.

Finally, although questionnaires as well as both closed and open questions are justified ways of gathering data, there might be some challenges. Firstly, it is possible that there are informants who do not answer according to what they really think which, of course, applies to other methods using interviews as well. Secondly, an ordinal scale measurement is relative because the presented scale affects the distribution of informants who choose a particular category or label (Fowler 2009, 102). Thirdly, it is also important to understand that informants differ in how they understand the labels, categories and statements. Nevertheless, meaningful analyses are still possible because on the average, for example, the people who rate their feelings as "good" feel more positively than those who rate their feelings as "fair" (ibid.). In addition, people may interpret for example statements differently, and poorly defined terms can sometimes be a problem in both open and closed questions, for example if there are terms or concepts that are ambiguous or have multiple meanings (Fowler 2009, 92). I tried to avoid this by running a pilot test and asking some other students to answer the questions and say if there was something that was unclear or strange. No other special terms other than *motivation* were used in the questionnaires of this study. It was not defined what was meant by motivation but the presupposition was that the informants understood the basic meaning of it, an

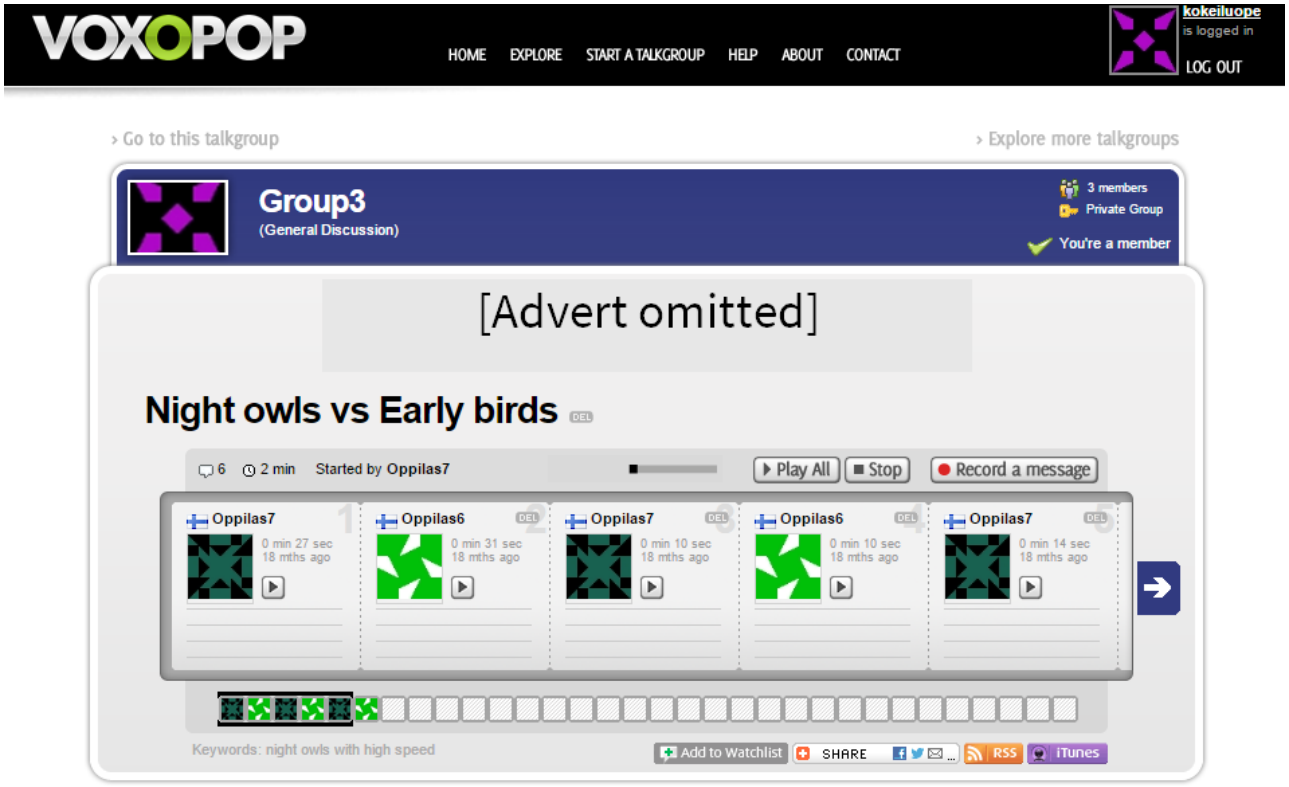
interest to do something. Although attempting to take different biases and problems into account in making the questions, it is not reasonable to assume perfect correspondence between the answers given by the informants and some other reality (Fowler 2009, 87).

4.1.3 Topic of the debate and the online tools

The topic of the debate was chosen with the teacher of the first group and it was the same for all the pairs. The topic that was chosen was the varying biological circadian rhythms of people. The assumption was that everyone has personal experience and opinions on the topic. I found two articles on the topic in English to serve as a background for the debate for the informants. One article said that people who get up early in the morning are the happiest and another that people who stay up late are more likely to be successful than early risers. I also gathered useful phrases and Internet links to websites with phrases, tips and information related to argumentation and successful debating. In addition, I gathered Internet links to websites which could support practicing oral communication skills, such as three dictionaries with audio examples for pronunciation available and two online text-to-speech synthesizer applications, *Imtranslator* and *Oddcast.com*. These links and phrases were gathered in Word documents (see Appendices 4 and 5) which the students received on their electronic course platform. User names and passwords were created for the students in advance.

Creating the Voxopop talk groups, user names and passwords for the students was the last phase of preparing the material. Voxopop talk groups resemble message boards but instead of text they use voice and have a specialized user interface (ibid.). All the talk groups in this experiment were restricted to be private so that only the members of a specific talk group, myself and the teacher of the group could see and hear the contents. One student begins by recording an initial comment which the other then replies to. When all the comments of the debate have been recorded, the comments can be combined and listened to as a coherent dialogue. A pair or a group does not have to record their comments together and the only limitation is to wait for his/her pair's comment before answering.

The participants can therefore work alone at their own pace if they wish. Picture 1 shows a finished conversation on the website. The square icons, with green patterns on a dark and light backgrounds alternately, at the center of the page, represent the informants and their comments.



Picture 1. A finished conversation on the website.

4.2 The experiment and the analysis

Carrying out the first (beginning) questionnaire (see Appendix 1) launched the experiment. It was filled in during the first lessons of the courses. Before that, I, on purpose, did not tell the students anything else than the vague topic (the use of technology in language teaching) of my study. This was done in order to prevent any further information guiding their answers. After that the exercise part was started during the same lesson.

4.2.1 The informants

The informants of the study were two upper secondary school groups in two different cities in southern Finland. In one of the schools, a valid research permit was already valid and in the other

one, the principal granted one after I applied for it. One of the upper secondary schools is known for its remarkably good results in the matriculation examination tests. There is a three tenths difference between the schools when the schools' entrance criteria are compared: students must reach a certain average grade in their secondary school leaving certificate in order to be accepted into the upper secondary schools (Toponetti 2015). The data is from 2012 which is when most of the informants have started their upper secondary school studies. There were in total 51 informants in the first questionnaire and 46 in the second questionnaire. Table 4 below illustrates the number of informants in the questionnaires in both groups:

	Group 1	Group 2	Total
First questionnaire	23 female, 10 male	6 female, 12 male	51 informants, 29 female, 22 male
Second questionnaire	21 female, 8 male	6 female, 11 male	46 informants, 27 female, 19 male

Table 4. The number of informants.

As shown in Table 4, there are in total five informants less in the latter questionnaire because there were absences from class. This does not cause problems in terms of the analysis because students' answers will not be analyzed individually by comparing one informant's answers between the first and second questionnaire. Instead, the answers from all the informants will be analyzed together per each question at a time in order to find tendencies in their answers.

The informants were 16–18 years old at the time of the study. Most of them had begun their English studies approximately at the age of nine or ten (in the third or the fourth grade). The informants thus had approximately ten years of experience of studying English in a school context. One of the groups attended in April 2013 and the other group in December 2013. In one of the groups, the experiment was a part of the course ENA6 (Tiede, talous ja tekniikka, "Science, economy and technology"), which is the last obligatory English course for all students in upper secondary school. In another group the experiment was a part of the course ENA2 (Viestintä ja vapaa-aika,

"Communication and free time"), another obligatory course which aims at practicing students' oral communication skills (Finnish National Board of Education 2003).

4.2.2 During the first lesson and homework

In the exercise part, the informants were first asked to read the background articles on varying biological circadian rhythms of people and to decide who defends "early birds" and who "night owls" within their talk groups. Students were encouraged and asked to refer to the articles or the studies introduced in them at least twice in their comments. The students also received tips on how to seek help on the Internet when doing the exercise, if necessary. The online learning tools (dictionaries and text-to-speech synthesizers) and argumentation support links and phrases were introduced to them. The next phase was for the students to choose their pair or group, and they were given the user names and passwords. Then, the Voxopop site and the exercise were introduced to them. After logging in to the exercise website and testing the use of it, the pairs started recording their own debate. Some students prepared for their comments more than others, for instance through writing notes whereas some students answered to the comments spontaneously without preparing. They were told that they can record at school, too, if it is not possible to do that at home.

The students were asked to record at least three comments each. The comments were recorded in two parts. The first comment(s) were recorded during the lesson so that all the debaters were present online and replied immediately. In Levy's (1997, 96) words, this kind of usage is *co-located computer-mediated communication*. The remaining comments were to be recorded as homework, which can be classified as *remote computer-mediated communication* (ibid.). As regards time relations, Hrastinski et al. (2010, 654) points out that instead of the medium per se, it is the users who decide how a medium is used. Thus, a single medium may be used in different ways.

Voxopop was used in two different ways in the present study, although it appears to be more asynchronous than synchronous. In general, there is admittedly a short time lag and a delay between

saving the voice message and the moment when the other student(s) can listen to it, compared to a real-time conversation. However, the co-located usage of Voxopop was more synchronous than remote usage (cf. Haythornthwaite 2000, see Chapter 3.2.3). Although the students' turn-taking possibilities in the online exercise are limited, the conversation bears some resemblance to a real-time conversation. The definition of quasi-synchronous computer-mediated communication by Garcia and Jacobs (1999) presented in 3.2.3 appears to fit this kind of usage, even though Garcia and Jacobs described it as a quality of a text-based medium. However, by the time of the definition, Voxopop and other voice applications were not similarly available to be used in language learning contexts as they are now**,** and the term appears not to have been elaborated on during the last decades for some reason. In my opinion, the term quasi-synchronous is suitable to be used in describing the more modern multimedia tools, too. In conclusion, it is my presupposition in words of Herring et al. (2013, 3) that technological advancements have led to such improvements in audio and video capabilities that research is lagging and has not yet followed with the improvements.

4.2.3 The second lesson

The second (final) questionnaire was carried out in the groups after they had had a week to finish the homework. Most of the students managed to record the comments without problems. However, some students in both groups reported technical problems and did not manage to record their comments at school or at home. Therefore, in one group, the students continued recording in the second lesson of the experiment. Despite that, a small number of students did not succeed in recording any comments. There was also one student who refused to record at all.

The informants who did not get comments recorded, or refused to record (one informant), were asked to answer in the second questionnaire anyway based on their experience. These answers are not separated from other answers because there are not many of them and all the students knew how the exercise worked because it was introduced and tested by them during the first lesson. The

assumption was that these students knew enough about the exercise because of testing it during the first lesson in order to be able to answer. I considered it to be important not to exclude these students in order to get a more realistic view of the online exercise: it is, indeed, problematic and worth noting if there are students who cannot accomplish the exercise because of technical reasons. In addition to this, technical problems with the recording do not supposedly motivate students, for example, and excluding their opinions would have been therefore likely to distort the results.

4.2.4 Analysis after the experiment

After the experiment, the informants' answers were analyzed. I started the analysis of the quantitative questions by making graphs of all of them and going through the material while taking notes. The graphs form the basis of the analysis even though the graphs are not presented if the result was clear enough to be presented without illustration. Unclear answers, such as two alternatives chosen, were categorized as empty. The numbers of empty answers are shown in every figure as well as the total number of the informants in the particular question or statement. When discussing the results, the percentages given have been counted based on the qualified answers, in other words, the answers that did not get disqualified as empty. That is, if two students of 51 students had not answered at all or had answered in an incorrect way, 49 students is considered to be 100 %. This was done because disqualified answers were not considered to be informative.

The method used in analyzing the open questions is qualitative content analysis. It is a research method applied to the verbatim responses given by the informants to open questions (Lavrakas 2008, 140). The aim is to get a meaningful set of categories by coding the answers (ibid.). The verbal answers were read through and analyzed thematically, starting with forming thematic groups of views and expressions used by the informants. If one informant had mentioned several different views, (s)he has been listed in many answer categories. Furthermore, some direct citations have been used to support the analysis. They are sometimes needed for readers' understanding as they open, illustrate

or explain the informants' different ways to see or experience things (Trost 2005, 134). Only single, short sections from longer responses will be presented in the study. These examples will be presented with the code of the informant, for example M3/F3 (male or female informant number three) in order to clearly show the source of the comment. The sexes of the informants have not systematically been taken into account in the analysis. However, as regards open questions, some differences between the sexes were notable and will therefore be presented.

In the following chapter, the analysis and the results will be presented. Both questionnaire questions and the informants' verbal answers have been translated from Finnish into English. The results will be presented thematically. In some sections, statements and questions from both questionnaires are presented together, which is clearer than presenting answers related to the same topic separately. It is stated within every figure (both closed and open) whether the presented data is from a questionnaire carried out before (questionnaire one, Q1) or after the online exercise (questionnaire two, Q2). In addition to this, it is stated whether the presented data is a closed Likert-statement (S) or an open question (Q) and what is the number of the statement or question within the questionnaire. For example, the statement number seven in the first questionnaire is thus Q1/S7 and question number one in the second questionnaire is Q2/Q1. The actual statement or the question will be presented, too. Unless otherwise stated, when discussing the results, the reported category of the "agree" or "disagree" answers includes both answers which partly and completely (dis)agreed with the statement. When referring to the informants, both the expressions the students and the informants will be used, and they mean the same.

5 Analysis and results

This chapter, firstly, begins with an exercise type categorization of *Open Road 8*. Secondly, in section 5.2 the survey results will be presented and analyzed. Thirdly, the teachers' feedback on the experiment will be discussed in section 5.3. Finally, the last section 5.4 summarizes the results.

5.1 Exercise types in *Open Road 8*

Study books and dictionaries sometimes contain phonetic transcriptions for the words that are new or complicated in their structure. Therefore, the most noteworthy finding in *Open Road 8* was the fact that there are practically no phonetic transcriptions at all to guide the students' pronunciation although the course, and thus also the study book, concentrate on spoken language. The phonetic transcription symbols are introduced to students on the first pages of the book. The study book also advises the reader that spelling and pronunciation do not match one to one in the English language and students are encouraged to check the pronunciation in a separate dictionary or in the word list provided in the book. Although this is an important piece of advice in theory, in practice there are no phonetic transcriptions for the words used or new words taught in the book, with the exception of a list of occupations.

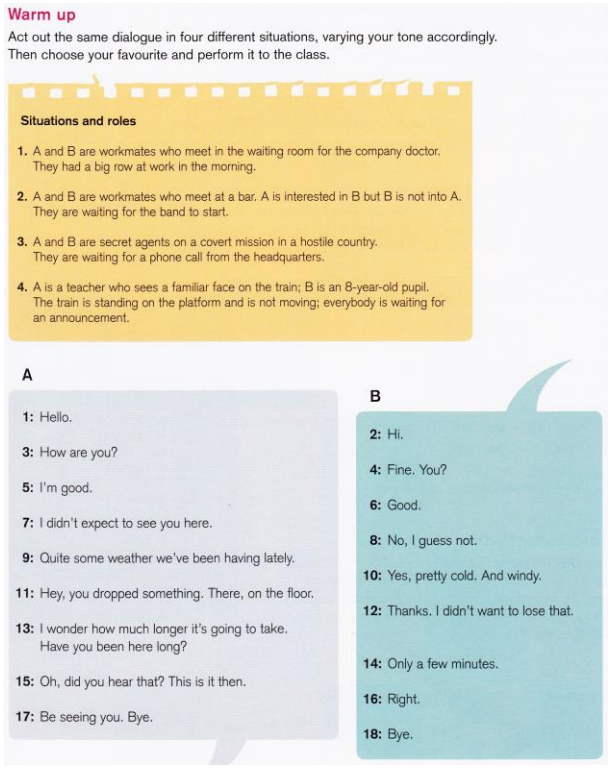
According to my own experience within the field, not many students use dictionaries actively as a pronunciation aid and especially ones separate from the study books are not widely used. This is why, in my opinion, it would be essential to have phonetic transcriptions printed in the vocabularies and general glossaries, which many students use regularly when studying new words. In addition, Otava, the company that publishes *Open Road*, provides online material for the study book series. Students can download all the chapters and pronunciation exercises of the study book as MP3 recordings (Otava). However, a possibility to listen to single words in the vocabulary, for example, is not listed as an available feature on the digital book or on the website, although the digital versions enable for example making notes in the text and other additional features (Otava).

When a student is interested in the pronunciation of a specific word, it would be important to have a chance to listen to the single word only instead of the whole chapter.

According to my exercise type categorization, the following are the main exercise categories used in *Open Road 8:*

1) Provided dialogues
2) ”Situation tasks” and role playing
3) Discussion or debate with a pair or a group
4) Summarizing or retelling something
5) Presentations and interviews
6) Communication skills exercises
7) Games
8) Listening comprehensions, songs, reading exercises out loud

Categories 7 and 8 are not given further attention to in this analysis because they do not train students' own production in a similar way as the other categories (category 8) or are a rather rare exercise type (category 7).



Warm up

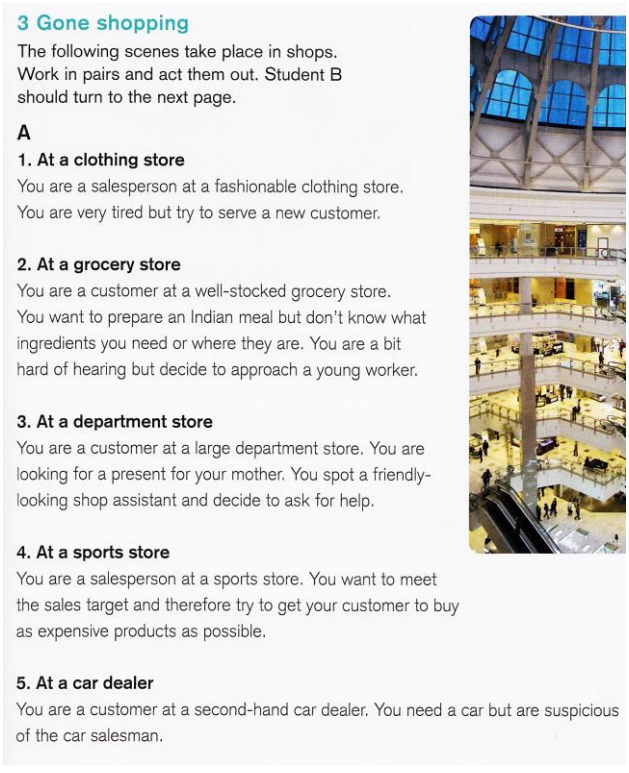
Act out the same dialogue in four different situations, varying your tone accordingly. Then choose your favourite and perform it to the class.

Situations and roles

1. A and B are workmates who meet in the waiting room for the company doctor. They had a big row at work in the morning.
2. A and B are workmates who meet at a bar. A is interested in B but B is not into A. They are waiting for the band to start.
3. A and B are secret agents on a covert mission in a hostile country. They are waiting for a phone call from the headquarters.
4. A is a teacher who sees a familiar face on the train; B is an 8-year-old pupil. The train is standing on the platform and is not moving; everybody is waiting for an announcement.

A	B
1: Hello.	
	2: Hi.
3: How are you?	
	4: Fine. You?
5: I'm good.	
	6: Good.
7: I didn't expect to see you here.	
	8: No, I guess not.
9: Quite some weather we've been having lately.	
	10: Yes, pretty cold. And windy.
11: Hey, you dropped something. There, on the floor.	
	12: Thanks. I didn't want to lose that.
13: I wonder how much longer it's going to take. Have you been here long?	
	14: Only a few minutes.
15: Oh, did you hear that? This is it then.	
	16: Right.
17: Be seeing you. Bye.	
	18: Bye.

Picture 2. An example of exercise type 1.



3 Gone shopping

The following scenes take place in shops. Work in pairs and act them out. Student B should turn to the next page.

A

1. At a clothing store
You are a salesperson at a fashionable clothing store. You are very tired but try to serve a new customer.

2. At a grocery store
You are a customer at a well-stocked grocery store. You want to prepare an Indian meal but don't know what ingredients you need or where they are. You are a bit hard of hearing but decide to approach a young worker.

3. At a department store
You are a customer at a large department store. You are looking for a present for your mother. You spot a friendly-looking shop assistant and decide to ask for help.

4. At a sports store
You are a salesperson at a sports store. You want to meet the sales target and therefore try to get your customer to buy as expensive products as possible.

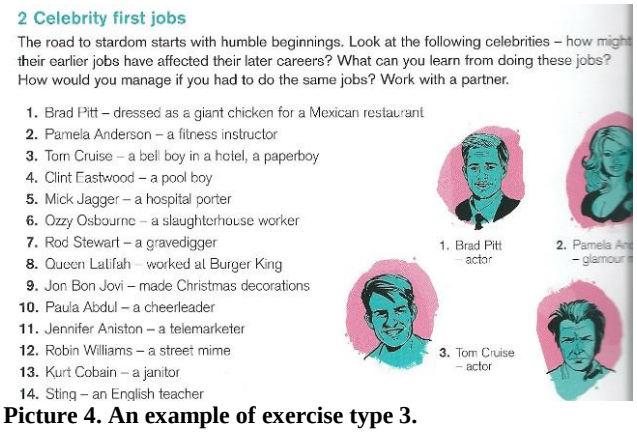
5. At a car dealer
You are a customer at a second-hand car dealer. You need a car but are suspicious of the car salesman.

Picture 3. An example of exercise type 2.

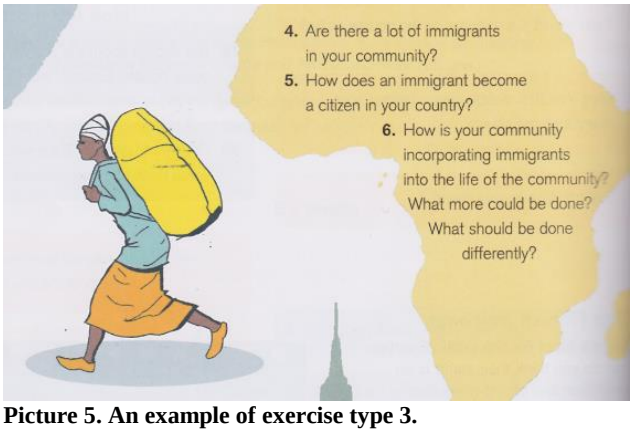
Picture 2 shows an example of the exercise type category 1 (provided dialogues). The category includes dialogues in English, which the students do not need to produce themselves but are asked to

read out loud in pairs, or, alternatively, dialogue outlines in Finnish which the students create a conversation in English based on. At least the outline of the dialogue is provided and sometimes also more detailed lines. Picture 3 illustrates category 2 (”Situation tasks” and role playing). Likewise the first category, this exercise type is typically fairly strictly guided when it comes to the contents of the student’s production. As shown in Picture 3, instead of leaving more room for the students’ imagination, they are provided with rather detailed scenes (e.g. “you are looking for a present for your mother”) which they are asked to act out.

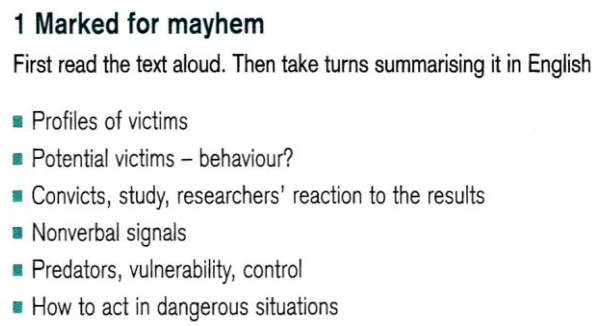
Pictures 4 and 5 show two examples of the exercise type 3 (Discussion or debate with a pair or a group). It is characteristic of this exercise type to ask the students to discuss or argue using specific material (picture 4) or topics or questions (picture 5). This exercise type leaves more room for the student’s imagination than the previous categories. Consequently, the exercises in this category allow more freedom of choice related to the language content and form (In comparison to e.g. categories 1 and 4). In category 4 (summarizing and retelling, picture 6), the original materials supposedly guide the students’ production to some extent, which means that the criterion “content and the language determined by themselves” is not fulfilled, at least not optimally.



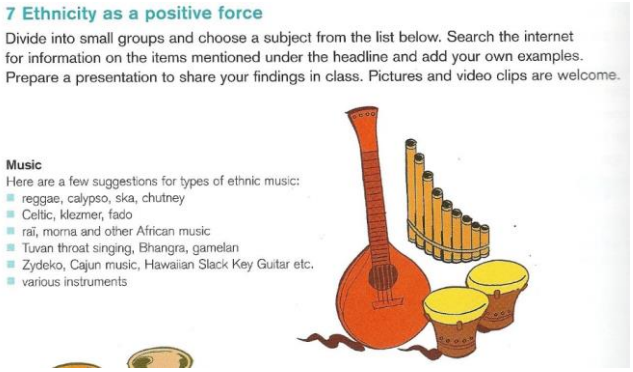
Picture 4. An example of exercise type 3.



Picture 5. An example of exercise type 3.

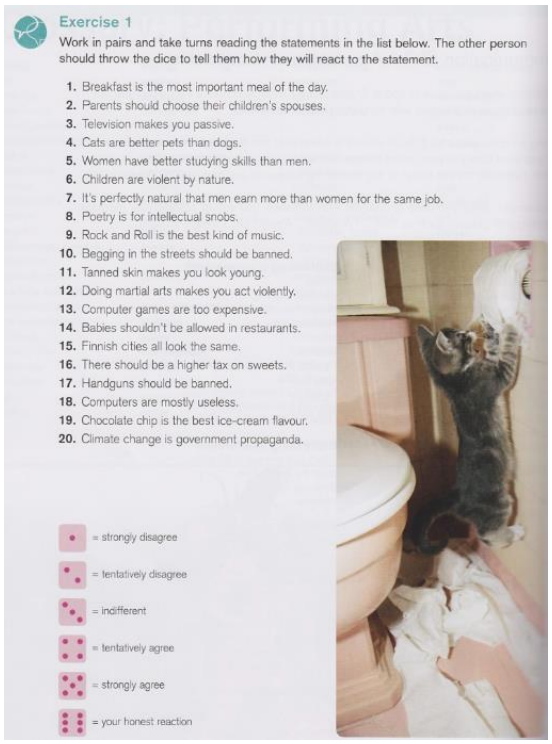


Picture 6. An example of exercise type 4.



Picture 7. An example of exercise type 5.

The fifth category includes presentations and interviews in which students prepare language material that they later use or introduce to others. An example of this category is shown in picture 7. Finally, the last category comprises of communication skills exercises which are rather guided as well. An example of this type is the argumentation exercise (see picture 8) in which students throw a dice and are then asked to react to the provided statements read by their pair according to the number given by the dice which represents different degrees of (dis)agreement. The students are not let to choose the content of their answer, which is why it is questionable whether it is genuine communication if the definition presented earlier by Tomlinson (2012, 54) is followed. However, one of the numbers on the dice represents the option "your own reaction" in which the students are asked to react according their own opinion.



Picture 8. An example of exercise type 6.

In conclusion, according to the findings of the study, there are four exercise type categories (1 provided dialogues, 2 "situation tasks" and role playing, 4 summarizing and retelling something, and 6 communication skills exercises) guided to a varying degree when it comes to the contents of the student's production. The guidance varied from the use of certain words or expressions (e.g. in a provided broader context/situation task, such as buying a present for one's mother) to the completely guided exercises in which all the lines were provided or predefined (e.g. those used in the particular chapter). If following strictly the definition of Tomlinson (2012, 54), communication is not genuine if the content and language are not determined by the learners. However, it may be helpful to provide guidance for the learners in the form of structures and words as a way of scaffolding. Exercises in categories 3 (discussion or debate with a pair or a group) and 5 (presentations and interviews) generally allow more freedom of choice related to the content and form of the students' language production. Finally, excluding the listening comprehension exercises, basically all the exercises in *Open Road 8* are meant to be done with a pair or in a group. This is natural since communication by definition is interactive. In general, the most noteworthy finding in the analysis was the lack of phonetic transcriptions which, however, were encouraged to be used.

5.2 Survey analysis

In this section, I will present the main survey results and their analysis. The main interest of the analysis lies in identifying general tendencies in the students' reported views and experiences in regard to their backgrounds and learner characteristics. The scale of closed questions is 1–4 (*Strongly disagree – partly disagree – partly agree – strongly agree*).

5.2.1 Quiet learners who prefer working alone versus social team workers - the informants as language learners and users in their own opinion

In this subsection, the informants' reported views of their backgrounds will be presented: general learner characteristics, experiences of language use, views of own language skills and language learning situations in the classroom context. Finally, the informants' reported online learning habits will be presented.

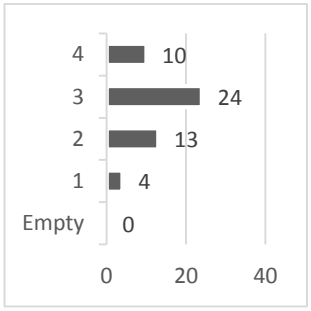


Figure 1. Q1/S1: I like situations in which I get a chance to speak foreign languages (n=51).

Figure 2. Q1/S2: I am a talkative person (n=51).

The first question asked the students to indicate whether they liked situations where they could use their oral foreign language skills. The results show that approximately two thirds of the informants (67%) answered that they liked situations in which they get a chance to speak foreign languages, whereas one third (33%) answered that they did not like such situations. This can be seen in Figure 1.

In the second question, the informants were asked whether they considered themselves to be talkative. Figure 2 illustrates that according to the answers, two thirds (67 %) of the informants considered themselves talkative, whereas one third (33 %) did not. The distributions of the

disagreeing answers in question 2 were almost identical to the disagreeing answers in question 1. This might suggest that one third of the informants did not consider themselves eager to speak in their mother tongue nor in foreign languages. Therefore, their dislike of language speaking situations may have nothing to do with foreign languages but may simply be based on their temperament.

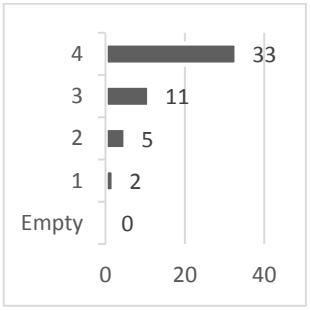


Figure 3. Q1/S21: I have needed English oral communication skills outside of school (n=51).

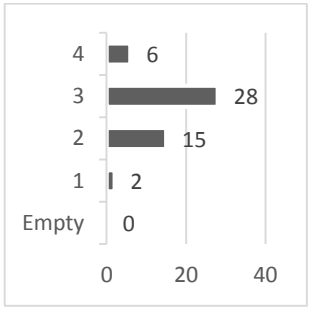


Figure 4. Q1/S23: I think that the English skills that I learn at school are similar to English skills that I have needed or believe that I am going to need outside of school (n=51).

In statement 21, the informants were asked if they had needed English oral communication skills outside school. As can be seen in Figure 3, as much as 86 % of the informants have needed English oral communication skills outside school. By contrast, 14 % percent of the informants disagreed with the statement. It is somewhat unexpected in today's international world that there are upper secondary school students who have not needed English oral communication skills outside the school context.

The informants were asked to indicate in statement 23 whether they think that the English skills that they had learned in school were similar to the English skills that they had needed or believed that they were going to need outside of school. As shown in Figure 4, according to 67 % of the informants, the English skills learned in school and needed outside of it were similar to each other. It could be argued that it is good for the students' motivation to feel that the learned skills are needed in life. On the other hand, upper secondary school students do not yet have much experience of working life, for example, and might not therefore be able to estimate the correspondence on a larger scale.

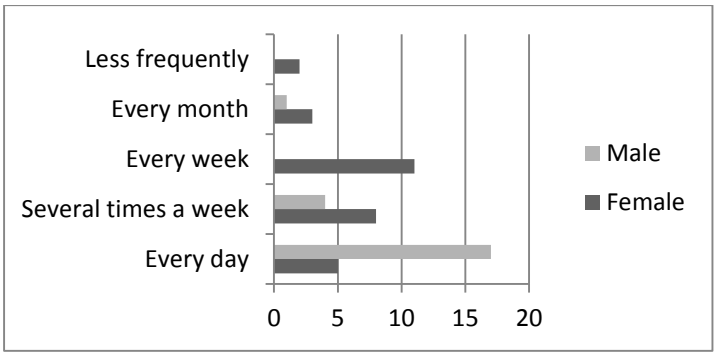


Figure 5. Q1/Q12: How often do you visit websites in the English language? (n=51).

Question 12 was aimed at investigating how often the informants visited websites in English. As shown in Figure 5, with the exception of one male informant, all male informants answered that they visit English websites several times a week. A clear majority (77 %) reported visiting every day. Moreover, there was a considerable difference between male and female informants. Of female informants, only 17 % reported daily visits and 28 % several visits a week. Most female informants (38 %) reported to visit websites in English weekly. Less than every fifth (17 %) answered that they visit English websites every month or more seldom. Visiting target language websites may well have an effect on language skills, which provides an interesting route for further research. The data gathered in the present study does not specify which websites the informants visit.

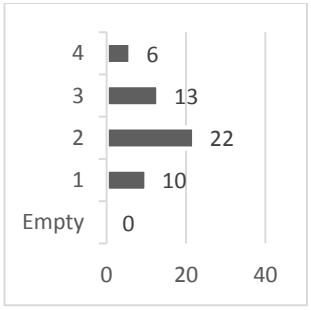


Figure 6. Q1/S25: I feel insecure about my English oral communication skills (n=51).

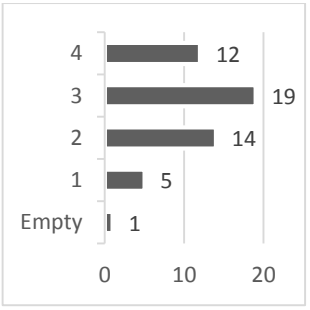


Figure 7. Q1/S24: I can verbally explain my reasoning for my own opinions and views so fluently in English that I believe I woul manage with my skills in working life (n=51).

In statement 25, the informants were asked whether they felt insecure about their oral communication skills. Most informants (63 %) had trust in their oral communication skills and disagreed with the statement. Conversely, 37 % were less sure about their communication skills and agreed with the statement as is illustrated in Figure 6. Related to this, the informants were asked in statement 24 whether they thought that they could verbally argue for their opinions and views so well in English

that they believed they would manage with their skills in working life. Most informants (62 %) believed that they would manage with their current English oral communication skills in working life (Figure 7). The percentage of the students (62 %) who believed they would manage in working life was very near the percentage of the students who answered that they felt confident with their oral communication skills (63 %). Of course, it must be taken into consideration that people evaluate themselves with varying degrees of self-criticism. The learners' own views of their skills and success in working life is nevertheless interesting.

Although many informants felt confident with their oral communication skills, as previously discovered in statements 24, 25 and 8, many still indicated an interest to learn to pronounce English better than they can now (Q1/S8). Nearly all the students completely (63%) or partly (29 %) agreed with the statement. Only 8 % disagreed with the statement and all of them only partly.

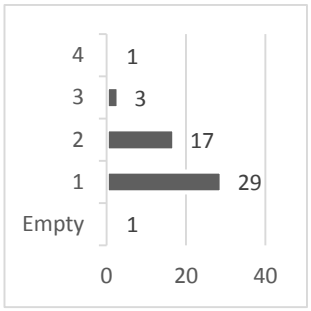


Figure 8. Q1/S15: Being in a classroom disturbs my studying and concentration (n=51).

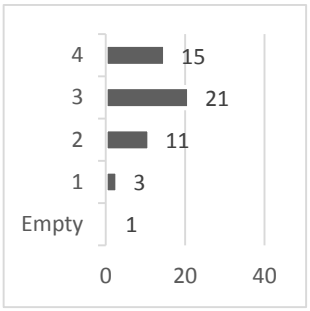


Figure 9. Q1/S29: I am interested in the forthcoming technology experiment (n=51).

In statement 29, the informants were asked whether they were interested in the forthcoming experiment. As shown in Figure 8, almost three quarters (72 %) of the students answered to agree with the statement. The percentage is approximately as large as that of the students who answered that they liked situations in which they get to speak foreign languages. It is therefore a possible explanation that the same informants who answered that they enjoyed such situations answered that they were interested in the experiment. Students who like situations which involve conversations may thus be more likely to be extroverts who are less stressed in new and social situations than introverts (e.g. Grein 2013, 31).

Statement 15 was aimed at discovering whether the informants felt that classroom situations

disturbed their studying and concentration. The results show that a clear majority (92 %) of the students did not think that classroom situations disturbed their studies and concentration (see Figure 9), which is a positive piece of information. Nevertheless, 8 % of the students felt that classroom situations disturbed them. Although they are a minority (approximately 10 % in this study), students of this kind and their needs should not be overridden and forgotten on a general level. It is likely that students of similar kinds are found in other groups and schools, too. Furthermore, three of these four informants who answered that classroom situations disturbed them were men. This could obviously be a coincidence in a relatively small number of informants.

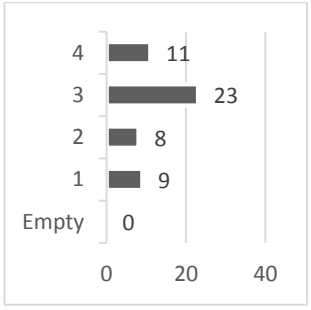


Figure 10. Q1/S16: Being nervous in classroom situations has a negative effect on my performance, for example pronunciation (n=51).

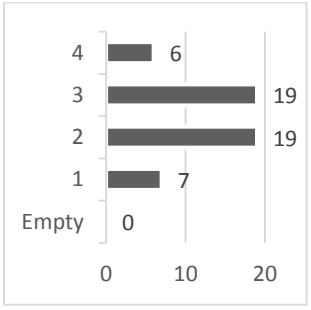


Figure 11. Q1/S17: The teacher does not get a truthful image of my oral communication skills in the classroom (n=51).

The informants were asked in statement 16 whether they were of the opinion that being nervous in classroom situations has a negative effect on their performance, for example pronunciation. Figure 10 shows that 67% of the students agreed with the statement. This is a significant number of students and, interestingly, somewhat contradictory with the fact that there were not many informants who were of the opinion that classroom situations disturbed their studying (Q1/S15). Statement 17 covered the same topic and the students were asked to express whether they thought that the teacher did not get a truthful image of their oral communication skills in classroom situations. The informants' answers divided into two equally large groups. This is illustrated in Figure 11.

The informants' views on how they learn best in their own opinion were asked in the first questionnaire. If a student mentioned several ways, his/her answers were all listed. Three students did not answer this question. The following figure illustrate the answers, Figure 12 concentrating on the

preferred working method from a social perspective (alone vs. with others) and Figure 13 concentrating on the more detailed answers.

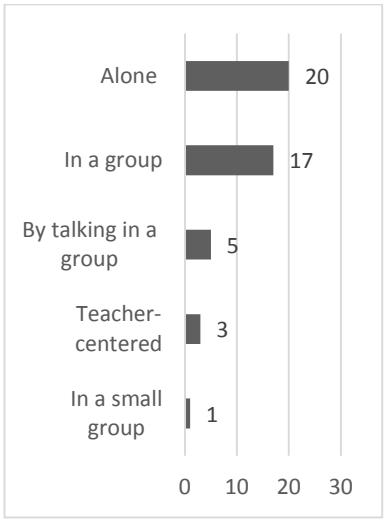


Figure 12. Q1/Q3: In your opinion, how do you learn best? For example alone or in a group (n=51).

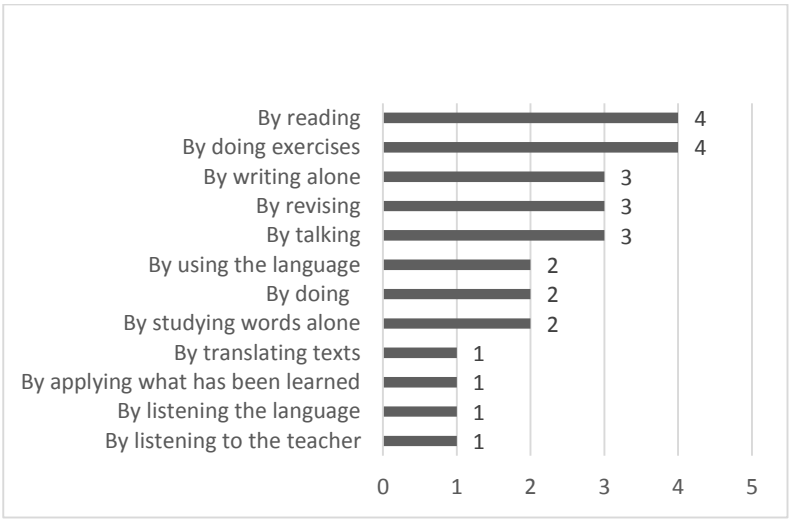


Figure 13. Q1/Q3: In your opinion, how do you learn best? For example alone or in a group (n=51).

As can be seen, almost one half (47 %) of the informants named working alone as the best working method for them. The other half (51 %) expressed the idea of learning best in some kind of a group. The informant F4 further explained that she learns best in a group, if the group works. This is a very apt notice: there are surely many students who would agree on the fact that not all groups are equally beneficial for learning. Seven students answered more precisely that they learn best in a group because then it is possible to communicate in English with others. Five students answered and emphasized that they learn best by *talking* in a group. For other students who preferred group work, other ways of working together in a group might be equally good.

As shown in Figure 13, variation in the preferred working methods is noteworthy. The informants' answers formed 12 categories and none of them included more than four answers. In addition to the answers listed here, some students mentioned that pictures help them to learn.

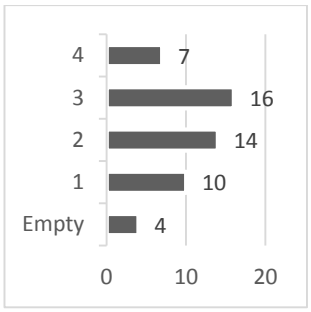


Figure 14. Q1/S11: I have been taught at school how to look for information and help on the Internet in my language studies (n=51).

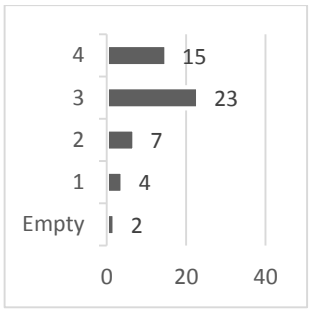


Figure 15. Q1/S5: I use technology/the Internet in my language studies (n=51).

The informants were asked to indicate in statement 11 whether they were of the same opinion that they had been taught at school how to look for information and help on the Internet in their language studies. Figure 14 shows that approximately one half (49 %) of the informants thought that they had been taught such skills to various extents and 51 % thought the opposite. Every fifth student (21%) completely disagreed with the statement. In statement 5, the informants were asked to express whether they used technology and the Internet in their language studies. Three quarters (76 %) answered that they did so (Figure 15). Thus, judging purely by these numbers, approximately one quarter had not, in their own opinion, learned to use them in the school context. This raises the question of what kind of learning support had they learned to use on their own. The following chapter looks at the informants' views on the use of the online learning tools before, during and after this experiment. Before that, the following section summarizes the main findings on the informants' backgrounds in this chapter.

In the open question Q1/Q7, the informants were asked what kind of support they know there is for language studies on the Internet and what support they use themselves. The answers to both questions are presented combined because they overlapped greatly. Again, the answers presented a wide variation in the informants' skills and habits. On the one hand, some informants did not know or use any online support (See e.g. citations from informants F2 and F12 below) and, on the other hand, some students reported active and varying use of several kinds of online learning support (See e.g. responses from informants F10 and F25 below).

F2: I do not know anything

F12: I have not used anything because I have not found such websites
F10: There are for example plenty of grammar advice and exercises, stories, websites in English…
F25: The use of the Internet is taken for granted in the English studies

Most of the informants' responses ranked somewhere between these two types. The following Figure 16 illustrates the answers from the informants who had listed the online support that they know or use, thus excluding the few informants who answered that they did not know or use any online support.

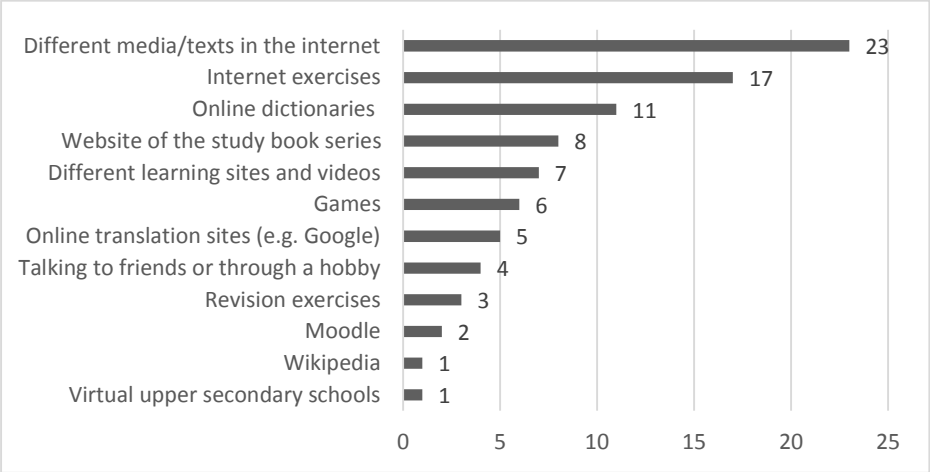


Figure 16. Q1/Q7: What kind of support for language studies you know that there is on the Internet and what kind have you use used yourself? (n=46).

As shown in Figure 16, different media and texts on the Internet and Internet exercises were the most common answers as online support used. It is presumable that for example the informants F2 and F10, who were presented earlier as examples who answered that they did not know any online learning support, did not consider websites in the English language as such although they supposedly knew that there are such on the Internet. In addition, online dictionaries were mentioned only by 22 % of the informants. One reason for the relatively low percentage could be that online dictionaries were so self-evident to the informants that they did not mention them. The use of online dictionaries will be further discussed later in this chapter. Moreover, websites of the study book series were mentioned by 16 % of those who answered the question. Many of them, however, mentioned that they rarely use them. One informant, for example, said that (s)he had not used them since secondary school. Furthermore, seven students out of 51 mentioned different learning sites and videos on

especially vocabulary and grammar. Two students specified that they used tutorial videos made by private users on *Youtube*. Six students out of 51 mentioned games and five mentioned online translation sites (such as Google). However, it is worth noticing that some students described online translation sites as an online dictionary, which may suggest that they use it to translate single words. This is exemplified in the following answer:

M6: Online dictionaries, for example Google Translate

It would be interesting to know how these students use the online translators. They can, of course, be used so that you look for just one word as is done with a dictionary. If used for translating longer sentences or even texts, it may not be beneficial for learning if students do not work on the sentences themselves at all. Finally, less commonly mentioned forms of online support were online chats with friends and chats related to a hobby online, revision exercises, Moodle, Wikipedia and virtual high schools. Informant M20 estimated that approximately one half of his vocabulary had been learned through ICT activities and particularly through virtual games.

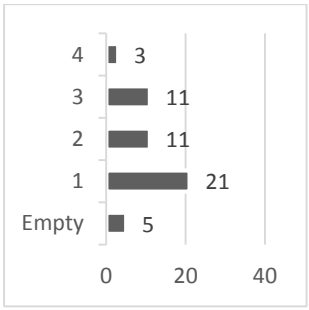


Figure 17. Q1/S9: I sometimes look for help on the Internet, for example when I want to know how a word is pronounced (n=51).

The informants were asked in statement 9 whether they sometimes look for help on the Internet for example when they want to know how a word is pronounced. The results illustrated in Figure 17 show that 70 % of the informants did not do so. In the light of previous studies which suggest that young people spend plenty of their time with the ICT and the Internet (e.g. The Union of Upper Secondary School Students 2013; Kjällander 2014), the number of informants who used the Internet for this purpose (30 %) appears relatively small. It is also a relatively small number in relation to the

informants' answers in the first questionnaire (Q1/S8) where 92 % of them expressed a wish to learn to pronounce better. As mentioned earlier in the study book analysis in section 5.1, the study book analyzed in the present study did not offer phonetic transcriptions.

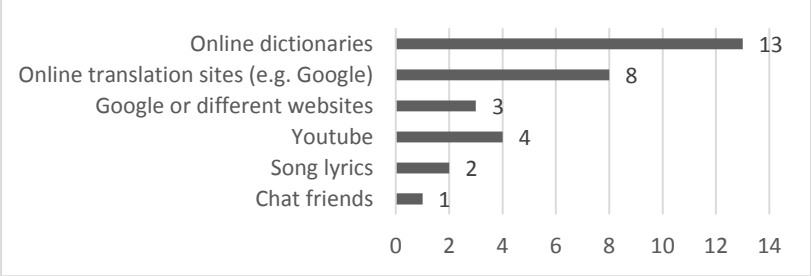


Figure 18. Q1/Q9: If your search for help with the pronunciation of a word online, where do you search for it? (n=51).

In an open question related to the statement 9, the informants were asked to specify where they searched for help with pronunciation if they did so. As Figure 18 illustrates, the sources most commonly used were online dictionaries and online translator sites (e.g. Google). Some informants had specified that pronunciation help found in the dictionaries that they used was in the written form. Informant M13 specified that he used the Internet for checking pronunciation in certain accents. In conclusion, judging by the numbers presented in Figure 18, the informants who reported using the Internet as support (14 informants, 30 %) with pronunciation used many different sources.

To sum up, most of the informants had needed English outside the school context, liked language use situations and felt confident with their oral communication skills. Despite that, almost three quarters of the informants were of the opinion that being nervous in classroom situations had a negative effect on their performance and almost all the informants (92 %) reported that they would like to learn to pronounce better. Almost half on the informants were of the opinion that they learned best alone. Noteworthy differences between the sexes were found concerning visiting webpages in the English language. Among all the informants, there were noteworthy differences in the reported use of technology and the Internet in language studies.

5.2.2 Language use and language learning situations in and outside of classroom situations

In this subsection, the informants' views and experiences on different language use and learning situations will be presented. The main interest lies in whether there are considered to be differences in the contexts in and outside of classroom.

Figure 19. Q1/S26: I would appreciate a possibility to practice oral communication skills in an unhurried situation at my own pace (in comparison to classroom situations) (n=46).

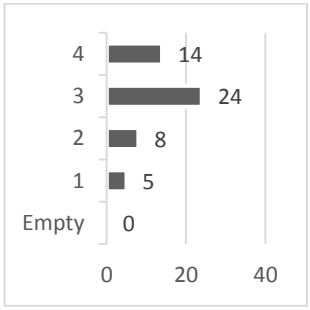


Figure 20. Q1/S19: It would be useful for me if I could listen to English speech repeatedly and in an unhurried situation if I wanted to, in order to learn more (n=46).

The students were asked in the first questionnaire (Q1/S19) whether they agreed with the statement that they would appreciate a possibility to practice oral communication skills in an unhurried situation at their own pace (in comparison to a traditional classroom situation). As shown in figure 19, 61 % of the informants agreed with the statement. Moreover, they were asked to express whether they agreed with the statement that it would be useful for them to be able to listen to talking in English and repeat the audio in an unhurried situation if they wanted to in order to learn more (Q1/S19). Three quarters (75 %) were of the same opinion with the statement (see Figure 20). This shows that more time would be appreciated to process learning material, which is not always possible in lessons where it is often necessary to cover an extensive range of content over predefined time.

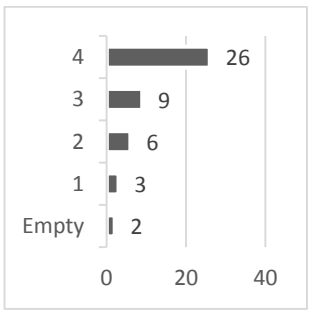


Figure 21. Q2/S3: I liked the possibility to record the answer(s) at my own pace and in my own space as compared to a classroom situations (n=46).

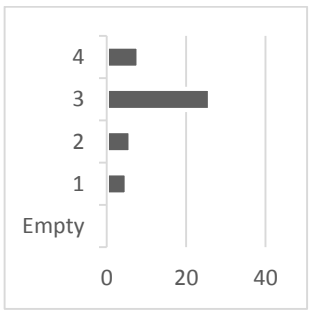


Figure 22. Q2/S11: It felt useful to have the possibility within the exercise to repeatedly listen to the recordings of others without rushing if I wanted to (n=46).

Related to the statements 19 and 26 in the first questionnaire on the need for more processing time and unhurried situations, after the exercise the informants were asked whether they liked the possibility to record the answer(s) at their own pace and within their own space as compared to classroom situation (Q2/S3). As Figure 21 illustrates, 71 % answered that they had liked that. Similarly, the informants were also asked to indicate whether it felt useful to have the possibility to listen to the others' recordings again without rushing if they wanted to. Most informants (68 %) agreed with this statement (see Figure 22). In other words, there were no notable differences in the informants' views before and after they had done the online exercise. Most of the informants expressed the preference for more processing time, unhurried situations and a chance to repeat the recordings in all the questions.

The students were asked whether students they agreed with the statement that speaking outside of classroom situations was easier than in classroom situations as has been observed in earlier studies (see Pihkala-Posti 2012a, 2012b). The informants' answers before and after doing the online exercise are illustrated in Figures 23 and 24 respectively:

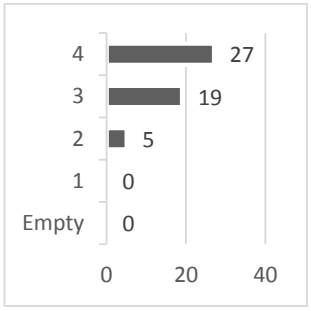


Figure 23. Q1/S22: I feel it is easier to speak English (or another foreign language) outside of classroom situations (n=51).

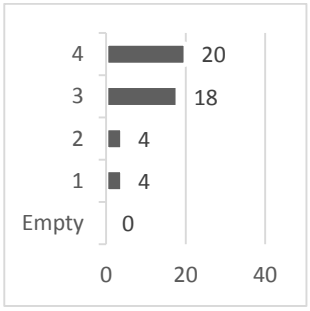


Figure 24. Q2/S4: I felt it was easier to produce English speech alone than in a classroom situation (n=46).

A clear majority (90 %) of the informants answered before the exercise that they thought it was easier to speak English (or another foreign language) outside of classroom situations. Interestingly, after the experiment, the percentage of informants who were of the opinion that it felt easier to produce English speech alone than in a classroom situation was smaller (75 %). It is possible that the informants answered the first questionnaire taking only non-school contexts into consideration. *Situations*

outside the classroom can be interpreted in different ways. Moreover, speaking is fundamentally social in its nature due to which recording may have felt unnatural or strange at least at the beginning, especially if a students felt that (s)he recorded his/her speech alone instead of talking to a pair or a group via a computer. Nevertheless, it is interesting that three quarters of the informants felt that speaking outside of a classroom situation was easier. One reason for this might be the social pressure caused by the other students in a group, which is what previous research on language anxiety suggests. In addition, students were asked whether their oral communication skills are better outside of the classroom. Figures 25 and 26 illustrate their answers:

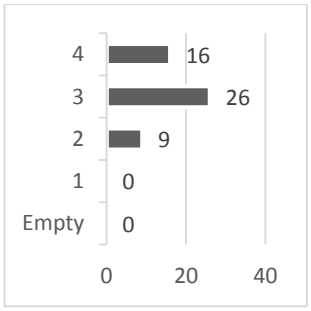


Figure 25. Q1/S27: I think that my English (or other foreign language) oral communication skills are better outside of the classroom (n=51).

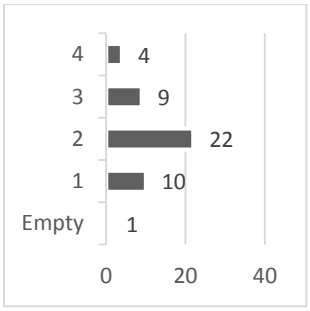


Figure 26. Q2/S10: I do not think that I did better when recording alone than when compared to classroom situations (n=46).

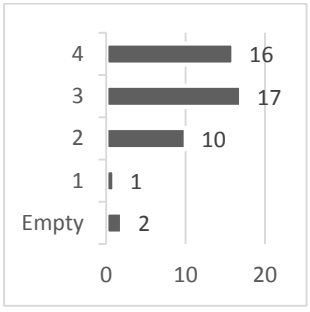


Figure 27. Q2/S5: I felt that the teacher got a more truthful view of my skills when I could record my answers at my own pace and in my own space (n=46).

Similar findings are seen in the statement concerning the quality of the production of oral communication skills outside of the classroom as in the question seeking to find out if speaking is easier elsewhere. Before the online exercise, 82 % of the informants thought that their English oral communication skills are better outside of the classroom (See Figure 25). In comparison, the number of informants who evaluated evaluated after the exercise that they did better when recording alone compared to a classroom situation was smaller (64 %). This is illustrated in Figure 26. Furthermore, as shown in Figure 27, as much as 75 % of the informants experienced that the teacher got a more

truthful view on their skills when they could record the answers at their own pace and undisturbed. If *a truthful view on skills* is interpreted to mean better skills than those usually shown in a classroom situation, it is interesting that these percentages differ from each other. The difference can relate to one of the statements being in a positive and the other in a negative form.

In sum, most of the informants expressed in all the statements related to the topic the preference for more processing time, unhurried situations and a chance to repeat if necessary. These features were hoped for while both producing speech and listening to a language. The majority of informants thought in the first questionnaire that it was easier to speak English outside of classroom situations and in the second questionnaire that it was easier to produce speech in English alone. Similar findings could be seen concerning the quality of the production, which the informants considered to be better outside of the classroom and when producing speech alone.

5.2.3 Variation in English teaching both welcome and unwelcome

In this subsection, I will present the informants' views on whether more variation in English teaching would be desirable and if so, what kind of variation or changes they would like. Moreover, I will analyze whether the informants consider there to be need for reformations in the current working methods in general level.

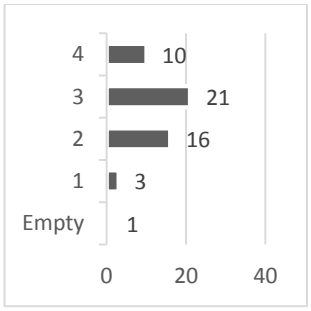


Figure 28. Q1/S4: I would like more variation in the working methods in English lessons (n=51).

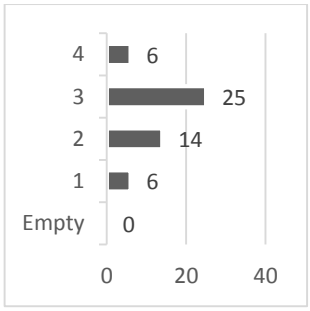


Figure 29. Q1/S10: I would like to use technology/the Internet more often in English lessons (n=51).

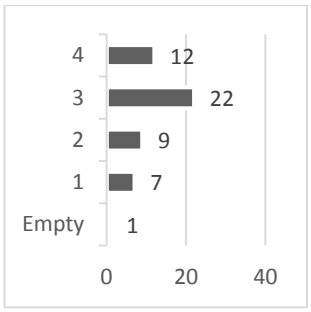


Figure 30. Q1/S14: I like conventional classroom working methods more than the use of technology/the Internet in English studies (n=51).

Before doing the online exercise, the informants were asked to express whether they agreed with the statement that they would like more variation in working methods in English lessons. Most of the students (62 %) were of the same opinion, as shown in figure 28. Similarly, they were asked before the exercise part whether they would like to use technology and the Internet more often in English lessons. Figure 29 illustrates that 61% of the informants answered that they would like that. At the same time, however, 68 % of the informants agreed with the statement that they like more conventional classroom working methods than the use of technology and the Internet in English studies (Q1/S14). Of course, these views do not exclude each other. In other words, it is possible that an informant would like to use technology and the Internet in English studies more than is currently done but still ultimately prefers conventional working methods. On the other hand, students are more used to conventional working methods and it is possible that this fact plays a role in the opinions. An example of such an opinion is the following:

M18: Old ways work well and all the new ones are always irritating

The first questionnaire's statement 4, which was presented above, also included an open question which asked the informants to further specify what kind of more varying working methods they would like, or conversely, what they would not like. Figure 31 looks at informants' thoughts on why (additional) variation was not considered necessary:

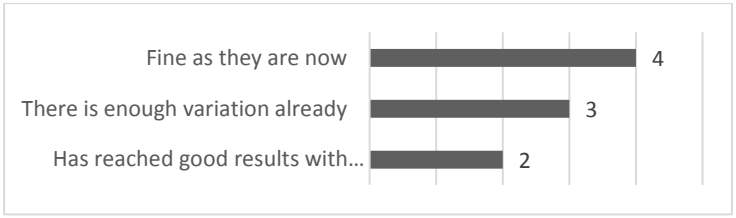


Figure 31. Q1/Q14: I would like more variation in working methods in English lessons. If no, why not? (n=51).

As can be seen above, nine informants (18 %) mentioned the following reasons for not wishing additional variation in the working methods: the working methods were seen as fine as they are, there was enough variation already and that they were happy with the current methods because they had reached good results with them. The following Figure 32 illustrates the answers of the informants who considered there to be room for more variation:

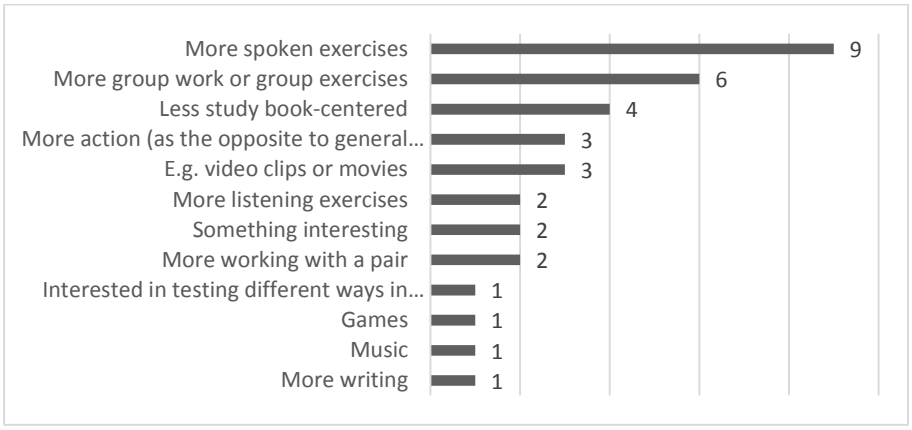


Figure 32. Q1/Q3. I would like more variation in working methods in English lessons. If yes, what kind of? (n=51).

Firstly, the most common (18 %) suggestion for more varying working methods was having more spoken exercises. For example, F23 answered more precisely that it would be nice to talk more and practice authentic language use instead of practicing single words. Moreover, F29 wished for a chance to speak with native English speakers in lessons. Secondly, the second most common suggestion was working more in groups in general and group tasks of different kinds. Thirdly, four informants hoped for less study book-centered working methods. They expressed that they did not want to "always read texts and translate them into Finnish." One of these four suggested that working with the study book could vary more with working via a computer. In addition, one informant answered that there should not be any reading out loud. Fourthly, three informants expressed a wish for more action in lessons, which they saw as the opposite to general revision. As Figure 32 above shows, other suggestions were

watching e.g. video clips or movies, doing "something interesting" and working more often with a pair. Games, listening to music and more writing were also hoped for, by one informant per suggestion. Finally, one informant answered that (s)he was interested in different working methods in general.

All in all, the informants' suggestions varied greatly. For most parts, ideas for new kinds of activities were not presented and the answers dealt with how much time should be done spent on different activities during lessons. The use of *more* or *less* in front of the listed activities confirmed this view. The same presumably applies to games, music, video clips and movies listed by some informants; it is likely that they are used on lessons to some extent although the informants do not specifically wish for *more* of them. A wide variation in answers and the fact that they mainly dealt with activities that are familiar to the informants is understandable as the informants may have different views on what *variation* is. Moreover, the informants' backgrounds and habits vary, which means that what is variation for one is not variation for the other. Furthermore, students are accustomed to certain kinds of working methods and it might be difficult to imagine some other kinds of methods. That is, one cannot know what kind of working methods (s)he would like if (s)he does not have any experience of them.

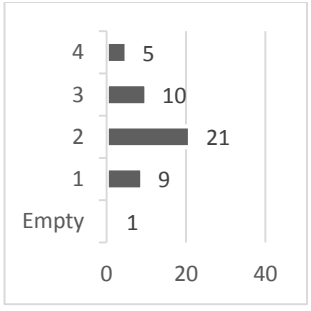


Figure 33. Q2/S23: I do not wish that technology and the Internet were used more in English teaching (n=46).

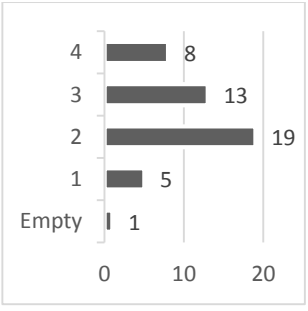


Figure 34. Q2/S19: I use technology and the Internet so much at my own time that I would therefore like exercises in English lessons to remain more conventional (classroom working etc.) (n=46).

After the exercise part, the informants were asked whether they agreed with the statement that they did not wish that technology and the Internet were used more in English teaching. The statement corresponds with statement 10 in the first questionnaire, but it is this time presented in a negative

form. Most of the students (65 %) disagreed with the statement and did wish that they were used more (see Figure 33). There appears to be considerable consistency in the students' answers in this topic. The number closely resembles the answers to the same question before the online exercise in which 61 % of the informants agreed that they would like to use technology and the Internet more.

After the exercise, the informants were also asked whether they agreed with the statement that they used technology and the Internet so much in their free time that they would therefore like exercises in their English lessons to remain more conventional. Almost one half (47 %) agreed with the statement (see Figure 34).

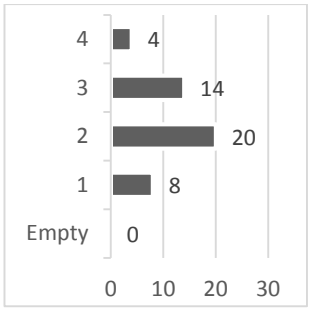


Figure 35. Q2/S20: English oral communication skills are practiced enough in secondary school and upper secondary school (n=46).

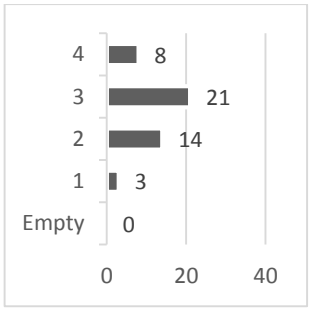


Figure 36. Q2/S22: It would be useful if different ways to utilize technology and the Internet in supporting language learning were introduced in English studies (n=46).

In statement 20 in the second questionnaire, the informants were asked to express whether they agreed that oral communication skills were practiced enough in secondary school and upper secondary school. Most of the students (61%) disagreed with the statement. This is illustrated in Figure 35. They were also asked whether they thought that it would be useful to introduce different ways to utilize technology and the Internet in supporting language learning in English studies. More than half (63%) were of the same opinion.

To sum up, most of the students answered that they would like more variation in the working methods on the English lessons. In spite of that, approximately as many agreed with the statement that they liked more conventional classroom working methods than the use of technology. When asked to specify their views, approximately every fifth informant mentioned the following reasons for not wishing additional variation in the working methods: *the working methods were fine as they*

were, there was enough variation already and they were *happy with the current methods because they had reached good results with them*. The suggestions by the rest of the informants varied greatly and concerned mainly whether particular activities should be done more or less on the lessons.

5.2.4 Meaningful, horrible, horrible but useful… - varying views on the use of the tested online learning tools

In this subsection, the informants' views on the present experiment and the online learning tools used will be presented. The following open questions will be presented combined as the informants' answers in them overlapped and the same issues were commented on in all of them:

> Q2/Q1: What do you think of the experiment that you took part in? Please describe the experiment and your experience in your own words.
> Q2/Q3: I liked the possibility to record the answer in my own privacy and peace and quiet (compared to classroom situations), why/why not?
> Q2/Q13: What kind of differences did you notice between an online exercise and a conventional classroom exercise? Did you notice differences in your own working, concentration etc.?

Generally speaking, the informants analyzed their own working closely. Many of them also gave plenty of reasons for why they considered the online exercise suitable or unsuitable for themselves. It is an important goal per se that students analyze their own working methods and become more conscious of them, as it can be eye-opening and useful for the students to realize the importance of one's own role in the learning results. By being aware of one's own learner characteristics, it may be easier to develop oneself as a learner. For example, the following views on which working methods the informants considered to be the most suitable for them in general were presented:

> F22: More working alone and not always everything with a pair
> F27: I am lazy when working alone.
> F13: I performed better with the online exercise because it was done in a group
> F17: I like independent studying more

Figures 37 and 38 look at the informants' answers to the open questions presented above. They are presented in a decreasing order of frequency. After Figure 37, the views listed in the answers will be discussed in more detail with some example answers. It is followed by Figure 38 on the same topic

with the less common answers.

Figure 37. Q2/Q1, Q2 and Q13: The informants' views and experiences of the experiment (n=46).

Results show that the most common (mentioned in 52 % of the answers) observation on the experiment exercise made by the informants was that doing the online exercise made them *less nervous* compared to an equivalent classroom exercise with the same function. The expression *less pressure* (compared to classroom situations) was used by remarkably many. The expression was not used in the questionnaire questions unlike for example the expression *peace and quiet,* which also was a common answer. This, consequently, makes the former appear a more genuine, an own experience by the informants than the latter. Under this category belong six informants who emphasized that it felt more comfortable and easier to record their comments alone since the exercise made them less nervous. These six informants commented thusly:

> F3 & F8: I was not nervous and I was more relaxed and pronouncing was clearly better
> F17: I was not nervous during the Internet exercise, and it was in my opinion a lot more useful and meaningful in every way
> F28: During the Internet exercise everybody concentrates only on what they are doing instead of concentrating on only one student at a time as in classroom situations
> M2: At home there is not such pressure and it was possible to edit if I did not succeed at first
> M5: In one's own privacy there is naturally less pressure and one does not have to worry about what the others think
> F9: One does not have to record so that the others hear
> F18: The experiment was nice and it was easier to talk alone than when the teacher is there next to you listening to you all the time

Although most of the students speak about *pressure* without defining it more precisely, it is social in

its nature judging by the frequent use of the expression *the others* in the answers. The preceding comments by informants M5 and F9 exemplify this, for instance. The use of the plural form appears to imply that the informant refers to the classmates. If interpreted so, the last example (F18) stands out by emphasizing the fact that the absence of the teacher makes it easier to record the comments alone.

The second most common (37 %) observation was that it was *easier to concentrate* on the task at home because there was no disturbance and noise likewise there often is in a classroom. Some of the comments included the following:

> F3: I was able to concentrate on the exercise better than in classroom situations and therefore I also succeeded better
> F22: It is easier to concentrate on the task more because more time was used on it than is usually used on the tasks
> M1: Easier and less pressure so I also concentrated on the exercise better
> M2: There was no background noise during the online exercise and one could speak more freely

Although it was common to consider the online exercise to be beneficial for concentration, two students (M5 and F5) had a contrary opinion and considered it problematic that other websites attracted them when working on the Internet.

The third most common point made by 35 % of the students was the fact that they felt *more relaxed* at home and/or liked the *peace and quiet* of their own home:

> M7: Much more peaceful and one did not have to be afraid of making mistakes
> F7: I was not nervous and could relax and my pronunciation was remarkably better because of it

Approximately every third informant (33 %) answered that the exercise was *new, different or provided variation* to the usual working methods:

> F23: It was nice to try this kind of an exercise because there has not been anything similar at school before
> M5: It was different from the study book exercises and in this case the variation was quite good
> F15: Variation to the usual working methods

F10: It was nice to have some variation in self-expressing in English

Approximately in every fourth answer sheet (26 %) the experiment was described to be *nice, pleasant, good* or *fun*. The answer by informant M5 in the following also illustrates that for many students it really is very important that the exercises are personal and have a connection with the learner's own life:

> M2: It was nice because it was done with a friend
> M5: The idea and the study were good even though I had to argue for a topic that I am against in a way

Ten students (22 %) felt that they *prepared for the exercise better* and/or *worked better or put more effort into it* than in classroom situations:

> F18: It was nice to first practice pronouncing alone
> F9: You put more effort into it when you had to record it
> F19: The task was worked on properly because of the recording. In classroom situations, it is usual to do something half-heartedly because nobody will listen to it afterwards
> F25: Stayed focused on the topic better than in a classroom
> F6: Alone you actually finished the task

Seven informants (15 %) considered the exercise to be *interesting* or *fascinating*. An equal number of informants said that it *was strange, difficult* or *confusing* (to use). Most of them, however, commented that it was strange or difficult only in the beginning before becoming accustomed to it. Figure 38 presents the less common answers below:

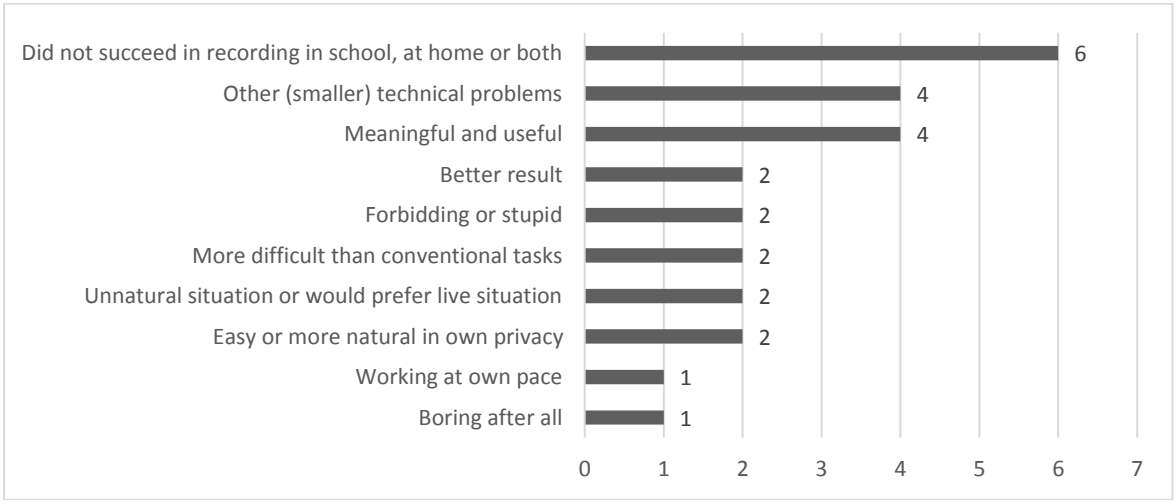


Figure 38. Q2/Q1, Q3 and Q13: The informants' views and experiences of the experiment.

Technical problems with the exercise were an obvious observation if the informant had had any. Six

students (13 %) did not succeed in recording either in school or at home or in neither of them. Their feedback, understandably, was that the exercise should always work without problems. In addition to these six students, four students reported some smaller technical problems with the exercise. Informant F18 described the frustration with the technical problems:

> F18: I did not like it at all when technology failed and a carefully recorded message could not be sent

Four students (9 %) described the exercise as *meaningful* or *useful*. According to two students, their outcomes were better in the online exercise. Two student considered the exercise to be *forbidding* or *stupid*:

> F1: It was not nice to record and I do not like working with a pair
> F2: A stupid and useless exercise and I cannot/do not like/want to use computers. You do not learn anything when all the time is spent on the hassle with the computer

Two students (4 %) answered that the online exercise was more difficult than classroom exercises and another two that the situation on a computer was *unnatural* and that they would prefer a live situation. In contrast, F24 in turn was of the opinion that it felt *more natural* to work in peace and quiet and in one's own privacy. Although only two informants used the term *(un)natural*, the answers by F30 and M19 express the same idea:

> M15: The answer did not feel natural
> F30: In classroom situations, people are spontaneous and do not edit what they say over and over again
> M19: It felt silly that your work pair that you send messages to sat next to you when recording in a classroom

Some students appreciated the possibility to *work at one's own pace*. Only one informant (M13) used the word *pace* but the same idea was expressed in answers by F20 and M17:

> M13: You get to proceed at an unhurried pace with the online exercise
> F20: More time to think about what you say
> M17: In classroom situations you have to get things done quickly

Recording one's own speech in English clearly awoke feelings among the informants. For the

sake of clarity, they are presented as one category here although they could be placed also under other categories:

> F1: It was nice to record my own speech and notice my own pronunciation
> F17: Interesting to hear my own speech in English
> M3: Exciting to hear my own pronunciation
> M13: It is a good idea to hear what one's own speech sounds like
> M10: Listening to one's own voice felt forbidding but you realized what was wrong with it and could improve
> F7: It was nice to test something new although in the beginning the thought of recording my own speech did not sound nice
> F27: It was strange to hear one's own voice yet it surely helped in pronunciation

Although many students answered that recording felt strange at least in the beginning, recording one's own speech was a fundamental problem only for one informant who refused to record the comments. The answers showed that a considerable number of the informants had not recorded and heard their own speech in English before. The recording appeared to be a somewhat frightening and exciting thought for many. However, the exercise were considered good and useful by many after becoming accustomed to the recording.

The last category of the informants' views on the online exercise presents observations related to working via computer. As mentioned earlier, one informant was clearly very negative towards working via computer and was of the opinion that the hassle with the computer takes up the time dedicated to working. Many informants commented on the differences in interaction between the online exercise and live situations in a classroom:

> M17: It was more complicated via computer, easier face-to-face
> M11: More practical via computer
> M23: You could re-record as many times as needed
> F3: I do not like technical devices but this was nice because I felt that it really was useful
> M30: It should be taken into account that not everybody has the required devices at home
> F20: In live situations facial expressions and gestures help
> F29: It is easier when you see your pair's face and eyes, it is difficult for me to talk and concentrate if I cannot look my pair in the eye
> M6: You get help in a classroom
> F29: A friend could not correct your mistakes in the online exercise

As shown in the previous quotations, some informants (e.g. F20 and F29) missed for example facial expressions and the eyes of the listener in the online exercise. Moreover, for some informants, other students in a classroom are also a linguistic support (e.g. M6 and F29). On the other hand, some students found pros and cons in both the online and classroom exercises. For example, F6 said that help from the other students is available in classroom situations but when working alone, one actually finished the exercise and concentrated on it properly, instead of getting distracted by their peers, for instance.

Overall, a clear majority of the answers in these three open questions about the experiment were positive. Nevertheless, the informants' views and attitudes varied notably. Some informants strongly disliked the experiment (See F1 and F2 presented earlier under the category *forbidding* or *stupid*), while some informants liked the experiment very much and described it positively (See e.g. M19 and F1 in the following):

> M19: Variation, meaningful, easy…
> F8: I am happy that I got a chance to participate.

In question 8 (Q2/S8) the students were asked how nervous they were when doing the online exercise compared to exercises in a classroom situation.

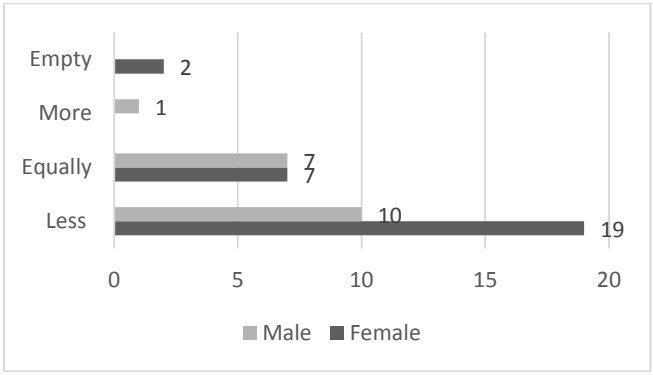


Figure 39. Q2/Q8: When doing the exercise, I was __ nervous about talking compared to classroom situation (n=46).

Figure 39 illustrates that 63 % answered that they were less nervous, 30% estimated that they were approximately as nervous as in classroom situations and only one student reported to have been more nervous. Judging by their answers, the four informants who answered in the first questionnaire that classroom situation disturbed them (Q1/S18) clearly benefitted from the online working method. All

of them answered that they were less nervous than in comparison to when being in a classroom situation. The following thoughts were expressed by these informants (one each) about the online exercise in the open questions:

> M14: I liked the experiment surprisingly much
> M19: It was nice and variation to the usual. It was also meaningful and easy without being disturbed
> M7: A lot more peaceful and no need to be afraid of mistakes
> N8: I am happy that I got a chance to participate. It was nice to record one's own speaking and hear the pronunciation. The exercise did not make me nervous and one could be more relaxed and the pronunciation was remarkably better

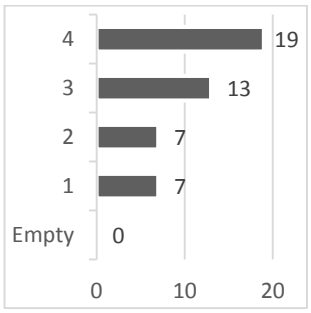


Figure 40. Q2/S6: There were new ways for me to utilize the Internet to support language learning among the online learning tools introduced in this experiment (such as speech synthesizers and online dictionaries) (n=46).

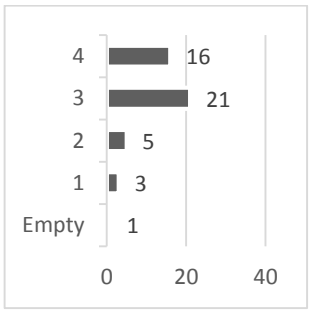


Figure 41. Q2/S7: I benefitted from having a chance to practice for example pronunciation before recording a comment (as compared to classroom situations) (n=46).

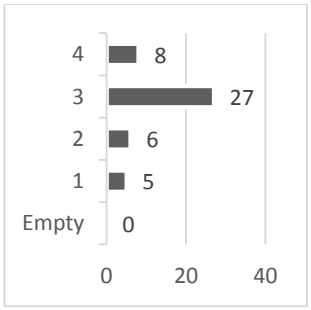


Figure 42. Q2/S24: I would like to utilize the online learning tools presented in this experiment (e.g speech synthesizers and online dictionaries) also in the future (n=46).

The informants were asked in statement 6 whether there were new ways for them to utilize the Internet to support language learning among the online learning tools introduced in the experiment. As shown in Figure 40, a greater part of the informants (70 %) agreed with the statement. Moreover, in statement 7 the informants were asked whether they felt that they had benefitted from having a chance to practice for example pronunciation before recording a comment. Students' eagerness to practice and learn pronunciation can be seen in that 82 % of them answered that they felt that they had benefitted

from the chance to do that (Figure 41). Statement 24 asked the informants to indicate whether they wanted to utilize the presented online learning tools also in the future. Three quarters (76 %) of the informants answered that they would like to do that (see Figure 42) which suggests that they were useful in their opinions.

Figure 43. Q2/S14: The benefits of the online exercise were worthwhile (n=46).

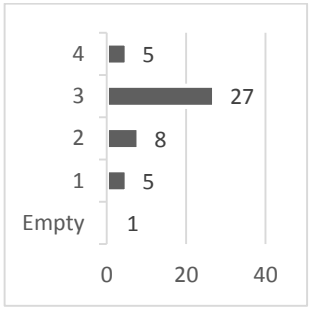


Figure 44. Q2/S17: I would like to do exercises of this kind also in the future (n=46).

The informants were asked to indicate in statement 14 whether they thought that the benefits of the exercise were worthwhile. Most of the students (69 %) agreed with the statement, as Figure 43 illustrates. The informants were also asked whether they would like to do exercises of this kind also in the future (Q2/S17). Approximately three quarters (73 %) of the students agreed with the statement (Figure 44).

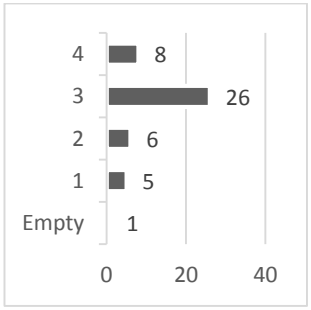


Figure 45. Q2/S15: I think that more frequent independent working of this kind would make me feel more confident with my English oral communication skills (n=46).

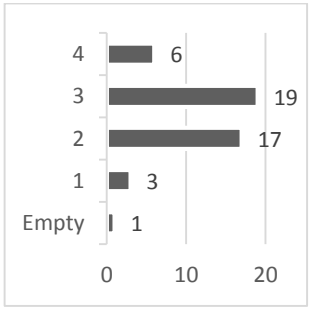


Figure 46. Q2/S16: I do not think that I would succeed in a live debate situation better after doing this exercise than I would do without the exercise (n=46).

Finally, the informants were asked in statement 15 whether they thought that more frequent independent work of this kind would make them feel more confident with their English oral communication skills. Figure 45 illustrates that 76 % of the informants thought so. In relation to this, statement 16 asked the informants to express whether they thought that they would not succeed in a live debate situation better after doing the online exercise than they would succeed without it. More

than a half (56 %) agreed with the statement as is shown in Figure 46. Conversely, 44 % of them disagreed and appeared to think that they would do better after doing the exercise.

In sum, the informants analyzed closely their own working during the online exercise. The clear majority of the descriptions of the online exercise in the open questions were positive. Most commonly mentioned answers were: *less nervous, less pressure, better concentration, peace and quiet,* being *more relaxed* and *new*, *different* or *variation*. The most common negative comments included *technical problems* (13 % of the answers), *unnatural situation* (mentioned by 4 % of informants) and that the exercise was forbidding or stupid (4 %). A few informants were clearly very negative towards working via computer and one of them refused to record at all. Most of the informants (63 %) were of the opinion that they were less nervous when doing the online exercise than in a classroom situation, 30 % that they were approximately as nervous and one student reported to have been more nervous. The results showed that a considerable number of the informants had not recorded and heard their own speech in English before. It was, however, considered useful by many despite feeling uncomfortable at first. Among the online learning tools introduced in the experiment, there were new ways for the informants to utilize the Internet in order to support language learning. Approximately three quarters of the informants answered that they would like to use both Voxopop and other online learning tools used also in the future.

5.2.5 Technology as a motivational factor

In this subsection, the students' views on motivation before and after the online exercise will be presented and analyzed. The main interest lies in discovering whether the use of technology was considered to have an effect on motivation.

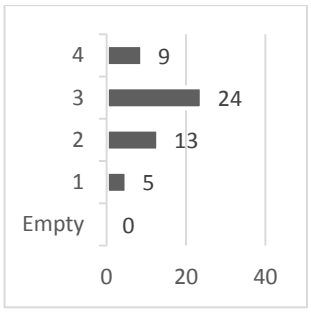


Figure 47. Q1/S18: The use of the new working methods, technology and the Internet in English teaching would increase my motivation to study (n=51).

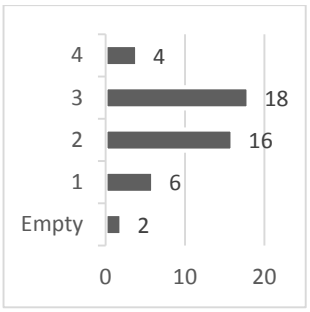


Figure 48. Q2/S12: The use of the new working method, technology and the Internet in English teaching increased my motivation to study (compared to classroom working) (n=46).

The informants were asked in statement 18 of the first questionnaire to indicate whether they agreed with the statement that the use of the new working methods, technology and the Internet in English teaching would increase their motivation to study. Figure 47 illustrates that 65 % of the informants believed that the use of these methods would have a positive effect on their motivation. As a pair to this statement, the informants were asked similarly in the second questionnaire's statement 12 whether they were of the opinion that the use of the aforementioned methods increased their motivation the study in comparison to classroom work. The percentage of the informants who agreed with the statement after doing the online exercise was 50 % (Figure 48) which means that it was smaller than before doing them when it was 65 %. One reason for the lower percentage after doing the exercise may be found in the technical problems. Understandably, they do not motivate the students, rather the opposite.

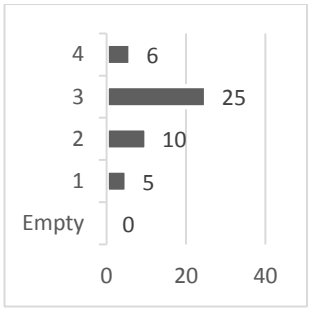


Figure 49. Q2/S2: The online debate exercise felt like a meaningful way to practice English oral communication skills (n=46).

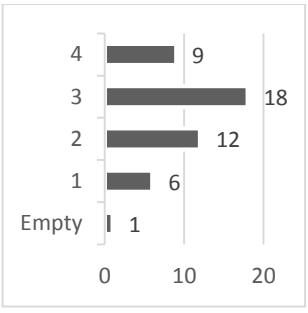


Figure 50. Q2/S9: The online debate exercise was a more motivating way to practice oral communication skills than a comparable classroom exercise (n=46).

Continuing on the topic of motivation, statement 2 asked the informants to indicate whether they thought that the online debate exercise felt like a meaningful way to practice English oral

communication skills. As shown in Figure 49, 67 % of the informants agreed with the statement. Thus, according to the answers 20 % of the informants answered in the second questionnaire that the online exercise did not increase their motivation but that it was a meaningful way to practice oral communication skills. The informants were also asked to express whether they thought the online debate exercise was a more motivating way to practice oral communication skills than a corresponding classroom exercise (Q2/S9). As illustrated in Figure 50, 60 % of the informants agreed with the statement. This means that there were five informants more who answered that the online exercise was more motivating compared to an equivalent classroom task than informants who answered that the online exercise increased their motivation to study on a general level. In other words, the number of students who considered the online exercise to promote motivation was consistent in the different questions on the topic. One reason for the informants' experience of increased motivation can supposedly be found in the *novelty effect* (Dörnyei 2001, 76) which, however, is only temporary according to previous studies (Tapola & Veermans 2012, 74).

In order to understand the informants' more detailed views on how the online exercise affected their motivation, the open question 12 asked the informants to describe why the use of the new kind of working method, technology and the Internet in English teaching did or did not increase their motivation to study. If it was unclear whether the answer described a positive or a negative effect on motivation, it was confirmed by checking the informants' answer to a closed question to which this open question was connected (Q2/S12). Six informants did not answer this question and five informants answered that they felt that their motivation did not change notably or at all. The answers of those who answered that it increased their motivation and conversely, of those who thought the opposite, are presented separately because it is clearer. The answers in which motivation was seen to be affected positively were more common and are therefore presented first:

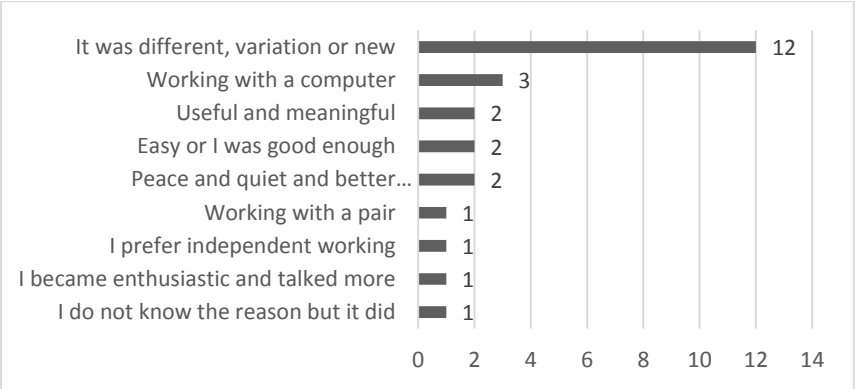


Figure 51. Q2/Q12: Why did the use of the new working method increase my motivation to study (n=46).

As shown in Figure 51, the most common answer (26 %) was that the online exercise was *different, new* or *variation* to old. The second category (7 %) was *working with a computer*, which included the following views: working in a computer class was positive, working with a computer was more practical than for instance handwriting and using the study book's vocabulary at the end of the book and that it was easier to practice pronouncing. Moreover, the less common answers included the following: the online exercise was *useful and meaningful* or *easy.* The latter was further defined to mean the feeling of *being verbally good enough* to accomplish the exercise. In addition, *peace and quiet, better concentration,* a chance *to work with a pair and a chance to work independently* were mentioned, too, by one student each. Furthermore, one informant had become enthusiastic about the exercise and had talked more than they would have during a conventional classroom exercise because of it. Finally, according to one informant, the motivation increased but the reason for that was unclear.

The following Figure 52 presents the answers of the informants who did not think that their motivation increased:

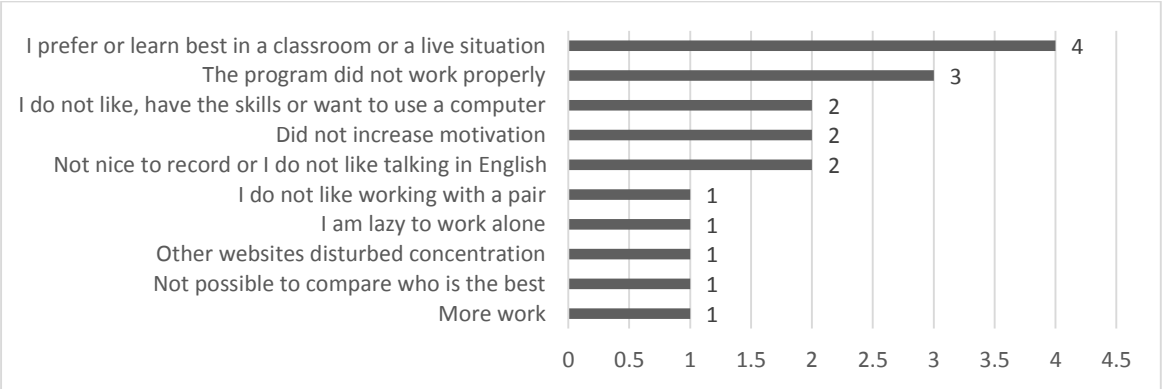


Figure 52. Q2/Q12: Why did the use of the new working method not increase my motivation to study (n=46).

Four students (9 %) answered that they *preferred* or *learned best in a classroom* or in *live situations* in general. Furthermore, 11 % of the answers were related to the *computer use*: the *program did not work properly* or the *lack of skills or interest in using a computer*. Two informants out of 46 answered that the new working method did not increase their motivation, one because the exercise was not useful in everyday studying and the other because of the informant was already motivated. In addition, other answers included *dislike of recording* or *talking in English* and *dislike of working with a pair*. One informant answered that (s)he was *lazy to work alone* and one that *other websites disturbed concentration*. Moreover, one informant answered that it decreased motivation that in the online exercise it was not possible to compare who is the best. This is an interesting view as on the one hand, competitive spirit can be experienced as distressing by some students, but on the other hand it may motivate other students. Learners can experience such competitiveness very differently. Finally, one student was worried that there would be more work if the online exercises were used more commonly. According to the informant, there is usually less to do at home and it would therefore decrease motivation to have too much homework.

To sum up the section concerning motivation, half of the informants believed that the use of the new working method, technology and the Internet in English teaching increased their motivation to study. More than half of the informants thought that the online debate exercise felt like a meaningful way to practice English oral communication skills and that it was a more motivating way to practice oral communication skills than a corresponding classroom exercise. When asked to specify how it affected motivation, *different, variation* and *new* were the most commonly mentioned (26 % of the answers) features of the task which increased their motivation. Among the most commonly mentioned reasons for the fact that the online exercise did not increase their motivation were general *preference for live situations* (9 % of the answers) and computer-related reasons such as that the *program did not work properly* or that the informant *did not like, have the skills* or *want to use a computer* (10 %)

5.3 The teachers' feedback

The teachers' answers for the questions on the experiment (see Appendix 3) showed that the experiment was considered meaningful, interesting and useful by them as well. Positive features of the online exercise in their opinion included students' active role, self-expression and a chance to answers and reactions that were open and not preset. The teachers also suggested that shy students may be encouraged to express their opinion more freely when not having to talk in front of a bigger group. The teachers also pointed out that many students like to do exercises on a computer and test new things, and many of them like oral communication exercises in general as well. In their opinion, the debate exercise challenged students with more advanced skills and many students, especially reflective students perhaps, appreciated and enjoyed the possibility to work in one's own privacy and at one's own pace. Moreover, some students were motivated to hear their own pronunciation. One teacher noted that the time went surprisingly quickly with the recordings and another that the fact that someone else than their own teacher listens to the exercises might increase the students' motivation and efforts as well. On average, however, the teachers estimated that there were no noteworthy differences in the students' motivation to work in a classroom and with an online exercise.

Possible technical difficulties were commented on also by the teachers. There were students who had problems during the experiment, which obviously can be frustrating for the students as well as for the teachers. Because the program was used for the first time in at least one of the groups, some computers required for example Java installation or updates before the exercise, although no problems were observed on the computers on which the teachers test-recorded short comments before the experiment. One teacher pointed out that it might have been necessary to emphasize more that the schools' computers can be used and borrowed for recording the comments. The teachers also pointed out that it may decrease a student's motivation if the program does not work. Other problems or weaknesses in the exercise in teachers' opinions were that more time could have been used on the background materials and phrases for expressing opinions. One of the teachers mentioned that the

exercise was rather challenging for students with weaker skills. The view is opposite to my own thoughts that the exercise type would be easy for weaker students because no predefined phrases or words are required and students can freely choose what they say. Other observations included the problem that occurred when some students did not do the exercise and it disturbed their pair's exercise as well. In other words, students' success was considered to be too dependent on how active the pairs were.

When asked for proposals for improving the exercise, the teachers suggested that the first exercise should be easier. Furthermore, they recommended more time to be spent on studying the phrases beforehand, a possibility to borrow devices from school to be used at home and as a possibility to choose one's own debate topic and the article for its support. In addition, they suggested that learners listen to other students', not only their own pair's, speech and give peer-feedback to each other. It would also be good to have more physical distance between the pair in order to create genuine need for communication. Now the pair sat next to each other in the first phase of the online exercise, which was carried out in school. Voxopop was familiar beforehand for one of the teachers and new for the other. Both teachers said that they could use it also in the future. One teacher raised the question of large group sizes making the use of computers less simple and continued that it would be easiest if the students used their own computers if they had such. In that case, the computer and the programs would be familiar to them. In other words, basic requirements to run the exercise would first need to be in order.

5.4 Summary of the main findings

In this section, a summary of the main findings of this study will be presented, which will be organised by the research questions. However, the findings of the study book analysis in relation to the informants' answers will be presented for the sake of clarity at the end of this section, even though this belongs to the first research question. The first research question relates to the current context of

language teaching (see Chapter 2), which will be further discussed in discussion (Chapter 6). The research questions two and three concentrate on learner experience (Chapter 3) in relation to the current context of language teaching. The learner experience is seen to consist of learner characteristics (temperament and motivation) and interaction via computer. To reiterate, the research questions of the present study are the following:

> Q1: What kind of exercise types are there in the selected study book (*Open Road 8*) aimed at practicing oral communication skills? How do the findings relate to the informants' answers in Q2 and Q3?
>
> Q2: What kind of tendencies can be found in the informants' reported views and experiences of themselves as English language users and learners, and their views on their preferred learning methods?
>
> Q3: How do the informants describe the use of Voxopop and the supporting online learning tools, which they were encouraged to use when practicing?

Firstly, an analysis on the exercise categories in the study book *Open Road 8* was carried out in order to create context for the study by illustrating what kind of exercise types are found in a commonly used study book aimed at practicing oral communication skills. This was justified as the use of study books is a currently prevalent working method in language teaching. In regard to the exercise types found in the study book, the online debate exercise belongs to category 3, in which the students are typically asked to discuss or debate specific material, topics or questions. In other words, the tested exercise type offered variation in relation to the other features of the online exercise rather than in terms of the exercise type. The most significant finding on a general level was that the study book does not provide phonetic transcriptions apart from some exceptions (e.g. specialty vocabulary, such as a list of occupations). Eight exercise type categories were found of which categories 7 (games*)* and 8 (listening comprehension exercises, songs and exercises involving reading out loud) were excluded because the former did not train the students' own production in a similar way as the other categories did and the latter was a rather rare exercise type. Furthermore, there were four exercise type categories (1 provided dialogues, 2 "situation tasks" and role playing, 4 summarizing and retelling something,

and 6 communication skills exercises, see section 5.1 for details), which were guided to varying degrees when it comes to the contents of the student's production. The guidance varied from the use of certain words or expressions (e.g. in a provided broader context/situation task, such as buying a present for one's mother) to the completely guided exercises in which all the lines were provided or predefined (e.g. those used in the particular chapter). If following strictly the definition of Tomlinson (2012, 54), communication is not genuine if the content and language are not determined by the learners. Exercises in categories 3 (discussion or debate with a pair or a group) and 5 (presentations and interviews) generally allowed more freedom of choice related to the content and form of the students' language production. Finally, excluding the listening comprehension exercises, basically all the exercises in *Open Road 8* were meant to be done with a pair or in a group.

Secondly, the second research question, which was answered through the questionnaires, was interested in the tendencies found in the informants' reported views and experiences of themselves as English language users and learners as well as their views on their preferred learning methods. The results showed that 67 % of the informants answered that they liked situations in which they speak in a foreign language. Conversely, it is noteworthy that every third informant (33 %) reported to dislike such situations. The percentages corresponded with the percentages of the informants who considered, or alternatively did not consider, themselves talkative in general. Not surprisingly, most of the informants (86 %) had needed English oral communication skills outside of school. Most informants (63 %) had faith in their oral communication skills and approximately as many (62 %) believed that they would manage with their current English oral communication skills in working life when it comes to argumentation. However, 92 % of the students answered that they would like to learn to pronounce English better than they can now. Most of the students (61 %) were of the opinion that oral communication skills were not practiced enough in secondary school and upper secondary school and almost as many thought that it would be useful to introduce different ways to utilize technology and the Internet in supporting their language learning in English studies. Moreover, when

it came to visiting websites in the English language, a considerable difference between male and female informants was found. With the exception of one male informant, all male informants reported visiting websites in the English language several times a week whereas most of female informants (38 %) reported weekly visits and only 17 % daily visits.

In relation to studying situations and methods, 92 % of the students did not feel that a classroom situation disturbed their studying and concentration. Despite that, almost 70 % of them answered that they thought that being nervous in classroom situations has a negative effect on their performance. Furthermore, a clear majority of the informants expressed in both questionnaires that when it comes to both producing and listening to speech, unhurried situations and more time to process would be appreciated. Interestingly, in the first questionnaire, as much as 90 % of the informants answered that they thought it was easier to speak English outside of classroom situations. After doing the online exercise, 75 % reported that it felt easier to produce speech alone than in classroom situations. Similarly, 82 % of the informants thought in first questionnaire that their English oral communication skills were better outside of the classroom, whereas afterwards, the percentage of the students who evaluated that they did better when recording alone compared to classroom situations was smaller (64 %).

An interesting finding was that almost a half (47 %) of the informants named working alone as the best working method for them in their opinion whereas the other half (51 %) were of the opinion that they learned best in some kind of a group. The more precise working methods listed as the best for the informants varied remarkably, which can be seen from the fact that only four students at most listed any same working method. Approximately 60 % answered that they would like more variation in the working methods in the English lessons and approximately as many that they would like to use technology/the Internet more often during the English lessons. At the same time, however, 68 % of the informants agreed with the statement that they prefer conventional classroom working methods to the use of technology and the Internet in the English studies. Moreover, the informants were asked

to specify why they wished for more variation, or alternatively, why they did not want any. For most parts, ideas for new kinds of activities were not presented and the answers dealt with how much time should be spent on different activities during lessons. The most common answers were *more spoken activities*, *more group tasks* and *less study book-centered studying*. Approximately ten students did not wish for variation, listing that *the current working methods are fine* as they are, there is *enough variation already* and *having reached good results with the current methods* as their reasons.

Before the experiment, there was considerable variation in the informants' knowledge, views and the use of the Internet in language studies. Half of the informants (49 %) thought that they had been taught how to look for information and help on the Internet in language studies, whereas 76 % reported using technology/the Internet in their language studies. When asked to further define what they use, it appeared that the spectrum was wide. Some of the students were very well aware of different aids and knew for example which dictionaries have audio feature, whereas some students answered that they did not use the Internet in their English studies otherwise than what is done together in class during English lessons. Some of the online learning tools introduced in the experiment were previously unknown for 70 % of the informants. This could also be seen in the first questionnaire, in which only 30 % of the informants reported looking for help for example with pronunciation on the Internet.

Thirdly, the last research question was aimed at finding out how the informants describe the use of the online working method tested in the study. In the answers to the open questions, the most commonly commented feature of the exercise was that the online exercise made the informants less nervous and decreased (social) pressure. This was noted in 52 % of the answers. The specific expression *less pressure* was used by remarkably many, which is notable as the expression was not included in any of the questions which might have guided the answer otherwise. The next most popular comments included *easier to concentrate*, *peace and quiet*, and being *more relaxed*. It was also considered to be nice *variation* to the working methods. Most of the comments described the

online exercise positively. The most common negatively describing comments included *difficult* or *strange (at the beginning)* and *technical problems*.

Most of the informants (67 %) answered that the online debate exercise felt like a meaningful way to practice English oral communication skills and one half of them that the new way increased their motivation to study. When asked to specify why it increased or did not increase motivation, the clearly most common answer was that it increased motivation because it was *new*, *different* or *variation* to old. The comments on why it did not increase were less common and included for instance *preference for classroom or live situations* and *problems with the program*. Most of the students (63 %) estimated that they were less nervous in the online exercise compared to equivalent exercises in classroom situation, 30 % that they were equally nervous in both and one student reported having felt more nervous when recording than in a classroom exercise. In addition, all of the four informants who answered in the first questionnaire that classroom situation disturbed their studying and concentration appreciated the alternative way to practice. Related to the experienced usefulness of the online exercise, 69 % of the informants were of the opinion that the benefits of it were worth the time spent on it. Furthermore, approximately three quarters thought that more frequent independent work of a similar kind would make them feel more confident with their English oral communication skills. Similarly, three quarters answered that they would like to do exercises of this kind and utilize the other online learning tools introduced also in the future.

The results showed that it was common for the students to hear one's own speech in English for the first time during the recording. It was common to describe it as strange or even awful at the beginning, but useful after getting accustomed to it. It was considered to be a good way to become aware of one's pronunciation and improve it. Furthermore, it was pointed out by several students that they did the exercise properly because others could listen to it later. There were a few students who did not like the recording and talking at all, saying that it felt very disagreeable. One of these informants reported being against working via computer in general.

Finally, the survey results presented above will be reviewed in relation to the results of the study book analysis. The lack of phonetic transcriptions in the study book, concerning both the printed and digital form of it, was problematic in the light of the findings in the survey analysis. A distinct majority (92 %) of the informants expressed a desire to learn to pronounce better than they can now and almost 40 % felt unsure of their oral communication skills. The talk exercises appear welcome to the majority (70 %) of the informants who reported liking situations involving talking. Conversely, 30 % reported to dislike such situations. Nevertheless, it is obvious that oral communication skills need to be practiced even if some students do not like them. Furthermore, almost a half of the informants reported that they preferred working alone, which is contradictory to the fact that, with the exception of listening exercises, all the exercise categories found in the study book were meant to be done with a pair. Nevertheless, generally speaking, most of the informants (68 %) appeared to be content with the current methods, which supposedly include working with the study book. This could be seen in the fact that they agreed with the statement that they liked more conventional classroom working methods than the use of technology and the Internet in English studies. After doing the online exercise, however, most informants reported that they liked the decreased social pressure when doing the online exercise. In addition to this, a clear majority (71 %) liked the possibility to record the answer(s) at their own pace and in their own privacy as compared to classroom situations. Finally, 82 % answered that they had benefitted from having a chance to practice the pronunciation before recording a comment, for example. The results suggest that different online exercises earn their place in complementing and increasing the variation in the often prevalently study book-based working methods.

6 Discussion

The research questions, which concentrate on learner experiences as reported by the informants, have been answered to in section 5.4 by summarizing the main findings of the empirical part of the study. In this chapter, the results concerning the tendencies in reported learner experiences will be discussed on a broader scope with relation to the current context of language teaching (see Chapter 2). The first section (6.1) discusses the implications of the experiment for language teaching in relation to the following topics: school system reformations, assessment practices, study culture, authenticity and the effects of the increased media use on learning. It also covers the students' interaction via computer, variation in learning tasks and online working methods. Finally, I will evaluate the validity of the implications by examining the present study critically (section 6.2).

6.1 Implications of the results for language teaching

The educational scene in Finland is in a state of change on many levels. Steiner (2013, vii) points out that it is easier for people to agree on what new kind of education should not look like, mentioning rote memorization from a textbook in order to succeed in multiple choice tests as an example. He continues that it is more difficult to define what the call for a new, 21st century education truly means for those within education (ibid.). This seems to describe the current situation in Finland, too, as it is not always explicit what the ongoing reformations mean in practise, on a classroom level. The present study has contributed to exemplifying how online tools could complement the currently prevalent working methods and how they could be used in preparing the students for the electronic matriculation examination tests.

The Matriculation Examination Board has listed future challenges and prospects concerning the digitalization project in spring 2015 (Britschgi 2015). Among other things, speech communication, authentic situations and increased utilization of ICT are mentioned as timely topics. Reportedly, ICT skills will therefore become an essential part of teaching and learning, and research on the subject is

needed (ibid.). The present study contributes to the research needs, which is emphasized by the fact that the sample matriculation examination exercises already available online (Digabi B) resemble the online exercise of the present study in many ways.

A useful, fair and trustworthy assessment of language skills needs test-based and systematic, but also qualitative and flexible, material as its support (Kohonen 2005, 324). The monitoring and recording of learning behavior and progress is listed as a general advantage of CALL (Reinders et al. 2012, 363-366). It is easy to save recordings from Voxopop as well, which could, for example, enable collecting spoken material throughout a learner's language studies. This would give a concrete and easy way to observe the learner's development both for the language learner himself and the teacher. Having actual data on the student's oral communication skills might also be beneficial if the aim is that evaluation is based on actual achievement instead of the student's temperament and personality, which is recommended by previous research (Mullola 2012; Keltikangas-Järvinen & Mullola 2014). Moreover, digital material can be listened to by other teachers or other students as well. For example Auvinen and Rönkä (2005, 192) report good experiences on peer feedback: when using an e-language portfolio, the students seemed to appreciate the possibility of reading and listening to each other's texts and recordings. They gave each other feedback which was apt, supportive and sometimes very detailed, which also means that giving feedback can develop everyone's communication skills, not just the receiver's (ibid.). Some informants expressed a wish for this kind of feedback in this study, which would be an easy way to improve the exercise.

In regard to study culture, the preference for studying alone expressed by one half of the informants might, according to previous literature (Sahlberg & Shalan 2002, 268), be partly learned because it is characteristic of the current study culture in many upper secondary schools. Such study cultures may be slow to change (ibid.). In this study, 67 % of the informants thought before the online exercise that being nervous in classroom situations has a negative effect on their oral communication performance. This might relate to peer pressure (Dörnyei 2007, 722). Most of the informants appeared

to notice the lack of social pressure when they produced speech in English in their own privacy as more than half of them listed it as a difference between the online exercise and classroom exercises in the open questions. This study confirmed the view of social aspects and possible group pressure playing a major role in language learning (Dörnyei 2007; Tomlinson 2012; Pihkala-Posti 2012). These aspect should be taken into account more actively in language teaching. As discussed in Chapter 3.1, the reasons for not being able to show one's best abilities in classroom situations can be very different, for example social (e.g. a negative or anxiety-inducing climate with classmates) or related to temperament (e.g. being too shy). As numerous aspects affect the student's performance in classroom situations, variation in the working methods in a classroom may not necessarily solve the possible problems whereas the online exercises may offer different kind of solutions.

The quality of teaching and learning can be dramatically different depending on whether the classroom is characterized by a climate of support and trust or by a competitive, cut-throat atmosphere (Dörnyei 2007, 720). The question of climate, of trust or the lack of it, may be especially relevant in the Finnish upper secondary school system (the flexible "class-free upper secondary school", in which students independently choose the courses they study and they are not allocated a mutual schedule with their home group as in basic education). In addition to this, it is characteristic of schools to be dynamic spaces (Goodson et al. 2002, 8). They are places in which, just to name some, contradictory purposes, conflicting wills and opposing agendas meet and more-or-less spontaneous and unintended events occur (ibid.).

The results of the present study were in line with earlier research, which suggests that speaking foreign languages can cause language anxiety despite good atmosphere in a group (Olsson Jers 2010, 165; Dörnyei 2001, 40; Tomlinson 2012, 232-233). A noteworthy number of the informants in this study expressed that a possibility to practice oral communication skills in their own privacy every now and then is appreciated. The informants also commonly reported having felt more relaxed when doing the online exercise. The results confirm previous research (e.g. Swenson & Taylor 2012, 50–

51; Pihkala-Posti, 2012, 118) that working online and in smaller groups is experienced by the learners to be less stress-inducing and more relaxed. The online exercises of this kind may help especially shy and less social, introvert type of students to step by step strengthen possibly lacking communicative self-confidence and thus possibly ease their anxiety in live language use situations, too.

It is worth remembering when starting to use new kinds of exercises that according to Tomlinson (2012), many studies suggest that students respond negatively to sudden changes in what happens in the classroom. Such patterns and expectations are, however, changeable (ibid.). If the methods are properly explained and introduced, it may not take long before the students perceive them as useful and enjoyable (Tomlinson 2012, 50). In other words, learners need time to get accustomed to new ways and some students need it more than others. Keltikangas & Mullola (2014, 40) give an apt example: when a teacher brings new technology to classroom, there are some students waiting for him already at the door, ready to enthusiastically test everything new. Some other students sit and watch quietly for a couple of lessons and wait for the situation to calm down. It is important to continue using the new exercise type at least long enough so that even the learners who adapt slower can concentrate on the task instead of on the new method. Obviously, there are always different tastes and not everyone likes every task even after getting used to it. Despite that, it is possible also in the present study that negative reactions of some student had to do with being nervous because of the new method. When used frequently and for long enough, the working method might become most beneficial because the students become familiar with it, which might also decrease technical problems. The same was suggested by the teachers in this study.

It turned out in the present study that upper secondary school students vary notably in their reported studying habits, such as making good use of the Internet resources as language learning support. The result corresponds with observations that young people are not a homogeneous group of "digital natives" but that the term rather hides a wide variation of knowledge and experience (Hargittai's 2010; Pihkala-Posti & Uusi-Mäkelä 2014). Hargittai (2010) even discusses varying

"digital backgrounds" as a cause for *digital inequality.* The situation in Finland is likely to differ from the situation in the United States, where the study was conducted, because of a rather consistent and regulated Finnish basic education.

It is worth remembering also in Finland that teachers should not assume that all learners have used computers and have extensive ICT skills. It is necessary to use computers and to do digital exercises of this kind in upper secondary school as well in order to make sure that all students become accustomed to using them before moving to electronic matriculation examinations. The electronic matriculation examination tests do not separately test ICT skills but good skills in using the learning tools naturally enable successful performance in the test (The Matriculation Examination Board). Also, it is necessary for the students to get accustomed to listening to their own speech and pronunciation in a foreign language already at an earlier point of the studies, especially now that oral communication skills will become a part of the English matriculation examination, too. Results showed that hearing one's own speech in English while recording for the online exercise was the first time for remarkably many students.

Next, I will briefly discuss whether the tested online exercise can be considered authentic, which according to some views is considered a goal in language teaching, if the definitions of authenticity presented in 2.2.4 are followed. If authentication is as a personal process of engagement and authenticity is the result of acts of authentication (Van Lier 1996, 128), the exercise in this study appears authentic because doing them requires engagement in producing speech and listening to the reply. Some of the informants commented on this by saying that in the online exercise it was not possible to pretend to be doing the online exercise as it sometimes is, according to them, when doing classroom exercises. Furthermore, according to Kaikkonen (2000, 53; 2002, 6) authenticity essentially means a learner's experience of the meaningfulness of studying and learning. If the definition is followed strictly and other factors are excluded, it is possible to construe that the exercise were authentic for the majority of the informants (67 %) as they agreed with the statement that the

experiment was a meaningful way to practice English oral communication skills. In addition, according to Kohonen (2002, 20), authenticity, being a part of something and being an active actor are closely related to how meaningful a learner considers his/her learning process to be.

Applied to this exercise, most of the students considered the task to be meaningful, which, following Kohonen's (2002, 20) view, may be a result of the fact that the informants had to be active and process the task in order to accomplish it. However, according to some definitions (cf. Tomlinson 2012, 54), the online debate situations and communication cannot be considered genuine because the students did not choose the topic and they had to choose their roles. Finally, as has been discussed in terms of authenticity, ICT has been considered as something than can break the boundary between the classroom and the so-called "real life" (e.g. Ainley & Armatas 2006, Mishan 2004). The results of the present study suggest that, from a learner point of view, the relationship between the online exercise and their own life was experienced very differently by the informants.

In the light of this study, the reported gap between students' media usage and the studying customs of the school system (Prensky 2007; Taalas 2007; Lehtinen et al. 2011, 130; Ahtokivi 2013; Pihkala-Posti 2012b, 2013) does not seem as problematic as suggested in the literature. A majority of the students expressed a preference for the conventional working methods in closed questions, although variation in the working methods appeared welcome. Moreover, the online working method generally received a positive response and was considered to have clear advantages.

Swenson & Taylor (2012, 1) suggest that it is typical for young people today to find it easier to interact with computers than in face-to-face contexts because of the almost inescapable impact and popularity of social networking sites. Most of the informants did report in this study, too, that it was easier to produce speech in the online exercise. However, it is my interpretation that instead of face-to-face situations per se, it was the large group which was considered stressful. The informants used the term *the others* in one way or the other often rather clearly to refer to the source of the perceived pressure. A few informants reported that it was easier to interact via computer and a few that they

missed the conversation partner's facial expressions or eyes. For most of the students, it appeared to make no difference whether they talked to a pair live or via computer, supposing that there was just the pair instead of the whole group listening to.

The online exercise type is likely to be beneficial for all learners because it enables the learners, at least sometimes, to work at their own pace and in their own privacy also when it comes to producing speech. However, working together serves many goals according to previous studies, for example increases the chance to consider the task to be meaningful (Rasku-Puttonen 2005, Piippo 2009). The online exercise enables students to work together computer-mediatedly while physically separate from each other (as was done in the first part carried out during a lesson) or alone at home (the second, homework part). When used similarly to the first part of the study (both debaters being online and replying as soon as they received the comment, *co-located communication*, see Levy 1997, 96), they can be seen as quasi-synchronous communication (see 4.2.2). This, in effect, can be seen to combine, from a pedagogical perspective, positive features which have been connected with asynchronous and synchronous learning tasks (cf. Pihkala-Posti 2014, 2015 in press). This could be seen, for example, in the informants' answers, when over 80 % of them expressed that they had benefitted from a chance to check the pronunciation of words before recording the comments, which would not have been possible in synchronous communication. Nevertheless, the situation appeared to resemble spoken conversation as some informants composed and sent their comments on the fly without preparing, which is more characteristic of synchronous computer-mediated communication (Herring 2010).

Because of differing learner characteristics (temperament, motivation etc.), not all working methods suit all learners and variation in working methods is needed. One way to increase variation is to develop and increase the use of different online exercises. Informant F4 put it aptly in this study and said that all the students should be let to study in the way that suits them best. She continued that this is why it was good that online working of this kind was also introduced. Although such an ideal

situation in which all the students could always study in the way most suitable just for them may not be possible to reach, increasing variation in learning tasks and in ways to show one's skills is a step in that direction.

Different methods have different advantages, which is why variation is important. A noteworthy benefit of the online exercises is that it is easier to listen to words' pronunciation when practicing, which is not possible in a similar way with study books. The results show that the informants (92 %) wish to learn to pronounce better, in which they supposedly need help. The analyzed study book did not offer phonetic transcriptions and only 30 % of the informants reported sometimes independently looking for help with pronunciation on the Internet. In general, the importance of encouraging language learners to find themselves a practical and regular routine with learning pronunciation is highlighted if phonetic transcriptions are not offered in the study book used.

When it comes to specialty vocabulary and words that are difficult to pronounce for native Finnish speakers, students are most likely commonly advised of the pronunciation by their teacher. Nevertheless, by upper secondary school, the topics and vocabulary covered in English lessons are already challenging and it would therefore be important to offer students easily accessible support on pronunciation as well. It is therefore justifiable to call for providing phonetic transcriptions in the course material or at least providing active guidance towards the use of separate dictionaries, whether paper or online, or other sources. It might be useful for many students to be able to listen to the pronunciation digitally, for example when the teacher is not available, for example when doing homework. It would lessen the need to guess pronunciation and possibly learn wrong pronunciation patterns, especially as it takes quite a lot of skill and knowledge to read the phonetic transcriptions it even if there were some. After getting to know the introduced learning tools, among which were new ones for most of the students, most of the students expressed a desire to use them also in the future. In my opinion, it would be useful for all students to be familiar with different kinds of online learning tools as early as possible in order to be able to use them when needed during their studies.

It is usual to say that technology should not be used for its own sake. The results showed that there is actual need for complementing the current working methods. The opinion of the majority of the informants appeared to be that the use of the online learning tools brought benefits along them. The teachers' views were positive, too. They considered the exercise to be meaningful and useful although there were some problems, such as technical challenges. The key issue of technology use is what can be *done* with it instead using it for the sake of the sophisticated devices, which sometimes may have had the emphasis (Kjällander 2014, 10). Devices or resources of different kinds can create and offer varying preconditions for learning instead of being important per se, which would be a question of change from technological to pedagogic possibilities (Selander & Åkerfeldt 2008).

It is my understanding that the tested online exercise offered alternative preconditions for learning and genuinely brought additional value to the learning task compared to study book exercises. Such features were a chance for the students to practice oral communications skills in their own privacy without the possible social pressure of a classroom setting. The features of the learning task of the tested online exercise resemble in many ways those recommended in previous research (Tomlinson 2012, 55; Dörnyei 2001; 76) and the exercise entailed many of the benefits listed as being typical to CALL, such as giving the students more control and access to different resources (Reinders et al. 2012, 363). From a teacher perspective, recording enables a chance to concentrate on every student's speech and pronunciation one at time, possibly more easily than in classroom situations. Moreover, the exercise appeared to encourage students to be more active, which has has been suggested by previous literature as well, as the teacher can monitor whether the task is accomplished (Pihkala-Posti 2015, in press) and the student has to be mentally present when producing speech online (Matikainen & Manninen 2000).

Further, speech synthesizers or online dictionaries can complement the use of study book by offering an example for pronunciation that is easy to use and easily available. All in all, different online learning tools – not limited to the ones used in the present study – and guidance with using

foreign language media appear to be an easy way to support students' learning habits by providing alternative methods for those who want them. Additional support can be especially important for students with dyslexia or other kinds of difficulties with language (see also Pihkala-Posti 2013b). Such students could benefit from, for example, speech synthesizers, which read the text out loud, helping the students to follow the text better.

It is, however, also good to keep in mind that not everything should be transferred online. The human experience is the most important regardless of what kind of technology is employed (Kimura 2002 in Finkelstein 2007, 65). He continues that students learn from their teachers and peers, for example, not from a computer (ibid.). In addition to this, worries on health issues have been expressed related to the use of computers, such as children and young people sitting too much in front of computers. Working on the Internet creates some challenges, too. Several informants in this study mentioned the problem of easily getting distracted by other websites when trying to work online. This has also been reported by previous research literature for example by pointing out that technology-based exercises and a large amount of information challenge students' self-control skills, for example their ability to organize and manage all the information (Lehtinen et al. 2011, 133).

6.2 Critical evaluation of the present study

In regard to the research questions used in the study, it appeared beneficial to use both open and closed questions in the questionnaires. On the one hand, closed questions offered data which enabled forming an overall picture of general tendencies in the informants' reported views and experiences. On the other hand, open questions offered answers and views that were unexpected and therefore could not anticipated and asked about. Nevertheless, as the used methodology theory suggested, open questions offer often interesting but rather miscellaneous answers that might be challenging to categorize. The choice to make the percentages for the closed questions proportional with the number of qualified answers instead of the total number of informants made comparing the results more

challenging. Nevertheless, I consider the percentages comparable because the number of disqualified answers was zero or one in a clear majority of the statements.

I followed Fowler's (2009) and Lavrakas (2008) advice presented in Chapter 4.1.2 in forming the closed questions. Despite that I noticed during the analysis that some statements and questions were not as suitably formed as possible. The statement "I use technology and the Internet so much in my own time that I would therefore like exercises in English lessons to remain more conventional (classroom working etc.)" (Q2/S19) turned out as a matter of fact to include two statements, which made it less informative and suitable for interpretations. Moreover, the open question 7 (Q2/Q7) should have asked the students to specify more whether they considered their answers as something that increased or decreased their motivation. Now some answers were challenging to interpret if the informant had not specified what (s)he meant. However, this did not prevent the present study from getting reliable results on the topic because a related closed question helped in interpreting the orientation of the answers.

Another shortcoming of the present study was perhaps the fact that there were some empty or incorrectly filled answers (e.g. choosing two alternatives) in part of the closed questions. This might suggest that the informant did not want to answer and would have preferred to have a neutral "I do not know" answer. A neutral alternative is sometimes a reasonable answer alternative because it may be that sometimes informants really do not have enough information to be able to answer or do not have an answer for some other reasons. However, in the present study it appeared to be a good choice not to offer a neutral alternative in order to prevent getting too much of "I do not know" data, which would not have been as useful as the data gathered now. The neutral alternative would have been a too easy choice for the informants not interested in answering and reflecting their answers.

Finally, it should also be remembered that even if the questionnaire is reliable, it may be unrealistic to assume perfect correspondence between the answers given by the informants and the actual state of affairs (Fowler 2009, 87). Also, in presenting the answers, something might have got

lost in translation because the questionnaires and answers were in Finnish and they have been reported in English. The results cannot be generalized because the sample was relatively small and educational experiences can vary notably not only from school to school but also from classroom to classroom, as pointed out by (Seltzer & Rose 2006, 483). Furthermore, the study by The Union of Upper Secondary School Students in Finland (2013, 11) showed that statistically, students' interest in computers and electronic study material appeared to increase while success in school weakened. If this is true, it may be that the results of a similar study would vary in other upper secondary schools as one of the upper secondary schools which participated in the present study is nationally known for its remarkably good results in the matriculation examination tests. Nevertheless, because widely varying views and opinions were represented in the present study, it appears likely that similar kinds of opinions would be found in a larger sample, too.

7 Conclusion

The present study was aimed at studying and analyzing learner characteristics and learner experiences concerning the English language, as reported by upper secondary school students through two questionnaires. It was in the interests of the study to add to the understanding of the learner perspective concerning the working methods in general and especially the use of the online working method tested in this study. These issues were studied by forming tendencies of the informants' answers. Firstly, the main types of exercise categories in the study book aimed at practicing oral communication skills were analyzed in order to create the context and to reflect against the informants' answers. Secondly, the informants were asked to express their views of themselves as learners and users of the English language. Thirdly, the present study introduced the informants' reported experiences of practicing oral communications skills using a voice-based online learning tool Voxopop and other online learning tools that they were encouraged to use.

The aims of the have now been reached and the research questions answered. The results of this study revealed that the informants varied notably in their reported learner characteristics, learning habits and learner experiences, which is in line with the results of previous research. Interestingly, half of the informants reported that they prefer working alone to group tasks. When asked to freely describe the online exercise, the majority of the informants considered them to be meaningful and have other positive features. The most commonly mentioned features were the experience of decreased (social) pressure, better concentration and peace and quiet, all of which according to many consequently helped feeling more relaxed. The most important question which rose while comparing the results of the study book analysis and the students' answers was whether learning pronunciation is currently being supported sufficiently and whether it could be supported more actively, for example by guiding students to use online dictionaries which provide audio examples of pronunciation. The results of the present study further confirm the need for variation in working and testing methods as has been commonly suggested in previous research, too. The results also suggest that the online

working method justifiably earns its place as a way to increase variation and complement the currently prevalent working methods often based on study books.

The study has succeeded in its aim of contributing to developing the online working methods in language teaching. It gave new information on learner experiences within an online learning environment and it is responding to the need for research as set by the Finnish Matriculation Examination Board (Britschgi 2015). This kind research is fresh and necessary in preparing for the forthcoming electronic Finnish matriculation examination tests. Based on the results of the present study, I am of the opinion that the learner experience perspective should be utilized more in developing language teaching. It is worth noting that many students had not heard their own English pronunciation recorded before, which is problematic as oral language skills are to become a part of the foreign languages matriculation examinations. If the phenomenon is common in upper secondary schools across the country, then this is something schools need to react to.

The present study offers several topics for future research. Testing the online working methods on a larger sample of informants or carrying out more in-depth interviews would provide more information on learner experience. Also, it might be fruitful to study whether differences can be found in reported learner experiences between the sexes or informants with different language skills. Moreover, the present study left unanswered questions concerning the methods used by upper secondary school students to study pronunciation. Finally, it would be interesting to study the relationship between a language learner's skills, motivation and the use of online learning tools and online media in the English language.

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Appendices

Appendix 1

ALKUKYSELY

Nimi _____ Millä luokalla englannin opiskelusi alkoi? _____
Sukupuoli _____Ikä _____Kurssi_____

Rastita jokaiseen väittämään käyttäen 4–asteista skaalaa (katso merkitykset vierestä) se vaihtoehto, joka parhaiten vastaa omaa ajatustasi. Niihin kohtiin, joihin on varattu vastaustilaa, vastataan sanallisesti vapaamuotoisesti.

		tävsin eri mieltä	iokseenkin eri mieltä	iokseenkin samaa mieltä	tävsin samaa mieltä
1.	Pidän tilanteista, joissa pääsen puhumaan vieraita kieliä.				
2.	Olen luonteeltani puhelias.				
3.	Millaisin keinoin opit mielestäsi parhaiten? (Esim. yksin vai ryhmässä?) _____ _____				
4.	Haluaisin englannin tunneille vaihtelevampia työtapoja. Jos haluaisit, millaisia? Jos et, miksi et? _____ _____				
5.	Käytän teknologiaa/internetiä kieltenopiskelussani. Jos käytät, miten ja minkä kielen opinnoissa? _____ _____				
6.	Käytän teknologiaa/internetiä opiskellessani muita aineita.				
7.	Millaista tukea tiedät internetistä löytyvän englannin opiskeluun ja millaista olet itse käyttänyt? _____ _____				
8.	Haluaisin oppia ääntämään englantia paremmin kuin nyt osaan.				
9.	Haen toisinaan apua internetistä esimerkiksi pohtiessani, kuinka jokin sana äännetään. Jos haet, mistä esimerkiksi? _____ _____				
10.	Haluaisin käyttää teknologiaa/internetiä useammin englannin opinnoissa oppitunneilla.				
11.	Minua on ohjattu koulussa hakemaan tietoa ja apua internetistä kieliopinnoissani. Jos on, minkä kielen tunneilla on ohjattu ja mistä esimerkiksi? _____ _____				
12.	Kuinka usein vierailet englanninkielisillä internetsivuilla? Ympyröi sopiva vaihtoehto. Joka päivä / useita kertoja viikossa / viikoittain / kuukausittain / harvemmin				

13. Pidän enemmän luokkahuonetyöskentelystä kuin teknologian / internetin käytöstä englanninopiskelussa.

14. Pidän enemmän luokkahuonetyöskentelystä kuin teknologian / internetin käytöstä muiden kielten opiskelussa.

Minkä kielen:

_____

15. Luokkahuonetilanne haittaa opiskeluani ja keskittymistäni.

16. Jännitys luokkatilanteessa huonontaa mielestäni suullista suoriutumistani, esimerkiksi ääntämistä.

17. Opettaja ei mielestäni saa luokkahuonetilanteessa oikeaa kuvaa suullisesta osaamisestani.

18. Uudenlaisten työtapojen, teknologian ja internetin käyttäminen englanninopetuksessa lisäisi opiskelumotivaatiotani.

19. Minulle olisi hyödyllistä, että voisin halutessani kuunnella englanninkielistä puhetta uudelleen ja ajan kanssa, jotta oppisin lisää.

20. Olen saanut mielestäni koulussa riittävästi opetusta tiedonhausta internetistä (esimerkiksi erilaisista nettisivuista ja niiden luotettavuudesta).

21. Olen tarvinnut englannin suullista kielitaitoa koulun ulkopuolella.

22. Mielestäni englannin (tai muun vieraan kielen) puhuminen on helpompaa muualla kuin luokkahuonetilanteessa.

23. Englannin kielen taito, jota opin koulussa ja englannin kielen taito, jota olen tarvinnut tai luulen tarvitsevani koulun ulkopuolella, vastaavat mielestäni toisiaan.

Miksi/miksi ei:

_____

_____

24. Osaan perustella omia mielipiteitäni ja näkemyksiäni niin hyvin englanniksi suullisesti, että uskoisin pärjääväni työelämässä.

25. Tunnen itseni epävarmaksi englannin suullisen kielitaitoni suhteen.

26. Arvostaisin mahdollisuutta harjoitella englannin suullista kielitaitoa rauhassa ja omaan tahtiini (luokkahuonetyöskentelyyn verrattuna).

27. Mielestäni englannin (tai muiden kielten) suullisen kielitaidon suoriutumiseni on parempaa muualla kuin luokkahuonetilanteessa.

28. Kaipaisin opastusta ja vinkkejä siihen, kuinka voin hyödyntää teknologiaa ja internetiä englannin opiskelussa.

29. Odotan tulevaa teknologiakokeilua kiinnostuneena.

Onko sinulla muita kommentteja/ajatuksia aiheesta?

Kiitos vastauksistasi! ☺

Appendix 2

LOPPUKYSELY

Nimi _____

Milloin aiot kirjoittaa englannin yo-kirjoituksissa? _____

Rastita jokaiseen väittämään käyttäen 4–asteista skaalaa (katso merkitykset vierestä) se vaihtoehto, joka parhaiten vastaa omaa ajatustasi. Niihin kohtiin, joihin on varattu vastaustilaa, vastataan sanallisesti vapaamuotoisesti.

täysin eri mieltä			
	iokseenkin eri mieltä		
		iokseenkin samaa	
			täysin samaa mieltä

1. Mitä mieltä olet tekniikkakokeilusta, johon osallistuit? Kuvaile omin sanoin osallistumistasi/kokemusta.

_____

_____

_____

2. Kokeilun väittely tuntui mielekkäältä tavalta harjoitella englannin suullista kielitaitoa. ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

3. Pidin mahdollisuudesta äänittää vastaus omassa rauhassani (verrattuna luokkahuonetilanteeseen). ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Miksi/miksi et?

_____

_____

4. Mielestäni englannin suullinen tuottaminen tuntui helpommalta yksin kuin luokkatilanteessa. ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

5. Koin, että opettaja saa oikeamman kuvan osaamisestani, kun sain äänittää vastaukseni rauhassa (verrattuna luokkahuonetilanteeseen). ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

6. Kokeilun yhteydessä esitellyissä työkaluissa oli mukana minulle uusia internetin käyttömahdollisuuksia kielenoppimisen tukena (kuten puhesyntetisaattori ja internet-sanakirjat, joista voi tarkistaa sanan ääntämisen). ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

7. Koin hyötyväni siitä, että sain kokeilun harjoituksessa harjoitella esimerkiksi ääntämistä ennen vastauksen äänittämistä (verrattuna luokkahuonetilanteeseen). ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

8. Harjoituksessa jännitin puhumista luokkahuonetilanteeseen verrattuna (ympyröi oikea vaihtoehto):
Vähemmän / saman verran / enemmän

9. Kokeilun väittelyharjoitus oli motivoivampi tapa harjoittaa suullista kielitaitoa kuin vastaava luokkahuoneharjoitus. ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

10. Mielestäni suullinen suoriutumiseni ei ollut parempaa yksin äänittäessäni kuin luokkahuonetilanteessa. ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

11. Koin hyödyllisenä, että kokeilun harjoituksessa minulla oli halutessani mahdollisuus kuunnella toisen/toisten opiskelijoiden englanninkielisiä puheita uudelleen ja ajan kanssa. ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

12. Uudenlaisen työtavan, teknologian ja internetin käyttäminen englannin opetuksessa paransi opiskelumotivaatiotani (verrattuna luokkahuonetyöskentelyyn). ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Miksi/miksi ei?

_____

_____

_____

13. Millaisia eroja mielestäsi on internetissä tehdyssä harjoituksessa ja vastaavassa luokkahuoneharjoituksessa? Huomasitko eroja esimerkiksi liittyen omaan työskentelyysi/keskittymiseesi tms.?

_____

_____

_____

14. Kokeilun harjoituksen hyöty oli siihen kuluneen ajan arvoista. ☐☐☐☐

15. Useammin toistuva kokeilun harjoitusten kaltainen itsenäinen harjoittelu saisi minut tuntemaan itseni varmemmaksi englannin suullisen kielitaitoni suhteen. ☐☐☐☐

16. En usko, että tehtyäni harjoituksen pärjäisin aidossa väittelytilanteessa paremmin kuin pärjäisin ilman harjoitusta. ☐☐☐☐

17. Haluaisin tehdä kokeilun harjoitusten kaltaisia tehtäviä jatkossakin. ☐☐☐☐

18. Luulen, etten kokeilun jälkeen lue englanninkielisiä lehtiä internetistä useammin kuin aiemmin. ☐☐☐☐

19. Käytän tekniikkaa ja internetiä vapaa-aikanani niin paljon, että toivoisin siksi englannin harjoitusten pysyvän perinteisempinä (luokkahuonetyöskentely jne.). ☐☐☐☐

20. Suullista kielitaitoa harjoitetaan tarpeeksi englannin kielen opinnoissa yläkoulussa ja lukiossa. ☐☐☐☐

21. Mielestäni olisi hyödyllistä, että koulussa opetettaisiin enemmän tiedonhakua (esimerkiksi erilaisten nettisivujen luotettavuudesta jne.) ☐☐☐☐

22. Mielestäni olisi hyödyllistä, että englannin opinnoissa opetettaisiin erilaisia tapoja hyödyntää teknologiaa ja internetiä kielenopiskelun tukena. ☐☐☐☐

23. En toivo, että englannin opetuksessa hyödynnettäisiin enemmän tekniikkaa ja internetiä. ☐☐☐☐

24. Haluaisin hyödyntää kokeilussa esiteltyjä työkaluja (kuten puhesyntetisaattori ja sanakirjat, joista voi tarkistaa ääntämisen) jatkossakin. ☐☐☐☐

Miten harjoitustapaa ja harjoituksia voitaisiin mielestäsi edelleen kehittää/parantaa?

Appendix 3

1) Mitä mieltä olit kokeilusta? Millaisia hyviä jahuonoja puolia näet kokeilun harjoituksissa?
2) Huomasitko joidenkin oppilaiden hyötyvän erilaisesta harjoitustavasta ja vastaavasti huomasitko sen olevan joillekin erityisen vaikeaa?
3) Ajatteletko, että voisit teettää kokeiluharjoitusten kaltaisia tehtäviä oppilailla myös tulevaisuudessa?
4) Yllättyitkö jostakin asiasta kokeilun suhteen?
5) Miten harjoituksia voisi mielestäsi edelleen parantaa oppilaiden/opettajan kannalta?

Kiitos! ☺

Appendix 4

Internet-osoitteita, joista voit saada apua englannin (suullisen kielitaidon) opiskeluun

Puhesyntetisaattori (lukee tekstin/sanan, jonka kirjoitat):

http://www.oddcast.com/home/demos/tts/tts_example.php
(Syötä teksti kohtaan ”Enter text” ja valitse haluamasi kieli. Voice- kohdan valinta tarjoaa erilaisia lukijoita, joilla osalla on myös eri aksentti. Tämän jälkeen paina ”say it”.)

http://imtranslator.net/translate-and-speak/
Erona edelliseen on, että tässä puheen etenemistä voi samaan aikaan seurata kirjallisesti. Syötä haluamasi teksti kenttään ja paina kaiutinta (TTC Voice) Translate and Speak – tekstin alta.

Sanakirjoja, joista voit tarkistaa sanan ääntämisen:

http://www.macmillandictionary.com/
Hyvä ja luotettava sanakirja. Kun haet jotakin sanaa, pystyt kuuntelemaan sen. Lisäksi sanoista löytyy myös esimerkkejä kuinka kyseistä sanaa käytetään ja esimerkkejä fraaseista, joissa sana esiintyy. Oikealla tarjotaan myös muita kyseiseen sanaan liittyviä sanoja. Kokonaisuudessaan todella hyvä sivu englanninopiskelijalle!

http://www.forvo.com/languages/en/
(Monia kieliä). Syötä sana oikeaan yläkulmaan kohtaan ja paina ”go”. Tämän jälkeen voit kuunnella sanan nuolinäppäimellä siinä tapauksessa, että joku on lausunut sanan sivuston kokoelmaan. Kannattaa valita, mistä kielestä sanaa hakee siinä tapauksessa, että sana löytyy useammalla kielellä. Kuka tahansa voi äänittää sivustolle sanoja eli siinä mielessä on syytä muistaa olla lähdekriittinen, mutta pääasiassa ääntämisiin voinee luottaa!

http://www.howjsay.com/

Muita hyviä nettisivustoja:

Nopea ja hauska tapa kartuttaa englannin sanavarastoa on myös liittyä Facebookissa yhteisöön *Krista opettaa sinulle englantia!*

(*kuva on sivulta http://www.foreignstudents.com/ josta löytyy tietoa opiskelusta Englannissa*)

Kokeilu 12/2013/Jenni Pulsa

Appendix 5

About argumentation/debates:

-Some useful information and phrases can be found in the Open road course books 4 & 8

Internet sources:

What is a debate and why debate? → http://utadebatesociety.org/formal-debating/

Good ideas, material and resources → http://utadebatesociety.org/materials-resources/

- ➔ especially Basics of Refutation (how to refute an argument)

http://www.wikihow.com/Always-Win-an-Argument

Useful expressions and phrases can be found also here:

http://www.englishclub.com/speaking/agreeing-disagreeing-expressions.htm

http://silvia-nulle.com/resources/Debating+-+Useful+Phrases.pdf

http://quizlet.com/17124902/debate-phrases-flash-cards/

http://quizlet.com/3894258/a-level-discursivedebate-phrases-113-these-arguments-for-flash-cards/

- ➔ You can also search for useful phrases and information on argumentation from other sources in the internet! ☺

How to refer to research or other sources:

For example:

According to Professor/other title [name], …

According to (the) researchers…

According to research carried out by…

The study [which study?] shows that…

According to [name] magazine/ newspaper, …

Kokeilu 12/2013/Jenni Pulsa