

LEARNING ENGLISH SPEAKING SKILLS AT
UPPER SECONDARY SCHOOL:
the students' and the teachers' view

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**LEARNING ENGLISH SPEAKING SKILLS AT UPPER SECONDARY SCHOOL:
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Vieraiden kielten opettamiseen suulliseen opettamiseen sekä testaamiseen on viime aikoina kiinnitetty erityistä huomiota. Suullisen kokeen lisäämisestä ylioppilastutkintoon on keskusteltu jo viime vuosikymmenellä ja kokeen lisääminen on nyt noussut jälleen ajankohtaiseksi aiheeksi. Suullisen kielitaidon opettaminen lukiossa joutuu usein väistymään päähuomion vievän kirjallisten taitojen tieltä, joita ylioppilaskoe testaa.

Tutkielman tarkoituksena oli selvittää miten englannin suullista kielitaitoa opetetaan lukiossa ja eritoten mitkä asiat vaikuttavat opetukseen. Halusin tutkimuksessani tuoda esille sekä opettajien että oppilaiden mielipiteet suullisen kielitaidon opetukseen lukiossa. Aikaisemmat tutkimukset eivät juuri ole tutkineet aihetta sekä opettajien että oppilaiden näkökulmasta. Tutkimuksen tavoitteena oli lisäksi selvittää kuinka opettajat ja oppilaat kokevat suullisen kielitaidon harjoittelun kouluympäristössä.

Tutkimusaineistoa keräsin kahdelta koululta; toinen koulu sijaitsi pienellä paikkakunnalla Pohjois-Pohjanmaalla ja toinen keskikokoisella paikkakunnalla Keski-Suomessa. Keräsin aineistoa oppilailta (N=40) kyselylomakkeen avulla. Lomake sisälsi 23 kysymystä, joihin oppilaiden tuli vastata sopivalla väittämällä Likert- asteikolla ykkösen ollessa olen täysin erimieltä ja viitosen ollessa täysin samaa mieltä. Lisäksi haastattelin kahta opettajaa, jotka opettivat tutkimukseen osallistuneita oppilaita.

Tulokset osoittivat että sekä oppilaat että opettajat suhtautuvat yleisesti suullisen kielitaidon opettamiseen ja oppimiseen positiivisesti. Oppilaat olivat halukkaita oppimaan suullisia kielitaitoja mutta erityisesti tytöt tulosten mukaan olivat arkoja kielenkäyttäjiä. Lisäksi suullisen kielitaidon harjoitteluun vaikuttivat useat asiat kuten aika, materiaalit sekä opiskelijoiden erilaiset taitotasot. Vähäinen aika aiheutti opettajien mielestä eniten ongelmia suullisen kielitaidon opettamisessa. Oppilaiden erilaiset taitotasot haastoivat opetusta ajankäytöllisesti mutta myös pedagogisesti. Hyvät materiaalit opettajat puolestaan kokivat kielitaidon opetusta edistävänä tekijänä. Oppilaat suhtautuivatkin suulliseen kielitaitoon positiivisesti myös vapaa-ajan näkökulmasta. He tunnistivat suullisen kielitaidon tarpeellisuuden koulun ulkopuolella sekä tarpeen taidoille tulevaisuudessa.

Tutkimuksen tuloksia voidaan käyttää hyödyksi opetuksessa. On hyödyllistä tietää kuinka oppilaat suhtautuvat suullisen kielitaidon oppimiseen ja siten hyödyntää tietoa opetuksessa. Esimerkiksi eritoten tyttöjä tulisi rohkaista käyttämään kieltä sekä oppitunnilla että koulun ulkopuolisissa tilanteissa. Myös vapaa-ajan positiivinen rooli voitaisiin käyttää hyödyksi myös oppitunnin suullisen kielitaidon opetuksessa.

Asiasanat: teaching speaking skills, oral language skills, oral language proficiency

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1 INTRODUCTION

The world has become more international as people interact across country borders via the Internet and other means. Especially the Internet has enabled people from different countries to interact with each other easily on an every day basis. Additionally, nationalities and people meet as people travel in different countries. The European Union especially has made travelling from one country to other within the union countries easier. Hence, in Finland too more and more people interact with each other in foreign languages when they meet in face to face situations or communicate through different means. Interaction, then, is considered to be the essence of languages. Thus, learning foreign languages is seen as learning means of communication in another language than one's mother tongue. One can communicate in different ways, however, it can be said that speaking is the most dominant way used for conveying meaning between different people and different cultures. Thus, foreign language learning should also focus on learning speaking skills, that is production of speech and practising interactive skills, which can be used for communicating. However, it is known that in upper secondary school written skills gain focus in teaching at the expense of oral language skills (see for example Savela 1997, Yli-Renko 1991). The change in society for more interactive has been noted by the Kielipolittinen ohjelma (KIEPO) research that suggest that the obvious gap, the lack of a speaking test in the matriculation examination, should be filled and thus the learning of speaking skills would be supported (Jukkala et al. 2004: 10). Teaching oral language skills is acknowledged in the National Curriculum and according to it the skills should be without exception taught. Yet, the reality that the schools face tends often to be different.

The aim of this study, thus, is to find out how teachers view teaching speaking skills, how they teach speaking and which factors, on one hand, facilitate teaching and on the other, hinder teaching oral language skills in the classroom setting. What is more, the view point of the students on this matter has not been widely studied before. Hence, I wanted to include the students' opinions and experiences about learning speaking skills. The previous studies in fact concentrate more on testing speaking skills rather than teaching them. They include some research on teaching speaking skills as the testing and teaching are tightly connected but the main focus in these studies is on testing speaking. Practising, testing and assessing speaking skills has been studied for example by Huuskonen et al. (2006), Tattari (2001), Huttunen et al. (1995) and Yli-Renko et al (1991) from the point of view of teachers. The viewpoint of

learners on this matter in upper secondary school has not been widely studied. The latest study was found done in 1991 by Yli-Renko and Salo-Lee. This study, thus, seems to be one of the first studies to include students' point of view on practising oral language skills in upper secondary school. In the present study I will use terms oral language skills, speaking skills and oral language proficiency interchangeably.

My attention to this matter was drawn by the on going debate about testing speaking skills in the matriculation examination. There has, as matter of fact, been a working team which has planned the execution of a speaking test into the matriculation exams (Jukkala et al 2004: 10). As a future teacher I was interested to find out if how teaching oral language skills was dealt with in classrooms and whether the students felt that teaching is too grammar centred. I wanted to find out has the change faced by the society reached classrooms and is teaching foreign language skills become a little more about teaching communication, speaking even though the matriculation examination is still lacking a speaking proficiency test.

In this study I will firstly discuss teaching oral language skills at upper secondary school. Secondly, I will present how the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) defines communicative competence and then talk about how speech communication and speaking skills are defined. The final back ground chapter will report about the previous studies done on this field. Then I will introduce the present study and move on to describing the methodology of this study. The results will be presented next and they are discussed in the following section. Finally, I will conclude my study.

2 TEACHING ORAL SKILLS AT UPPER SECONDARY SCHOOL

Teaching oral language skills in Finland has in the past been criticised for being too theoretical or grammar bound. However, things have gradually been changing as the world has changed for more international and interactive. At upper secondary school practicing speaking should be, according to the National Curriculum (2003), a part of every language lessons along with rehearsing listening, writing and reading. Teaching at school should contribute to developing students' abilities to express themselves in foreign languages and, accordingly, speaking is one of those skills. In fact, since 2005 the National Curriculum has included language proficiency levels which are based on the evaluation scale of the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) (Huhta & Jukkala 2004). Thus, the Finnish foreign language evaluation scale includes speaking skills as one of the areas of evaluation.

The curriculum sets clear evaluation principles for teachers and goals for the students' to reach in speaking, writing, listening and reading in all foreign language courses in upper secondary school (Lukion opetussuunnitelma 2003). Yet, the current matriculation examination still tests other skills except for speaking. As Huhta and Takala (2004) note, this has raised a discussion about the matriculation examination having a negative washback effect on teaching foreign language skills, especially on the expense of speaking skills, and English is no exception. As speaking is not tested in the final exams of upper secondary school, teaching speaking skills tends to get neglected. This debate about testing speaking skills has been going on for more than ten years (see for example Romo 1991). Furthermore, this discrepancy was noted in the teacher trade union magazine and it was suggested that the criteria used throughout upper secondary school should become the criteria for matriculation exams as well. (Puustinen 2008). If the matriculation exam includes testing oral language skills, it is believed that teaching oral language proficiency would gain more value.

Since the course evaluation and thus teaching should follow the goals set by the Common European Framework of Reference, I will next present how the framework defines oral language skills that should be rehearsed at school.

2.1 Communicative language competence

Nowadays the CEFR is seen as a common guideline in Europe for teaching foreign languages. The CEFR has defined aims and central contents of different subjects and thematic entities and it provides guidelines for evaluation. The framework has defined sublevels which have separately been defined for reading, writing, listening and speaking. Even though the CEFR is not the only model of language proficiency, it is profound and the Finnish curricula have assessment levels based on it. The CEFR includes descriptions of competences needed in communication situations and I will now discuss how the framework defines communicative language competence, the skills that the students should learn at school.

For language interaction students need general competences but also communicative language competences. Competences can be defined as a set of knowledge, skills and characteristics that allow one to perform actions (CEFR 2001: 9). General competences, furthermore, are an entity of one's knowledge, skills and characteristics which enable one to function as member of a community. They are not language specific but they can be used in different kinds of situations, including language activities (Huuskonen et al. 2006: 13). As learners learn as well as experience different languages and learn about cultures they build up communicative

competences to which all language knowledge contributes. The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages describes language learning and use as follows:

Language use, embracing language learning, comprises the actions performed by persons who as individuals and as social agents develop a range of **competences**, both **general** and in particular **communicative language competences**. (CEFR 2001: 9)

These competences, moreover, are drawn to students use in several different contexts, under different conditions and constraints. That is, they make use of their previous experiences in order to take part in language activities that involve language processes. The language processes are about producing or receiving a text which is related to specific themes and domains. Thus, learners activate the strategies they need for accomplishing their tasks. As the learners monitor these actions, their competences are being reinforced and modified. Hence, communicative language competence enables one to function through languages. (CEFR 2001: 9, Hildén 2000: 169)

In order to communicate successfully one has to use both general competences as well as language competences (Huuskonen et al. 2006). Communicative language competence constructs of **linguistic**, **sociolinguistic** and **pragmatic components**. Linguistic competence includes lexical, grammatical, semantic, phonological, orthographical and orthoepic competences. *Lexical competence*, furthermore, includes the knowledge and skills to use vocabulary in a given language which has lexical elements such as fixed expressions, single word forms and grammatical elements. *Grammatical competence* is about recognizing and using grammatical resources of a language. That means producing or recognizing grammatical structures that have been constructed according to grammatical rules. *Semantic competence* is about the ability to control and be aware of the organization of meaning. *Phonological competence* is knowledge and skill about the production and perception of e.g. sound-units, that is phonemes and phonetic features that distinguish phonemes. The knowledge and skills that relate to the symbols that are used to produce written text is known as *orthographic competence*. The ability to produce a correct pronunciation from written text is called *orthoepic competence*. (Huuskonen et al. 2006, CEFR 2001)

Moreover, sociolinguistic competences include the sociocultural conventions of language use such as rules of politeness or norms between different social groups. Pragmatic competences are concerned with the functional use of linguistic resources. They refer to the knowledge of the principles according to which messages are a) organized and structured (discourse competence), b) used to perform communicative functions (functional competence) and c)

sequenced according to interactional and transactional schemata (design competence). (CEFR 2001: 13, Huuskonen et al. 2006: 15)

2.2 Speech communication and oral language skills

After describing the communicative competence, I will move on to examining speech communication and oral language skills. All communicative language functions in which the language user produces, receives or transmits speech are seen as speech communication. Most commonly speech communication takes place in interaction between two people; the producer and receiver of speech who are in connection with each other simultaneously. However, leaving a voice mail and the receiver's answer to it are also regarded as speech communication (Hildén 2000). Speech communication proficiency consists of the following skills; linguistic skills, functional skills and strategic skills. Linguistic skills constitute from the speaker's ability to choose grammatically and phonetically the correct forms. Functional skills equate with the pragmatic and sociolinguistic competences described above. Finally strategic skills include the skills that are needed to design and control interaction processes. It also contains the ability to make optimal use of one's own competences in communication situations in order to achieve communication goals (*ibid*). In consequence oral language skills are a part of speech communication. Hildén (2000) claims that oral language skills are language specific, say, oral language skills of English or German. However, it can be argued that learning stress or intonation in one language is of use in another language system which has the same principles for intonation and stress. Oral language skills, moreover, represent the skill and knowledge to manage in communicative language settings where spoken text is produced for interaction or transmission in the target language. In the interaction or transmission of the target language the sociolinguistic, pragmatic, linguistic competences and their strategic usage are needed. One can have oral language skills in several different languages and increasing oral language skills add to speech communication skills as a whole (Hildén 2000). The ensemble of one's competences can be examined from the table below.

Table 1 Foreign language skills in the domain of competences adapted from Huuskonen et al. 2006

General competences:	
- declarative knowledge	
o knowledge about the world	
o sociocultural knowledge	
o intercultural knowledge	
- skills and know-how	
o practical skills and know-how	
o intercultural skills and know-how	
- existential competence	
- ability to learn	
Sociolinguistic competence:	
o awareness of language and communication	- conventions about politeness
o general phonetic awareness and phonetic skills	- differences between registers
o learning skills	- dialects and accents
o heuristic skills	
Pragmatic skills:	
- lexica	
- grammatical	
- semantic	
- phonological	
Linguistic competences:	
- lexical	Oral language skills (for example English)
- grammatical	Strategies:
- semantic	-reception
- phonological	-production
	- interaction
	- transmission

3 PREVIOUS STUDIES ON TEACHING SPEAKING SKILLS AT UPPER SECONDARY SCHOOL

As the concepts and terminology have now been discussed, in this section I will describe the results of previous studies. Teaching and learning oral language skills, as a matter of fact, seems to be quite narrowly studied. The previous research almost without exception concentrates more on testing oral language skills at school. Additionally, the opinions presented are either the teachers' opinions or the students' ideas about practising oral language skills. A quite recent study by Huuskonen et al (2006) studied teachers' opinions mainly about testing oral language skills at upper secondary school, however, as testing and teaching languages are connected, the study included also research on teachers' opinions about teaching oral language skills. A similar study was done from the students' point of view on teaching oral language skills by Yli-Renko et al (1991) and it can be argued that the study is not contemporary anymore. However, it seems to be the most recent one found from the point of view of students. Tattari (2001) has also studied practising and testing oral language skills at schools from the teachers' point of view. Huuskonen et al. chose their target group based on the study Tattari had done; they left out participants from areas that were included by Tattari (*ibid.*). As a result, the two studies by Tattari (2001) and Huuskonen et al (2006) cover geographically the whole Finland.

In the study conducted by Huuskonen et al (2006) the results showed that teachers almost without exception viewed oral language skills as important. In fact, 98.8 % of the participants had agreed upon oral language skills' important role in language proficiency. Tattari (2001: 84), furthermore, reports that teachers in her study had seen oral language skills as an essential part of language proficiency. They thought that oral skills could actually be emphasized a little. Huuskonen et al (2006), however, also found out that many teachers do not pay attention to students' speaking proficiency nor do they assess it. Students, according to Yli-Renko et al (1991) had similar ideas about learning oral language skills in general as the teachers did; they viewed speaking skills as important and hoped for more of teaching oral language skills at school. Yli-Renko et al. (1991: 60), furthermore, states that Finns are conventionally seen timid about speaking foreign languages. Their study results show that students are shy about using English. Girls in particular were more timid speakers than boys. The students thought that the little time used for practising oral skills resulted shyness to use oral language skills. Quite many of the teachers, on the other hand, did not think that their students were timid English speakers. 50.7% had thought that their students had the courage

to use English, however, notably many 30.4% had also estimated their students as shy speakers, reports Huuskonen et al.(2006 :78) Tattari (2001:56), moreover, had received similar results as 61.4% of the teachers had thought that their students were not afraid to speak. Then again, 29.1% had thought their students to be timid speakers of English.

According to both, Tattari (ibid.) and Huuskonen et al (ibid.) the factor that influences teaching oral language skills the most is time. Majority of teachers thought that lack of time hinders practising oral language proficiency. Tattari (2001:58) found that 76% of the teachers thought that they did not have enough time for teaching oral language skills. Yli-Renko et al. (1991) reports similar ideas from the students; they felt that too much time was used for teaching and learning grammar. Even though the students viewed written skills as important they clearly felt that more time and practise was needed for rehearsing oral language proficiency. Materials and group size, on the other hand, in the teachers' opinion had encouraged teaching oral skills. (Tattari (2001), Huuskonen et al. (2006). Students had also been satisfied with the learning materials states Yli-Renko et al (1991). Along with lack of time, the teachers experienced student related factors hindering teaching oral language. Students' shyness, heterogeneous groups and students' lack of motivation were factors brought up by the teachers. At the same time, however, also student related factors, in the teachers' opinion, facilitated learning speaking skills. (Huuskonen et al 2006: 83) The teachers thought that the learners liked speaking and enjoyed learning the skills for it. This was noted by Tattari (2001:56) as 74% of teachers had thought that students do not see oral tasks as boring and they were motivated to learn.

The previous studies on this topic are actually concentrating on testing oral language skills rather than teaching or learning them. Yet, as it was already stated above, teaching and testing are connected to each other and thus the studies also pay attention to teaching oral language proficiency. However, more studies can be found from the point of view of teachers than students. Huuskonen et al (2006) and Tattari (2001) both found out that teachers viewed oral language skills as important part of language knowledge. However, they felt that certain factors; such as lack of time, and different student related issues hindered teaching oral language skills whereas materials and students facilitated teaching speaking skills. Similarly Yli-Renko et al. (1991) reported students' opinions; oral skills are really important, however, there was too much focus on teaching grammar.

4 THE PRESENT STUDY

The aim of this study was to find out what kinds of views do the teachers and learners in upper secondary school have on practising speaking skills. Previous studies have concentrated either on teaching oral skills from the teachers' perspective, or on learning them where only students' opinions were asked. Moreover, on those studies the focus has more been on testing oral skills instead of learning and teaching them. Both the learners and the teachers have experiences of practising oral language skills and as a future teacher of English, I was interested in whether their ideas of this topic meet. Furthermore, I wanted to learn about the factors that influence teaching speaking skills in the classroom setting; are there factors that hinder or possibly favour it? Thus, I included both, the students and the teachers, in my study in order to get the answer for the following research questions:

1. What are the students' and the teachers' opinions about learning oral language skills?
2. How do the students and the teachers experience practising oral language skills?
3. How do teacher teach speaking skills at school?
4. Which factors influence teaching oral language skills at school?

I expected that both the learners and teachers would feel the pressure of time. That is, the teachers would find it challenging practising speaking skills since there are several things to cover during the classes. The students, on the other hand, would feel that they are not getting enough practice on speaking skills. In the following section I will describe the participants and how the data was gathered and analyzed.

5 METHODS

In this section, I will discuss the participants of this study. Both learners and teachers took part in the study and accordingly background information of both groups is included. After that I will move on describing the data gathering. I used two different means of data gathering and thus both methods are introduced as well as explained, in the methods section. Finally, I will describe the method of analysis used in this study.

5.1 Participants

The participants of this study were students in two different upper secondary schools in Finland. One school was located in a middle-sized town in central Finland and the other in a small town in the northern Ostrobothnia. There were forty participants in the study, aged between 16 to 17 years. They were studying for their first year in the upper secondary school. The number of girls and boys were equal. I chose first year students as my target group since they have already gone through a transition phase when moving from upper comprehensive school to upper secondary school. Consequently, the students had already studied English for six years. Thus it could be expected that they are mature enough to evaluate teaching oral skills as well as to have developed such oral skills that they could evaluate and comment on learning them. According to the CEFR scale these students' language skills should have reached level B2. Additionally, I interviewed two teachers, a male and a female teacher, and consequently I had one teacher from both schools to take part. Both teachers were teachers of the classes that took part in my study. Teacher A was a teacher in central Finland and had been teaching the participating group only for a week. Some of the students in the group were more familiar to her from previous English courses whereas others she had not been teaching before. Teacher B was a teacher in northern Ostrobothnia and he had been teaching the target group from the beginning of upper secondary school since he was the only English teacher at the school. I interviewed him in English since he felt that as a non-native Finnish speaker his English skills were better and he was able to respond to my questions more freely. For teacher A the language of the interview was Finnish since she was a native Finnish speaker and I believed that her native language would enable her to express ideas more freely and relaxed.

5.2 Data gathering

For the students I conducted a quantitative study and gathered my data by means of a questionnaire which enabled me to get a wider view of students' opinions. The questionnaire included 23 statements and one open-ended question where the students could freely comment learning and teaching oral language skills in upper secondary school. The questionnaire was compiled in Finnish as I thought that the students' native language would give them freedom of expression and it would assure that everyone understands the statements. In the earlier research on this topic students' opinions were not studied and thus I wanted get as wide sampling of their point of view as possible and thus a questionnaire suited my purposes best. For the teachers, furthermore, I conducted a qualitative study and gathered

my data through semi-structured interviews. The semi-structured interview format enabled the questions to be before planned, however, it did not set restrictions to word formatting or word order. This approach was chosen to give the participants a freedom of speech and the opportunity to reflect their own opinions with out any limitations. (Hirsjärvi et al. 2000: 47). Moreover, the interviews were also audiotaped on the participants' permission and later transcribed. In stead of an interview, I could have conducted a questionnaire for the teachers too. Since it sets limitations to the form of the questions and answers, I chose to interview the teachers. I wanted to receive in-depth information about practising oral language skills in upper secondary school and by interviewing teachers, who make most decisions of classroom work, I expected to get the answers better. By means of an interview, I was also able to find out what factors influence teaching oral language skills at school in their opinion; after all teachers have the responsibility designing the teaching that happens in the classroom. The interview questions for the teachers as well as the questionnaire can be found in the appendix, respectively.

5.3 The method of analysis

When compiling the set of questions I used in this study, I paid attention to things that would reveal different aspects of practising oral language skills at school. The questions asked from the teachers included the same themes as the students' questionnaire so that I would find out the opinions of both on this subject. The questionnaire and the interview questions were a combination of my own questions and questions adapted from the study by Huuskonen et al (2006). Their study concentrated mostly on testing oral proficiency, however, they also studied teaching. The point of view in this study was the teachers' and thus for the questionnaire conducted to the students, I had to rewrite the questions to suit their viewpoint. The statements used in the questionnaire were divided into following into five subclasses in the following way:

1. Students' general view on learning speaking skills
Cronbach's alpha: .784
2. Confidence of oral language use
Cronbach's alpha: .714
3. Students opinions about practising English speaking skills
Cronbach's alpha: .798
4. Teacher's influence on learning oral language skills

Cronbach's alpha: .691

5. The influence of free time on oral language learning

Cronbach's alpha: .681

The reliability of this division was tested by using Cronbach's alpha and the reliability was good when the results were $p > .7$. According to the results, each item in this study seemed to test the same topic well. Additionally, before conducting the questionnaire, I piloted it with my peers and based on their feedback made some alterations. For example, based on their earlier research experience I changed my scale from one to five, one being strongly disagree and five being strongly agree which helped analyzing the questionnaire results. The Likert-scale questionnaire had twenty-three statements and one open ended-question where the students could freely comment on learning and teaching of oral language skills in upper secondary school. I collected all data for this study in March 2009. The participants had ten minutes to choose the best suiting alternative in the scale for each statement in the questionnaire in the beginning of their English lesson. The response alternatives were the following:

1. I strongly disagree
2. I disagree to some extent
3. I don't agree or disagree
4. I agree to some extent
5. I strongly agree.

The participants were also asked to give the information about their gender but no other personal information was gathered. Identifying gender enabled me to analyze differences between boys and girls. The data from the questionnaires was analysed by using a statistical analysis, T-test. Yet, the answers of the open-ended question were analyzed qualitatively. The interviews were transcribed and the answers analysed. In the process of transcribing the interviews for example, hesitation, false starts, pauses were omitted since this study was concerned on content of the participants' answers.

In the following section I will present the results of my study. Firstly, I will acknowledge the reliability of the questionnaire. Secondly, I report the students' and the teachers' general view on practising oral language skills. The next section will reveal the view of the students' and

the teachers on learning English speaking skills. Teaching speaking skills and the factors that influence teaching oral language proficiency are presented in the chapter following. Finally, I will present the results for the role of speaking skills in students' free time.

6 RESULTS

The main purpose of this study was to examine how English oral language skills are practiced in upper secondary school, which factors influence it and what kinds of opinions the students and teachers have about practicing oral language proficiency. In other words, I wanted to find out whether the both parties had similar ideas on this topic or not. For example, do the learners' and the teachers' opinion of not having enough time for practising oral skills meet. Additionally I will also report differences between genders and the two schools whenever a statistically significant difference is found. However, I will not systematically report all the results from the point of view of genders or school as this study is concentrating on finding out the opinion of teachers' and students' rather than seeking for differences in results between the two genders. Moreover, I will present the results between different subclasses and then move on reporting the results under each item.

In each section the students' results will be presented first following with the teachers' ideas on the matter. In section 5.4 *How do teachers try to teach speaking skills and which factors influence it* the results are reported from the teachers' point of view since this is, in my opinion, only a question for the teachers to answer. Statistical differences will be indicated according to the following scale:

$0,01 < p < 0,05$ almost significant (*)

$0,001 < p < 0,01$ significant (**)

$p < 0,001$ very significant (***)

$p > 0,05$ no difference ns

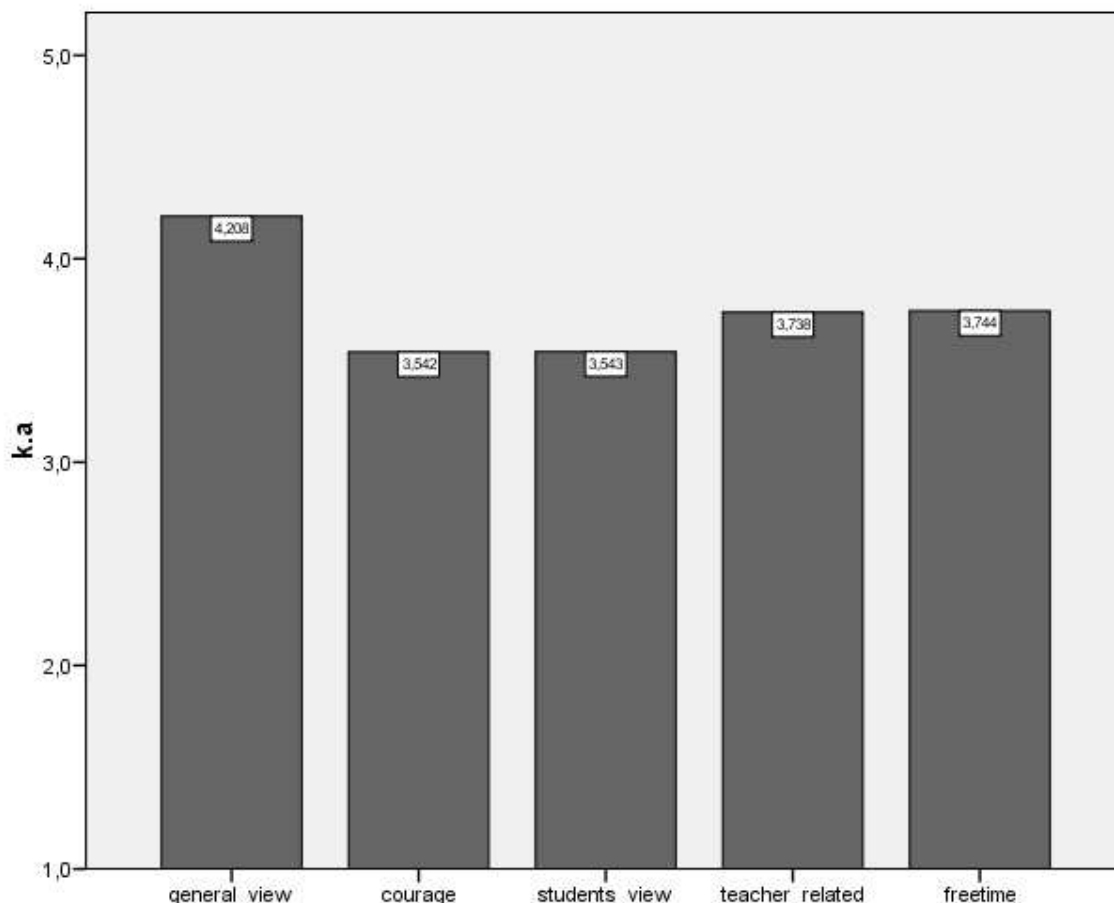
6.1 The reliability of the questionnaire

I wanted to examine teaching and learning oral language skills with as wide perspective as possible. As said before, the statements used in this study were divided into five different subclasses. Cronbach's alpha, a reliability test, was used to see if the items within the subclasses functioned together. The reliability test showed that statement 6 *I would like to adapt an accent into my speech (e.g. British, American or Australian)* and statement 10 *In my opinion, too much of time is used to learning oral language skills* were slightly problematic,

however, the statements could be used since the test result passed the limiting value of .7. Apparently the learners were not sure whether they wanted to have an authentic sounding accent or not. This could be because the teaching in upper secondary school concentrates more on the general oral language skills (e.g. intonation, pronunciation, stress etc.) where as learning an accent could be seen as more specific skill that the more advanced learners think about in their studies later. Teachers do not perhaps pay attention to this or stress this side to learning languages as there so many other things that can be considered more as basic knowledge and thus important for the learners to learn. Moreover, statement number 1 *Learning and practising English oral language skills is in my opinion an important part of language proficiency* had the highest mean 4.68 in the whole study. Additionally, the standard deviation for this question was relatively low too, which indicates that the respondents mostly agreed with this statement. What is more, the statements number 3, *It is important to teach oral language skills at upper secondary school* and 4, *I want to learn how to pronounce English vocabulary* gained a high mean too, 4.55 being the result for previous one and 4.48 for the latter.

Moreover, the lowest points in the whole test, 2.88 were the result of statement number 6 *I would like to adapt an accent into my speech (e.g British, American or Australian)* and 2.93 of statement number 8 *I practice oral language skills (e.g. pronunciation) during my free time too..* The means are clearly the lowest ones when compared to means of other statements. Additionally the results are close to the mean of 3 which in the questionnaire was the alternative that indicated no opinion. Besides, *Learning oral language skills is in my opinion difficult*, that is statement number 5, got a low mean of 2.90 as did statement number 13 *Learning writing skills is in my opinion more important than learning oral language skills* with a mean of 2.60. The low points of these two statements in fact give positive results. The statements and the mean as well as the standard deviation for each statement are found from appendix 3. Overall, the results indicate that the students' general view towards learning English language proficiency is positive. The means of different subclasses can be seen from the table below.

Table 1 The means of different subclasses relating to learning speaking skills in upper secondary school



6.2 Teachers' and students' general view on practicing oral language skills at upper secondary school

The students' general view on practicing oral language skills at upper secondary school was positive. In fact, thirty respondents' out of forty had strongly agreed with the statement number 1 *Learning and practising English oral language skills is in my opinion an important part of language proficiency*. Additionally, this item had the highest mean 4.208 of all subclasses. There was a significant difference found between students attitudes in the two schools. In school number one the students were significantly more positive about learning oral language skills in general. Table 2 presents the results concerning the differences between the students' general attitude in the two schools.

Table 2 Students' General view on learning oral language skills.

	School	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	P- value
General View	1	20	4.5333	.31344	.07009	.000(**)
	2	20	3.8833	.54370	.12158	.000(**)

However, as it is been said already, the overall results were positive and this could be seen in the answers of the open-ended questions too. This is illustrated in the following example:

Example 1

Mielestäni suullinen kielitaito on kielen oppimisessa tulevaisuuden kannalta tärkeintä. Silloinhan pystyn kommunikoidaan matkustellessani melkein kenen kanssa tahansa, tai esim. ulkomaalaisten sukulaisten kanssa. Toki kirjoitus- ja lukutaito vieraalla kielellä ovat myös tärkeitä.

In my opinion oral language skills are most important in language learning when thinking about the future. Then when I travel, I am able to communicate almost with anybody or e.g. with my foreign relatives. Surely writing and reading skills in a foreign language are really important too.

This point was brought out by both teachers too. They thought that learning oral language skills is important, however, they also recognize the same factor as the student in the above example; learning a foreign language involves other skills too. Additionally, other areas of language knowledge influence speaking skills as well. Still both teachers thought that teaching oral language is a significant part of language teaching. In the opinion of teacher A learning speaking skills could even be slightly emphasized in teaching.

Example 2

Opettaja A: En mä sitä sano että se pelkkä puhuminen tekee autuaaksi. Kyllä mä arvostan kielioppia aivan suunnattoman paljon ja se on myöskin väline siihen viestinnän tarkkuuteen ja sujuvuuteen.

Teacher A: I am not saying that only speaking makes one blessed. I do appreciate grammar a lot and it is also a tool to the accuracy and fluency of communication.

Teacher B: I think it's very important to teach oral skills, language is a part of life and it should be practical, not theoretical. So not only speaking, but also listening helps in life

Furthermore, both teachers recognized speaking skills as generally slightly neglected area of teaching which some times have to yield for practicing writing skills. The matriculation examination seemed to cause this which was noted by teacher B in particular.

6.3 Students' and teachers view on practising speaking skills

The mean for this section was 3.543. Consequently, most of the students thought that they could communicate based on the skills they have learnt at school. This was supported by the results of the subclass *confidence of oral language use*. The mean for this item for all the respondents was 3.542. This subclass included statements number 2 *I have the confidence to use English in classes* and number 15 *I have the confidence to use English out side of school*. Yet, it was found that boys had a greater confidence to use the language than girls did. The difference between genders was greater within statement number 2 *I have the confidence to use English in classes*. Table 3 presents the differences between boys and girls in relation to having the confidence to speak in English.

Table 3 Students' courage to speak in English

	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	P- value
Courage	Girl	20	3.2333	.97393	.21778	.018 (*)
	Boy	20	3.8500	.53503	.11964	0.19 (*)

Additionally, learning oral language skills was not generally seen overly challenging, however, there was a great deviation between the answers in statement number 5 *Learning speaking skills is in my opinion difficult*. The great deviation indicates that the learners are heterogeneous. The deviation for this statement can be seen from table four.

Table 4 The results for statement number 5 *Learning speaking skills is in my opinion difficult*

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	I strongly disagree	5	12.5	12.5	1,5
	I disagree to some extent	13	32.5	32.5	45.0
	I do not agree or disagree	6	15.0	15,0	6,0
	I agree to some extent	13	32.5	32.5	92.5
	I strongly agree	3	7.5	7.5	100.0
	Total	40	100.0	100,0	

The mean 3.55 for statement number 7 *In my opinion, enough time is used for teaching/ practicing oral language skills in classes* suggests that in the opinion of some students there is enough teaching oral language skills. Then again, students felt that too much of oral language practise were not done in classes. In one of the open-ended answers teaching was criticized for being too grammar focused. This is illustrated in the following example.

Example 3

Minun mielestä lukiossa (Suomessa) opetetaan aivan liikaa kielioppia. Mielestäni olisi tärkeämpää opetella puhumaan englantia hyvin kuin opetella kielioppiasioita.

In my opinion grammar is taught too much in upper secondary school (in Finland). I think it would be more important to learn to speak English well than to learn grammar.

The teachers were asked how they encourage students to use English at school during classes and also out side school. Both teachers tried to encourage students to use English in class by doing different types of oral tasks. Teacher A told that she also encouraged the students in Finnish to speak English. That is, she urged the students to communicate, convey meaning rather than to focus on grammatical structures. She also stressed the fact that making mistakes is something that the student should not be afraid of. Making mistakes needs to be practiced too, as teacher A said it, it is not enough to tell this to students but they need to experience it too. Exercises that give the student more freedom to use the language encourage them to use it both at school and out side school. For gaining confidence to use English out side of school situations, teacher A practiced real life situations such as phrases needed abroad or giving instructions. She also thought that her interaction with students encouraged the students to speak English out side of school. She made personal connections to students and encouraged them to speak English when going abroad. Teacher B, on the other hand, did not really explicitly in his opinion courage the students to use the language in outside school situations as he felt that teachers cannot really influence it. In his words, teachers cannot know how much students use English out side school as they connect with different people in the world. Then again, he thought that students considerably use the Internet which in his opinion contributed to learning speaking skills too.

Furthermore, both teachers thought that the majority of the learners generally had a positive approach to learning oral language skills. Teacher B recognized the students' unfamiliarity of speaking in English in class but he still thought that many of the students had a good attitude to oral language skills. Teacher A noted that social issues between the learners' sometimes cause some problems when practicing oral language skills not the oral practice itself. She also

thought that practicing oral language skills in various different ways resulted in students' positive attitude. Additionally, in her experience, motivating the students and giving them reasoning for learning speaking skills had a good impact too on the view that the learners' have.

Example 4

Opettaja A: joo, se on mun kokemus [positiivinen] ehdottomasti. Joskus voi tulla sellasia nihkeitä tilanteita, jotka liittyy minun mielestä enemmän sosiaalisiin suhteisiin kuin itse sen taidon harjottamiseen. Välttämättä ei oookkaan se kaveri, jonka kanssa pitäis tehdä ... monipuolisuus mun mielestä vaikuttaa siihen, että vastaanottokin on myönteinen. Tietysti minkä tahansa asian kannalta se motivointi, miten sitä [suullisen kielitaidon opetusta] perustelee jos sitä jotenkin kyseenalaistetaan.

Teacher A: yeah, that is my experience [positive] absolutely. Sometimes there might be some awkward situations which in my opinion, are more connected to social relationships than to practicing the skill. It's not necessarily your friend that you have to work with ... versatility, in my opinion affects on the reception being positive. Of course for any matter it is about motivation, how you justify it [teaching oral language skills] if some one questions it some how.

Teacher B: So I think in a way they are not so much used to it, so they all maybe more used doing things in writing and doing their homework, they are not so used in talking also English in class. But on the other hand, there are also quite many students who want to talk English and who are also grateful when they get some stimuli also for improving their oral skills

A part of the students' positive attitude for learning oral language could be the self confidence students' gain from using especially oral language. In the opinion of teacher A, succeeding in using English oral language was a much grater victory for the students than completing a written task.

Example 5

Opettaja A: ... niin ilosta nähdä semmosetkin, jotka on oikeesti vaikeuksissa kielen kanssa, ne aina kuitenkin jotenkin selviää siitä suullisesta tilanteesta. Tuntuu, että se on niille paljon suurempi voitto, kun se että ne saa jonkun kirjotelman kirjoitettua. ... Parhaimmillaan, miten se voi antaa myönteistä itseluottamusta sen kielen osaamisenkin suhteen

Teacher A: .. I am so happy to see that those students who really struggle with the language, they always some how manage oral situations. I feels like that to them it is a much bigger victory than writing an essay ... At its best, it can give positive self confidence about knowing a language.

6.4 How do teachers try to teach speaking skills and which factors influence teaching oral language skills

Teacher B mentioned that he speaks English as much as possible in class, thus the students get used to communicating in English. He being a foreigner was in his opinion an advantage. Teacher A used English as much as possible too but she did mention that for teaching grammar she used Finnish. This was because of the heterogeneity of the group; for others the abstract concepts were challenging enough in their mother tongue. Both teachers taught intonation and pronunciation, as teacher A put it, the basics of oral language learning. Additionally, both teachers used a variety of different tasks such as, role play, pair and group work, discussions and games. Idiomatic phrases, offering advice and asking for clarification were explicitly brought up by teacher A as ways of teaching oral language skills. The goal of both of the teachers was to have versatile tasks and methods in use which rehearse different aspects of oral language proficiency. It seemed that the goal for both teachers was to make the pupils to interact in class and engage them in communicative situations. Teacher B also told that he highlighted cultural differences in speaking for making students more active speakers. In other words, he taught conventions of small talk and tactfulness. He felt that his students had difficulty of expressing their opinion or introducing their own ideas and thus those skills needed practise too.

In the opinion of both teachers, the factor that hinders teaching oral language skills the most was the lack of time. Teachers have several other things to teach to the students; teaching speaking skills is only one of them. She recognized this pressure which was a result of having little time to teach several different things.

Example 6

- Opettaja A: Ei se suullinen kielitaidot ole ainut asioita joita opettajan pitäis opettaa. On kirjallinen taito, kulttuuri taito, oppimaan oppimisen taito. Se kenttä on valtavan laaja, mitä opettajalta oletetaan niin silloin mikä kaikki sitä arkea helpottaa, niin madaltaa kynnystä myös tässä suullisen kielitaidon kysymyksessä [opettamisessa] ... Niin yleisellä tasolla opettajia huolettaa se ajankäyttö aina. Kuinka monta kappaletta ehti käydä ja voi voi..
- Teacher A: Teachers are not supposed only to teach oral language skills. There are writing skills, cultural skills, language studying skills. The field, that the teachers' are expected cover, is extremely vast and then everything that makes every day teaching easier makes the threshold lower in this question of [teaching] oral language skills ... Yes, in the general teachers are always worried about time usage. How many chapter you manage to cover and oh no..
- Teacher B: In the lessons I think a part from the fact that the teachers have to rush through their books because the periods are quite short, I mean six weeks, it's a very short time you can't do very much ...

Moreover, teacher A told also that organizational issues sometimes cause oral language skills not be rehearsed. That is, at times a larger entity of teaching ends up taking the time spared for rehearsing oral language proficiency. She also stressed the importance of planning the lessons beforehand and that oral exercises would not always be the last thing covered in the lessons. This is a factor that she stressed to the teacher trainees as well that she mentors. Additionally, teacher A thought that occasionally teachers lack the confidence to make decisions about what is important in teaching. Thus, the teaching done in the classroom follows the course book.

Example 7

- Opettaja A: Jos itellä ei oo tietoo, taitoo riittävästi siitä tulee tavallaan sellanen olo, että ehkä se [suullisen kielitaidon opettaminen] liittyy myöskin sellaseen itsevarmuuteen, että ei osaa rajata tai määritellä mikä on tärkeää. Ei hahmota sitä kokonaisuudesta. Se kirja on hirveen turvallinen kurssi kirja, näitä asioita pitää varmaan käydä kun ne on tänne laitettu
- Teacher A: If you don't have enough of knowhow it kind of makes you feel like that maybe it [teaching oral language skills] is connected to self confidence that you can outline or define what is important. You don't see it from the whole entity. The book is really safe course book, these topics should probably be covered since they are here

Teacher B noted that students' personality has a role in teaching oral proficiency. He says that students are sometimes shy of using English. In his opinion, one part of the students is willing to practice and use the language where as the other part, the majority, is not ready to speak and they are looking for the things needed in the matriculation examination. Thus, he experienced this as an obstacle. Teacher A had similar experiences as she told about students' heterogeneity; students' skills had great variation. Additionally she had the principle of individualism where all the students have the opportunity to study at their own pace. This is illustrated in the following example:

Example 8

- Opettaja A: Vaikka ajattelis, että on pieni kirjallinen juttu. Se saataa viedä joltain hitaalta hirveen pitkän aikaan. Kun taas mä kunnioitan sellasta yksilöllistämisen periaatetta, että olis jotakin mitä jokainen vois tehdä loppuun eikä aina keskeytettäs ja olis huonouden kokemusta. Tietysti jos on tällasia periaatteita taustalla se aiheuttaa paineita suullisen kielitaidon harjoittamiselle ja miten paljon niitä ehtii siellä ottaa erilaisia [tehtäviä]
- Teacher A: Even if you think that it's a small written thing. It might take up a lot of time from some one who is slow. When I respect this kind of principle of individualism that there would be something that every one could finish and you wouldn't be always interrupted and get the experience of being insufficient. Of course if there are principles like this in the background they cause pressure for practising oral language proficiency and how much you have time to take different [tasks]

Furthermore, the matriculation examination as well as the course base system set restrictions for teaching oral language skills. Teacher B thought that the schooling system in upper secondary school has aims for the matriculation examination only and course teaching tends to become test focused because of exams held at the end of each course. In the experience of teacher B, the washback effect of tests makes teaching test oriented. Teacher A too noted the influence of matriculation examination on teaching.

Example 9

Teacher B: ... teaching in Finland is A) maybe too much matriculation examine orientated, so that you teach lots of knowledge all the time which the students have to know at the end of these three years ... On the other hand it's also this course system at the end of which course there is this test also. So teaching is also very much based on the preparation for this test. So in that way, English language teaching in Finland is, as I see it up to now, is a bit mechanical, not so natural.

As I wanted to find out which factors hinder teaching oral language skills at school I was, on the other hand, willing to find out whether there are factors that favour it. Both teachers mentioned good materials as promoters of teaching oral language skills. As teacher A said it, good materials enable the teachers to focus on the teaching itself rather than finding materials themselves. In her opinion, the most everyday factor influencing teaching oral language proficiency were materials; they should support the teacher's work instead of taking up time. Teacher B noted that English materials are good, they include versatile exercises and thus they promote teaching speaking skills. Furthermore, in his opinion those exercises are interesting but he still wondered about the students' lack of active participation when rehearsing speaking skills. Moreover, teacher B also thought that factors outside of school influenced teaching speaking at school. That is, the role of free time which teacher B recognized as significant force contributing to oral language teaching. Students get a great deal of input during free time via the Internet, movies and television programmes and thus their oral skills e.g. vocabulary improve too through this stimulus.

Example 10

Teacher B: I think the material offered in the English books is very interesting, it's good, it's modern and there are also these exercises which encourage English speaking skills like, pair work, discussion, role play and all these things. There are interesting exercises and very often I wish the students would also find that they are interesting. I see it 'Oh that's quite great' but I look at them everyone should have something to say about it. I see it, then I wonder that many of them are quiet they don't even mention the easiest things which immediately come to

Besides the materials, teachers A brought up the role of the National Curriculum and the CEFR. She saw the National Curriculum as a guideline for teaching. Furthermore, as the

curriculum sets the demand of testing or knowing students' level of language knowledge. She continues that naturally any given skill needs to be practiced before it can be tested or evaluated. Additionally, in her view the CEFR proficiency levels too bring teachers the responsibility of teaching oral language skills at school.

Example 11

Teacher A: Esim. nyt on Eurooppalaisen viitekehyksen taitotasot olemassa siellä ja ihan selkeesti siellä on puhuminen, suullinen kielitaito olemassa, läsnä siellä. Silloinhan se luo jo sen velvotteen, että sitä pitäis harjoittaa täällä. Mutta kaiken kaikkiaan se varmaan kaikkein arkisin kysymys siinä on se materiaali. Onko se materiaali semmosta joka tukee. Se sitä opettajan arkea vie. Pitääkö tosiaan alusta asti alkaa vääntämään jotain ja ettimään ite kirjoista tietoa

Overall she thought that positive atmosphere at school favours learning and teaching speaking skills. The fact that students' without exception understand the benefits of learning speaking and are willing to do it promotes teaching those skills. As she said it, there should not be any obstacles for teaching oral language proficiency at school

6.5 The role of English oral language skills in students' free time

Additionally, I wanted to take a look of the role English oral language skills have in students' free time. Two of the questions related to learning speaking skills at free time and the other two the importance of oral language skills. The mean for the item concerning students' free time and oral language usage was 3.744. This subclass included statements number 8 *I practice oral language skills (e.g. pronunciation) during my free time too* and statement number 14 *I use English speaking television programmes as model for my own speaking*. These statements, however, created a great deviation among the respondents. They had clearly either agreed or disagreed with this statement as only few students had not known their opinion. Yet, they almost without exception recognized the need for using oral language skills at their free time as statements number 18 *I am going to need English oral language proficiency in the future* and number 21 *I need English speaking skills in my free time e.g. when travelling abroad* scored high points. Moreover, there was a difference in the results between the two schools; school number 1 had a greater mean than school number 2. Statistically the result is almost significant. The difference between the schools is illustrated in the table below.

Table 6 The difference between schools concerning the role of oral language skills at students' free time.

	School	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	P-value
Freetime	1	20	3.9875	.72309	.16169	.037 (*)
	2	20	3.5000	.70244	.15707	.037 (*)

Interestingly the results for school 1, the school located in middle-sized town in central Finland, were in all items better than for school 2, the school located in a small town in Northern Ostrabothnia. In the next section the results of the present study will be discussed.

7 DISCUSSION

The aim of this study was to find out how students and teachers view practising oral language skills at upper secondary school. Additionally, I wanted to find out which factors made a difference in teaching oral language proficiency. I assumed that the both parties would acknowledge the little time there is reserved for teaching oral language skills. In this chapter I will discuss my findings and compare them with results of previous studies done on this topic.

The Students' and the teachers' general view on practising oral language skills, according to the results, was positive. The teachers' recognized oral language skills as important part of language knowledge, however, they were aware of other skills that need to rehearsed too. Tattari (2001) and Huuskonen et al. (2006) had concluded similar results for the teachers in their studies. Yli-Renko et al. (1991), furthermore, had found out that students had similar positive results. Consequently, also the view on practising English oral language skills was positive for the students and the teachers. What is more, the students courage to use English was studied in this study. The results show that boys were more confident English speakers whereas girls were timid user of English. Yli-Renko (1991 :60) also reported girls being more afraid of using English than boys. The students in her study thought that the shyness to use English was resulted from lack of practising speaking. Additionally the learners thought that for example grammar focused teaching and the matriculation examination had an influence to the shyness to speak. The results suggest that the lack of practise, which was experienced by some of the students in this study, could be influencing to the shyness to speak. Teacher B in this study noted that in his experience students were not used to speaking but doing written tasks. It is difficult to explain why girls seem to be shyer to speak; perhaps it is a matter of character. In addition, girls might experience teenage differently and thus they suffer from lack of confidence which results in shyness to speak in a foreign language, in this case in English. However, generalizations are difficult to make as the group of participants was small

in this study. Yet it is interesting to note that two studies nineteen years apart get similar results about girls' courage to speak.

The teachers', furthermore, thought that the students had a positive attitude to learning speaking skills which had been the opinion of teachers in the studies conducted by Tattari (ibid) and Huuskonen et al. (ibid). The teachers' opinion was in line with the students' results which for learning for speaking skills illustrate a positive attitude. The work done by the teachers seems to result here; both of the teachers had versatile ways to practise speaking, they rehearsed different aspects of oral language skills and both of them used almost without exception the target language for teaching. As teacher B recognized students' unfamiliarity to speak, he also taught cultural nuances. Additionally teacher A thought that motivating students and giving reasoning for learning speaking resulted in positive attitudes. In general the students did not find learning oral language skills as difficult. However, the great deviation in questions relating to this matter illustrate the heterogeneity of students; one student experienced speaking skills as the strongest area of language knowledge whereas for other learning speaking was extremely difficult. In teaching the teachers paid attention to things that seemed difficult to the learners.

The heterogeneity of student was noted by teachers as a factor influencing teaching speaking. The students' different skill levels made teaching more challenging as different tasks were more demanding for other learners. Yet, the factor that hindered teaching oral language skills the most in the teachers' opinion was the same found by Tattari (2001) and Huuskonen et al (2006); the lack of time. All in all, the teachers felt that they had several things to teach and little time. I hypothesized that the learners would feel that enough time is not used for learning speaking skills. In general they thought that enough practise was provided in class, however, the standard deviation in the questions relating to this matter was one of the highest in this study. Thus, for some students the practise was enough whereas others wanted more practise. It could be that on one hand, the learners who felt that their oral language skills were poor wanted more practise on it. On the other, the learners who had good oral language skills wanted to better their speaking abilities. Moreover, the matriculation examination and exams at the end of courses were hindering teaching speaking skills. As the tests only test writing and listening skills excluding speaking, the focus of teaching tends to be on the skills measured in the tests. The course exams leave room for the teachers to teach and even test speaking within language courses. That is however, up to the individual teacher to decide

even though the National Curriculum states that speaking should be taught and assessed in each course. The lack of time to teach speaking skills seems to be the reason why the exams do not test speaking. Hence, the skills that are evaluated at the end of senior secondary school take up the time in teaching. As I believe that testing does affect teaching speaking, having a speaking test in the matriculation examination would result in an increase in teaching speaking skills. Materials, on the other hand, were the greatest supporter of teaching oral language. It is quite natural that the tools for working, in this case course books, have to be adequate for versatile work. Other facilitating factors were the assessment scale which is based on the CEFR and general atmosphere at school. The proficiency level scale seemed to have become a tool for teachers in teaching. In addition, the general atmosphere in this school promoted practising speaking skills, however, it could be different from school to school.

The role of speaking skills, moreover, was significant in students' free time. They thought that they needed oral language skills in their free time and also in the future. Thus, the learners recognized the usefulness of oral language skills outside of school. Teachers adequately noted the role of free time in learning oral language skills. Teacher B thought that the best facilitators of teaching oral language skills were in fact factors in students' free time. Teacher A on the other hand, linked students' free time and language learning as she urged students to speak when going abroad and taught language for real life situations. As oral language skills have a significant role in the students' free time too, they are motivated for learning speaking skills. This, in my opinion, is connected with the students' positive attitude to learning English speaking skills which was found in this study. That is, the learners are more willing to study things at school that they experience as relevant and important in their free time. What is more, the things that students' experience as important are things that students think positively about. There was a difference found between the role of students' free time between the two schools. It is difficult to say what causes this difference. School one was a bigger school in a bigger town whereas school two was a small school in a small town. Perhaps the usefulness of oral language skills was clearer to the students in the bigger town because they meet more foreigners in their environment. On the other hand, regardless of town, school and size the students are able to travel, have access to the Internet, foreign films and other means which are related to oral language skills. Furthermore, the results for each item were without exception better for school one. It is difficult to say which factors influenced the better results of school one. The clearest difference between the participants was the size of their school and the town they lived in. However, it is difficult to make any

conclusions as this study had only two schools taking part and it cannot be said whether the size of the school and town had an influence on the better result of school one.

8 CONCLUSION

Both the learners and the teachers had a positive outlook on learning oral language skills in general and learning English speaking skills. Additionally their opinions about learning English speaking skills met as the teachers thought that the learners had a positive attitude to learning speaking skills. Girls, though, were found to be more timid users of English than boys which was noted also by Yli-Renko et al in their study done in the beginning of the 20th century. The teachers taught speaking skills in various different ways which, in my opinion, affected positively on students' view to learning speaking skills. One of the teachers in fact encouraged the learners to speak in English in class and also outside school situations. The results showed that the students taught by teacher A were more confident to speak, however, the difference was not statistically significant. Furthermore, practising oral skills was hindered by the lack of time as teachers have several areas of language to teach in class. Teachers in general seemed also to be worried about time. Students also noted that the matriculation examination, which does not test speaking, tends in general to have a negative washback effect on teaching oral language skills at school. Quite often practising oral language skills is neglected and oral language skills are not taught enough. In this study some of the students thought that they received enough training for speaking skills yet others criticized language teaching as slightly too grammar focused. The results showed that the students had a positive outlook to speaking skills in their free time too. The students clearly recognized that they needed speaking skills outside of school and in the future too.

The questionnaire in this study was filled in by forty students and two teachers were interviewed. As the group of participants was small, it is difficult to make any generalizations based on the results of this study. Yet, some statistically significant differences were found for example between the opinions of girls and boys in their confidence to speak. As these results were in line with the results of a previous study, it can be said that this study indicates that there are gender based differences relating to learning speaking skills. This information could already be of use to teachers and educators. This also arouses ideas for further study. The gender based differences could be studied further in order to find out what could be the factors causing them. Additionally more research on this matter from the point of view of the students is needed as studies seem to concentrate more on the teachers' perspective.

Furthermore, observing classrooms would give more detailed information how teachers teach speaking skills and how students react to it. Additionally, if a speaking test becomes a part of the matriculation exam in the near future, it could be studied whether the attitude of the teachers' and the learners towards learning speaking skills changes.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1 The interview questions for the teachers

1. What kind of education you have had and for how long you have been working as a teacher?
2. How long you have been teaching the group that takes part in this study?
3. Have you either worked or studied in an English speaking country for a longer period of time?
4. How was teaching oral language skills taken into consideration in your teacher education?
5. Do you feel that there is a difference in teaching oral language skills between the time you went to school and when you were studying to become a teacher?
6. Was the training provided in teacher education to teach oral language skills adequate enough?
7. How do you try to teach English oral language skills to your students?
8. Which factors hinder teaching oral language skills at school?
9. Which factors favour teaching oral language skills at school?
10. In your opinion, what are your students' opinions about learning speaking skills?
11. In which learning situations do you use English as the language of teaching?
12. How do you attempt to encourage the students to use English at school and outside school?
13. Would you like to comment teaching and learning speaking skills in any way?

APPENDIX 2 The questionnaire for the students

Hei!

Tämä kysely on osa Jyväskylän yliopistossa tekemääni englannin kielen pro seminaari-tutkielmaa. Tutkielmani aiheena on englannin suullisen kielitaidon opettaminen lukion ensimmäisellä vuosikurssilla. Vastaa alla oleviin väittämiin asteikolla 1-5 mielipidettäsi lähinnä olevalla väittämällä.

Olen mies nainen

Täysin samaa mieltä Jokseenkin samaa mieltä Ei mielipidettä Jokseenkin eri mieltä Täysin eri mieltä

- | | | | | | |
|--|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Englannin suullisen kielitaidon oppiminen ja harjoittelu on mielestäni tärkeä osa kielitaitoa. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 2. Uskallan käyttää englannin kieltä oppitunneilla. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 3. Englannin suullisen kielitaidon opettaminen on lukiossa tärkeää. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 4. Haluan oppia ääntämään englannin kielen sanastoa. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 5. Suullisen kielitaidon oppiminen on mielestäni vaikeaa. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 6. Haluan omaksua puheeseeni natiivi aksentin (esim. brittiläinen, amerikkalainen tai australialainen) | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 7. Oppitunneilla käytetään mielestäni riittävästi aikaa englannin suullisen kielitaidon opettamiseen. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 8. Harjoittelen suullista kielitaitoa myös vapaa-ajallani. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 9. Pystyn kommunikoimaan englannin kielellä koulussa oppimieni tietojen ja taitojen avulla. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 10. Oppitunneilla käytetään mielestäni liikaa aikaa suullisen kielitaidon opiskeluun. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 11. Englannin kielellä puhuminen on mielestäni mukavaa. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 12. Pyrin käyttämään englannin kieltä oppitunneilla. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 13. Kirjallisten taitojen oppiminen on mielestäni tärkeämpää kuin suullisen kielitaidon oppiminen. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 14. Otan mallia puheeseeni englannin kielisistä televisio-ohjelmista. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

15. Uskallan puhua englannin kielellä koulun ulkopuolella.	1	2	3	4	5
16. Otan mallia opettajan ääntämisestä oman puheeseeni/ ääntämiseeni.	1	2	3	4	5
17. Mielestäni on tärkeää, että opettaja käyttää oppitunneilla englannin kieltä, jotta saan mallia omaan puheeseeni.	1	2	3	4	5
18. Englannin kielellä puhuminen on minulle helppoa.	1	2	3	4	5
19. Oppitunneilla tehdään mielestäni riittävästi suullisia tehtäviä.	1	2	3	4	5
20. Opettajani rohkaisee minua puhumaan englannin kielellä.	1	2	3	4	5

APPENDIX 3 The mean and standard deviation for each questionnaire question

	Mean	Std. Deviation
Q1 Learning and practising English oral language skills is in my opinion an important part of language proficiency	4.68	.616
Q2 I have the confidence to use English in classes	3.73	1.086
Q3 Teaching oral language skills in upper secondary school is important	4.55	.597
Q4 I want to learn how to pronounce English vocabulary	4.48	.640
Q5 Learning speaking skills is in my opinion difficult	2.90	1.215
Q6 I would like to adapt an accent into my speech (e.g British, American or Australian	2.88	1.181
Q7 In my opinion, enough time is used for teaching/ practicing oral language skills in classes.	3.55	1.131
Q8 I practice oral language skills (e.g. pronunciation) during my free time too.	2.93	1.248
Q9 I am able to communicate in English based on the knowledge and skills I have learnt at school	3.93	1.047
Q10 In my opinion, too much time is used for learning speaking skills at school	2.00	.816
Q11 In my opinion, speaking in English is fun	3.75	1.127
Q12 I try to speak in English during classes	3.25	1.006
Q13 Learning writing skills is in my opinion more important than learning speaking skills.	2.60	.744
Q14 I use English speaking television programmes as model for my own speaking	3.60	1.057
Q15 I have the confidence to use English out side of school	3.65	1.051
Q16 I use teacher's speech/pronunciation as a model for my own speech/pronunciation	3.35	1.167

Q17 It is in my opinion important that the teacher uses English in classes so that I get a model for my own speaking	3.93	1.023
Q18 I am going to need English oral language proficiency in the future	4.30	.758
Q19 In my opinion, enough of speaking tasks is done during classes	3.80	.966
Q20 My teacher encourages me to speak in English	3.80	.966
Q21 I need English speaking skills in my free time e.g. when travelling abroad	4.15	1.051
Q22 Speaking in English is easy for me	3.23	1.368
Q23 I learn foreign languages best when I get to speak them as much as possible in class.	3.45	.986