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The power of assessment: What (dis)empowers students in their EFL assessment in a Finnish upper secondary school?

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Assessment wields a great deal of power over students. Yet, there is little research on how students, either in general or as individuals, experience assessment. Therefore, this study aimed to explore what disempowers or empowers students in EFL assessment. A total of 146 students from one Finnish upper secondary school answered a questionnaire on assessment and feedback in their EFL studies. The study utilises mixed methods: primarily, the questionnaire data was analysed quantitatively (principal component analysis, step-wise regression analysis), secondarily, qualitative data and analysis were also used. The analyses showed that students reacted to assessment in highly individual ways. While many students appreciated assessment, a significant minority found assessment disempowering. Assessment caused them considerable anxiety and they did not consider assessment methods good and versatile enough. Furthermore, feedback played a role in assessment disempowerment. Therefore, EFL assessment and feedback methods should be more versatile in order to also cater for those students who currently may feel disempowered by assessment.

Keywords: assessment, students' experiences, empowerment, disempowerment, upper secondary education, EFL

1 Introduction

Assessment plays a powerful role in education. It determines whether students succeed or not; in other words, it defines value (see e.g. Atjonen, 2007, p. 19; Linnakylä & Välijärvi, 2005, p. 16) and worth (see Shohamy, 2001) of their work, and thus affects them significantly. It may motivate students externally but may also cause them stress and anxiety. Yet, there is little research on students' experiences of the power of assessment internationally (Aitken, 2012), and hardly any in Finland. Furthermore, in the context of foreign language (FL) education in Finnish upper secondary schools, there is none so far. So, how do upper secondary students actually experience assessment as part of their EFL studies? In their opinion, does it guide and improve their learning or does it

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cause them stress and dishearten them? Do students feel that they have power over assessment, and if they do not, would they like to have some?

To find that out, students at one Finnish school answered a web-based questionnaire dealing with assessment and feedback during their upper secondary English studies. Even though the first overall results showed that most students were quite satisfied with assessment and its methods, content and timing, for instance, there were also those who felt that assessment had rendered them powerless and distressed. Subsequently, some of them had lost their motivation to study English. With the majority of students considering assessment good, accurate and fair, why did these students feel so differently? What disempowered them in assessment?

Firstly, I will define the concept of assessment briefly and then discuss empowerment and disempowerment and their role in assessment. Next, I will introduce the present study, its participants as well as data collection and analysis methodology. The main findings of the entire survey will be presented in a nutshell, but the key focus of this article is centred upon what the data revealed about students' empowerment and, in particular, disempowerment in assessment, and their possible predictors. Moreover, to illuminate students' experiences at an individual level, I will present three student cases. Finally, I will discuss the findings, their limitations and possible implications.

2 Conceptual framework

2.1 Assessment as defined in this article

Assessment is a broad concept, with various definitions for different contexts and purposes (e.g. Wiliam, 2011). In the school context, assessment has often been divided into diagnostic, formative and summative assessment, with formative assessment primarily supporting learning and summative reporting the results of learning. Currently, assessment at school is increasingly defined as assessment *for* learning and assessment *of* learning (e.g. Black & Wiliam, 1998, 2012; Gardner, 2012).

In this article, the term *assessment* refers to assessment as it is generally understood in Finnish schools and also defined by the *National core curriculum for upper secondary schools 2003*, which was in force at the time of this study. Accordingly, assessment here entails all aspects of classroom assessment, from various forms of formative assessment and feedback to a variety of student work, quizzes and tests, and, finally, to the assigning of summative course grades.

There is little research on assessment in upper secondary or foreign language education in Finland, but the little there is suggests that assessment in upper secondary school focuses on grading, which, in turn, is mostly based on teacher-controlled tests, and is neither very versatile nor interactive (Välijärvi et al., 2009). Self- and peer-assessments do not appear very common for summative purposes in FL education (Tarnanen & Huhta, 2011). Furthermore, the Matriculation Examination, the only high-stakes examination in the Finnish school context taken towards the end of upper secondary education, seems to affect teaching, studying and assessment practices in upper secondary education (e.g. Atjonen, 2007).

As students receive at least approximately 60 course grades (and at least six English grades) during their upper secondary education in Finland, it is safe to

say that assessment and grading, although part of upper secondary pedagogy in general, are a prominent phenomenon also *per se*. Grades are probably the most tangible recognition that students receive of their work. Moreover, according to extensive research, assessment has a crucial impact on students' studying and learning as well as on their motivation, self-concept and self-efficacy (e.g. Atjonen, 2007; Crooks, 1988; Harlen, 2012; Herman & Linn, 2014; Reay & Wiliam, 1999; Takala, 1994; Välijärvi, 1996).

2.2 Empowerment

The roots of empowerment have been attributed to various origins, ranging from Enlightenment to Marxism, from Civil Rights to feminist theories (e.g. Simon, 1994; Traynor, 2003). Thus, depending on contexts and purposes, it has had varying meanings (Francis, 2008; Perkins & Zimmerman, 1995).

First, empowerment was mainly used in an emancipatory sense of giving power to the oppressed (Freire, 1972). However, several scholars started to regard empowerment as a process that cannot simply be given to people (e.g. Karl, 1995; Rappaport, 1987; Zimmerman, 1995). Hence, Adams (1991, p. 208) defined empowerment as "becoming powerful" and explained that it "embodies two dimensions: being given power and taking power".

Furthermore, empowerment was seen as a collaborative process aiming towards greater power, participation and responsible autonomy (e.g. Cummins, 1986). Therefore, empowerment also entails a third dimension: actively taking charge of one's power and resources (Pollari, 2000).

In the 1980s and 1990s, a theory of empowerment was formulated within community psychology (see e.g. Perkins & Zimmerman, 1995; Rappaport, 1987; Zimmerman, 1995, 2000; Zimmerman & Rappaport, 1988). The theory analyses empowerment at individual, organisation and community levels and it includes both processes and outcomes, which may vary depending on the contexts and people involved (Zimmerman, 2000).

At the individual level of analysis, empowerment is referred to as *psychological* empowerment. Psychological empowerment has three components: intrapersonal, interactional and behavioural. The *intrapersonal* component is manifested by perceived control and self-efficacy, but also by competence and motivation (Zimmerman, 1995, 2000). The *behavioural* component entails "efforts to exert control" through active involvement (Zimmerman, 2000, p. 46). The interactional component provides a bridge between intrapersonal and behavioural components and it "suggests that people are aware of behavioural options or choices to act as they believe appropriate to achieve goals they set for themselves" (Zimmerman, 1995, p. 589).

As the theory of empowerment recognises, both empowerment processes and their outcomes vary (Zimmerman, 2000). In some cases, the actions meant to empower people "fail to foster the emancipatory potential that they make possible" (VanderPlaat, 1998, p. 87; see also Toomey, 2011). Moreover, although the goal of empowerment is to foster a group's or individual's agency and opportunities "to make effective choices, that is, to make choices and then to transform those choices into desired actions and outcomes" (Alsop et al., 2005, p. 10), some writers also highlight the right of those being empowered to decide *not* to use their power: "The choice is therefore with the individual, who, given the power, authority, skills and willingness to act, may choose to accept empowerment" (Rodwell, 1996, p. 309).

2.3 Disempowerment

Disempowerment is usually regarded as the opposite of empowerment (e.g. Bolaffi et al., 2003) and thus a term which seems to require no further definition (Kasturirangan, 2008; Toomey, 2011). Yet, like empowerment, disempowerment is used in different contexts with varying meanings. For instance, power and resources are sometimes seen finite: if someone becomes empowered, then someone else becomes disempowered (e.g. Lorion & McMillan, 2008). This notion seems to regard empowerment and disempowerment as the polar ends of allocated power.

However, many everyday definitions, such as dictionary definitions, of disempowerment include aspects of confidence and self-efficacy, which are important constituents of psychological empowerment (Zimmerman, 1995, 2000). Accordingly, even if people have been given power, but they lack self-confidence, they are probably less likely to use their power. Disempowerment is therefore not simply a case of denying someone power and resources.

Thus, in this article, disempowerment refers to students *experiencing* a lack of power and/or resources to make decisions in order to fulfil their potential. In other words, disempowerment refers to the lack of *perceived* control and low self-efficacy (e.g. Zimmerman, 1995, 2000): students may actually have been given power but they either do not realise it or believe in their power and/or themselves. Therefore, they do not, or cannot, take charge of their potential power, which may, in turn, lead to diminished motivation (Harlen, 2012; Weber & Patterson, 2000).

2.4 Empowerment and disempowerment in assessment

Assessment, from the students' point of view, is often a rather disempowering endeavour: as objects of assessment, students do not have much say in the assessment decisions (e.g. Aitken, 2012; Boud, 2007). Yet, decisions made on the basis of these assessments may have far-reaching consequences for students.

In the school context, empirical evidence of students' perceptions of the empowering or disempowering qualities of assessment is rather scarce. However, Aitken (2012) has studied Canadian students' anecdotes on assessment. The students, from primary school to university, mentioned several assessment practices that they found unfair. These included a lack of variety in assessment methodology, too pressurised tests or insufficient test-taking time, secrecy over test content, format or criteria, inadequate feedback and biased grading (Aitken, 2012). A European survey on FL assessment and its focus had rather similar results; in addition, students mentioned irrelevant or too limited a focus as a feature of 'bad' assessment (Erickson & Gustafsson, 2005).

Foreign or second language learning literature has discussed particular assessment approaches that could enhance learners' empowerment. For instance, Little (2005) and Little and Erickson (2015) highlight the possibilities of the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* (CEFR) and its European Language Portfolio (ELP) not only in integrating learning, teaching and assessment but in promoting learner *agency* through self-assessment. In addition to the ELP and its electronic version (Cummins & Davesne, 2009), course-based portfolios have been studied as a vehicle for student empowerment in upper secondary EFL studies in Finland (Pollari, 2000). Likewise, shared assessment

has been advocated as a way of empowering student writers in academic English at tertiary level (Pienaar, 2005). In primary school EFL, Bryant and Carless (2010) have investigated whether peer-assessment might empower pupils when preparing for examinations in Hong Kong. There have also been other approaches to foster students' agency and *autonomy* in FL assessment (see e.g. Dam & Legenhausen, 2011; Erickson & Åberg-Bengtsson, 2012) but these studies do not discuss the concept of (dis)empowerment as such.

Most research looking into assessment as a vehicle for empowerment has taken place in higher education and has focused on self- and peer-assessment. These studies have included several disciplinary areas such as health psychology, the humanities and social sciences. Their results have been somewhat mixed. For instance, in a study of 233 university students, Hanrahan and Isaacs (2001) found that university students experienced self- and peer-assessment difficult and even uncomfortable, but at the same time they felt that these methods enhanced their learning and understanding of the assessment and its criteria. Another study, by Patton (2012), explored 36 Australian undergraduates and their perceptions towards peer-assessment. The study found that although students supported peer-assessment for formative assessment purposes, they "were highly critical of it as a summative practice" (Patton, 2012, p. 719).

One of the most comprehensive assessment experiments attempting to empower students was reported by Leach et al. (2000, 2001). In addition to self-assessment, they decided to give adult education students more power over both assessment methods and criteria by offering choice: the students could name their own tasks and criteria to be used in assessment, or take what the teachers suggested. Their results showed that students had differing responses to assessment empowerment: there were students who liked power-sharing, those who disliked it and those who disliked power-sharing first but grew to appreciate it. Accordingly, Leach et al. (2001) conclude that although the results were mainly positive, "learners will vary in their desire and confidence to make judgements about their own work" (p. 298).

This desire and confidence may also vary depending on how advanced and mature students are (Francis, 2008). Thus, in the name of empowerment, the students in the study by Leach et al. (2000, 2001) could also decide to leave the assessment solely to the teachers. Tan (2012), however, disagrees with this choice: in his opinion giving students the right *not* to participate in assessment – self-assessment in his case – is not empowering. Moreover, if optional, it will not foster the learning and self-assessment skills of those who opt out (Tan, 2012).

The Finnish school system has only one high-stakes test, the Matriculation Examination. Otherwise, teachers decide on assessment and its methodology, within the boundaries of the National core curriculum for upper secondary schools. Although the core curriculum does not use the word empowerment as such, some traits of the concept are present. Firstly, assessment must aim at guiding and encouraging learning and it must be diverse. Secondly, the course goals and assessment criteria are to be discussed with students at the beginning of each course. Furthermore, students may be given a say in determining their course grades, but that is left for schools and teachers to decide (for further information, see *National core curriculum for upper secondary schools, 2003)*.

Thus, Finnish students should have at least some power in the assessment process so why do some students still feel disempowered in assessment?

3 The present study

3.1 Aims

This article is part of a larger study the aim of which was to find out how students at one school experienced assessment during their upper secondary EFL studies. For instance, did assessment encourage and guide students' learning, as required by the National core curriculum? Furthermore, were the assessment methods considered versatile, accurate and fair? Did they allow students any power or agency in assessment?

With conflicting findings of power and agency emerging from the data, I began to focus on the students' experiences of empowerment and, particularly, of disempowerment in assessment. Therefore, the research questions of this article are:

1. Do the students who found assessment disempowering differ from other students in any clear respect? If yes, how?
2. What predicts disempowerment in assessment?
3. How are assessment disempowerment and empowerment manifested at an individual level?

3.2 Data collection

To get a comprehensive view on students' experiences of EFL assessment in this upper secondary school in a practical and economical manner, its second- and third-year students were asked to answer a web-based questionnaire anonymously. In addition to background questions, the questionnaire had eight sections with 139 Likert-scale items and 11 open-ended questions. Each section covered one topic area: students' goal orientation; empowerment and agency in assessment processes; the usefulness of different assessment methods; the frequency of different methods; the accuracy and guidance of assessment; students' personal experiences of and views on assessment; the Matriculation Examination; and feedback.

The questionnaire drew theoretical inspiration from extensive literature on assessment, empowerment and FL education. Studies such as the evaluation of pedagogy in Finnish upper secondary education (Välijärvi et al., 2009) and *Towards Future Literacy Pedagogies* (Luukka et al., 2008; Tarnanen & Huhta, 2011) offered invaluable ideas for specific questions. However, with no previous research on most of the topic areas of the questionnaire in this context, the questionnaire was quite exploratory in its nature and had to be specifically designed for this study (Cohen et al., 2013; Creswell, 2014).

Most items on the questionnaire were based on the *National core curriculum for upper secondary schools 2003* and on the current assessment practices both in Finland and at this school. Four research experts on educational assessment and/or FL education as well as three colleagues at school (the upper secondary school head teacher, a student counsellor and another English teacher) commented on the evolving versions of the questionnaire. These experts were consulted to ensure that the content of the questionnaire was valid from practical, legislative and theoretical perspectives. Student voice was also included in the questionnaire as students' ideas and comments on assessment,

gathered during my teaching career of over 20 years, shaped the questionnaire considerably. Furthermore, the open-ended questions were placed at the end of each topic area, after the Likert-scale items, and were designed so that they would enable students to elaborate and express their ideas more freely (see Appendix 6).

The questionnaire was repeatedly tested and commented on by a senior researcher with expertise in both student surveys and in research on upper secondary education. Finally, the internet questionnaire was piloted by four upper secondary students. Each round of testing and comments contributed to further refinements. All these measures were taken to ensure the content validity and reliability of the questionnaire (e.g. Cohen et al., 2013; Messick, 1989).

3.3 Participants

Out of 199 students, 146 answered (response rate 73.4%). The second-year students (79 students, i.e. 54.1% of the respondents) answered the questionnaire during one of their English lessons in March 2014 and the third-year students, already preparing for the Matriculation Examination, in their own time (67 students, 45.9% of the respondents). Eighty-six respondents were female (58.9%), 60 male (41.1%). The average of their previous English grade (self-reported) was 8.58 (range 6–10, with 4 being the lowest and 10 the highest grade in the Finnish system). So far in upper secondary school, they had studied, on average, 6.7 courses (range 4–11) and had had 3.7 different English teachers (range 2–7). The first-year students were excluded from this survey as I wanted students to have had adequate experience of English studies and assessment at upper secondary school. Regarding gender and grades, the respondents are a good representation of the total student population of the school at the time of the study.

3.4 Data analysis

Principally, the data was analysed quantitatively. Originally, in order to reduce the dimensionality of the whole data, a varimax-rotated principal component analysis (e.g. Brown, 2009; Metsämuuronen, 2009) was conducted to summarise the variance of each section of the questionnaire into a few principal components. This analysis revealed a strong (dis)empowering component in assessment. On the basis of the resulting principal components, altogether 28 sum variables were formed[1] (see Appendix 1). The SPSS software was used for the statistical analyses.

Firstly, to address the research questions of this article, students' differing experiences of assessment (dis)empowerment were analysed and grouped with the help of means and standard deviations. Secondly, a stepwise regression analysis (e.g. Jokivuori & Hietala, 2007; Metsämuuronen, 2009) was run to find out which variables might predict disempowerment the strongest.

In order to add depth and to illustrate "what the individual variation means" (Patton, 2002, p. 15), qualitative data and analysis were also used in the third approach, i.e. in the illuminative close-ups of three individual students. Methodologically, these case analyses are based on mixed methods that complement each other: the qualitative data is used to both check the accuracy and validity of the quantitative findings and further explain them, and vice versa, in order to provide as comprehensive analysis as possible (Creswell, 2014). Firstly, the cases had to qualify in their category (disempowered/non-

disempowered/empowered) on the basis of the quantitative analysis of their responses to the Likert-scale items. Secondly, the open-ended answers of each of these qualified students were carefully read, analysed and compared with one another through close reading, which Brummett (2010, p. 25) characterises as follows: "Close reading is a mindful, disciplined reading of an object with a view to deeper understanding of its meanings" (see also Thomas, 2006). Then, the most information-rich cases – "those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance" (Patton, 2002, p. 46) – were purposefully selected.

4 Findings

One section of the questionnaire dealt with students' personal experiences of and views on assessment and its agency and power. The principal component analysis of that section extracted six components with Eigenvalues bigger than 1. The most effective component (17.43% of variance) was transformed into a sum variable which consisted of the four items that had the strongest loadings in this component (see Table 1). Henceforth, the resulting sum variable is called *Disempowerment* as its items cover central features or results of disempowerment: assessment is not seen as a factor facilitating learning, but rather as something that drains the students' power, resources and motivation. In other words, it refers to the lack of perceived control, self-efficacy and motivation, which are the features of the intrapersonal component of psychological empowerment (Zimmerman, 1995, 2000).

Table 1. The items and their loadings in the sum variable of *Disempowerment* (Cronbach's alpha .76).

Item	Loading
Assessment methods give me an opportunity to show how much I know.	-.788
The assessment methods (that are used) discourage me.	.771
Assessment has diminished my willingness to learn.	.749
Assessment just states, it does not guide or help me to learn better.	.615

The *Disempowerment* sum variable was the main starting point for all the following analyses. However, the analyses and findings deal with that sum variable from different angles. Firstly, I will present the 'big picture' of all the data using the *Disempowerment* sum variable as a dividing point which divides students into different groups. Then I will focus on the predictors of disempowerment with the help of a stepwise regression analysis. Finally, I will introduce three individual student cases which rely also on the students' open-ended answers.

4.1 Disempowered and non-disempowered student groups

To see the general trends of the data, the means of each of the 28 sum variables, as well as two individual variables (see Appendix 1), were calculated for the whole respondent group. Then, to see how the students who felt disempowered differed from the whole respondent group of this study, these means were

calculated also for the group that can be considered disempowered. The means are presented as graphs in Figure 1.

The disempowered group was defined on the basis of the sum variable named *Disempowerment* mentioned above. The mean of the whole respondent group for this sum variable was 2.48, with the minimum value of 1 and maximum 4.5 (*SD* .79). The cut-off point for including a student in the disempowered group was one SD above the mean (*M* + 1 *SD*, i.e. 2.48+0.79=3.27). This resulted in a group comprising 21 students (14.4%), most of whom were girls (see Table 2).

Also, I wanted to explore the students who, according to their questionnaire responses, did not appear disempowered at all. Calculating the cut point on the same principle (2.48–0.79=1.69), the resulting group had altogether 18 students (12.3%). However, I could not call these students empowered on the basis of this sum variable since the sum variable did not entail any items concerning power given to students or students actively taking charge of their decision-making power. Hence, they are rather clumsily called *non-disempowered*. The three student groups (i.e. the disempowered, the non-disempowered and the whole respondent group) differed from one another both in their gender ratio as well as in their grades: the disempowered students had the lowest previous grades (*M*=7.86) and the non-disempowered the highest (*M*=8.83) of these three groups. Furthermore, the disempowered students showed the biggest difference between the grade they would have given themselves and the one received (see Table 2).

Table 2. Descriptive statistics of the whole respondent group as well as the disempowered and the non-disempowered student groups.

	All respondents ***n*=146**	**The disempowered** ***n*=21**	**The non-disempowered** ***n*=18**
Number of female and male students / ratio	86 females, 60 males 58.9% / 41.1%	14 females, 7 males 66.7% / 33.3%	8 females, 10 males 44.4% / 55.6%
Second-year/third-year students ratio	79 / 67 54.1% / 45.9%	13 / 8 61.9% / 38.1%	11 / 7 61.1% / 38.9%
Mean of previous English grade	8.58	7.86	8.83
Mean of own estimate/i.e. self-grade	8.64	8.05	8.83
Mean of final English grade in basic education	9.06	8.57	9.11

When comparing the means of the sum variables of the Disempowered and the Non-disempowered with the means of the whole respondent group, a few sum variables or topic areas showed clear differences. For instance, the individual variable *Assessment causes me anxiety and stress* as well as the sum variable of *Stressful and discouraging assessment* divided opinions between these three groups (see Figure 1). Also, students' responses to feedback, its usefulness, importance and role in learning seemed to set these groups apart. The groups seemed rather different in their experienced ability to analyse their strengths and weaknesses. The Disempowered also considered the assessment methodology the least versatile and good, thought that course tests had had too much weight and also regarded assessment as the least accurate or just out of these three

groups. They also wanted to have more influence on the assessment methodology and criteria than the other two groups.

However, when comparing the sum variable concerning *Given empowerment* (e.g. whether the goals and assessment methodology were discussed at the beginning of the course, and whether students were given a chance to influence them), the difference became noticeably smaller. Furthermore, all the student groups seemed rather unanimous in their views on the degree of usefulness of some assessment methods, such as self-assessment or other 'softer', i.e. more formative, and versatile methods. At first glance, it looked as if the disempowered students also felt that they had been given power to participate in the decision-making process, but somehow they had not quite embraced it or it had not resulted in assessment methodologies of their choice.

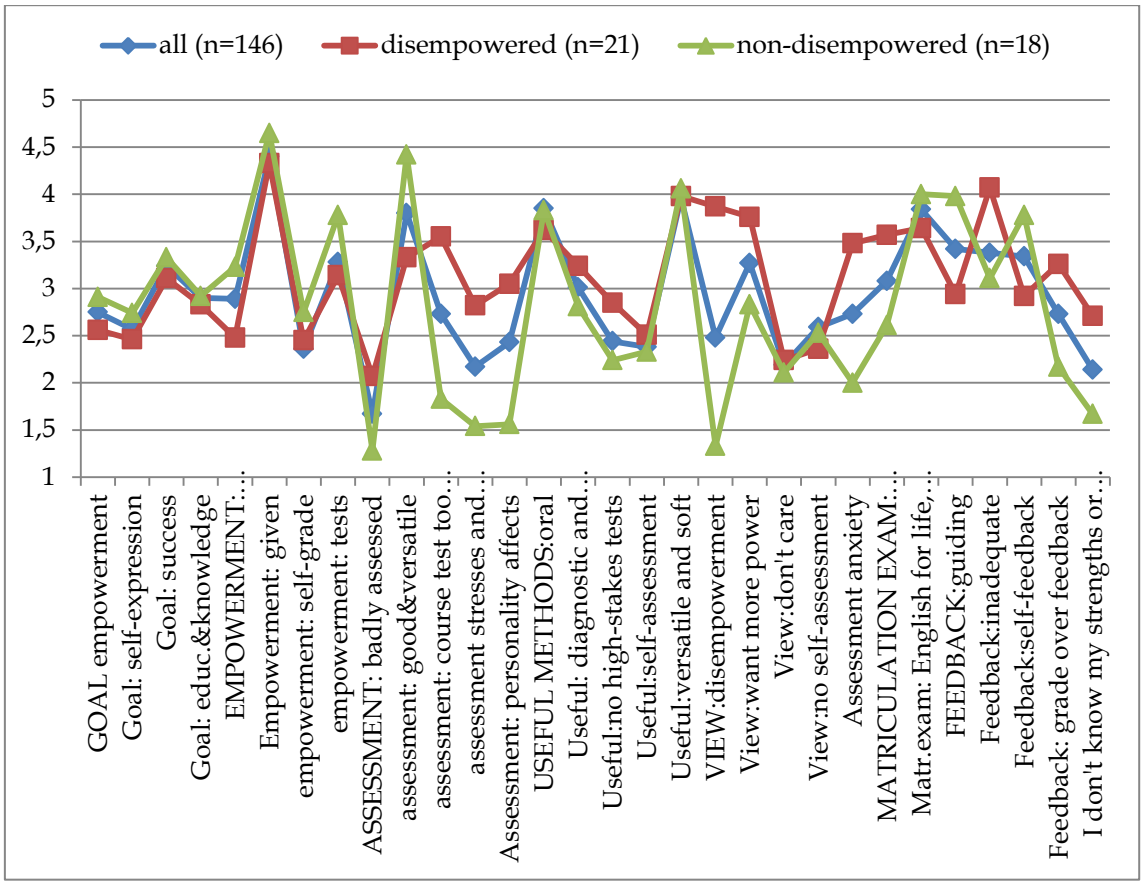

Figure 1. The line chart depicting the sum variable means of all respondents as well as the disempowered and the non-disempowered student groups (see Appendices 1 and 3 for more information on the sum variables).

In summary, several factors seemed to contribute to students feeling disempowered or not in assessment. Yet, the mere means of the sum variables did not adequately explain what might best predict disempowerment.

4.2 Predictors of disempowerment

To find out which sum variables or background factors such as grade, gender or year (as dummy variables) might best predict *Disempowerment*, a stepwise regression analysis was run. The analysis produced a model with eight predictors,

which altogether accounted for 59.3% of the variance. The distribution of the residuals was evaluated following the normality assumption. The normal probability plot of the residuals was approximately linear and the histogram of the residuals was almost normal. Also, the scatterplots of residuals indicated homoscedasticity, confirming the constant variance. Furthermore, as the tolerance (.59–.88) and VIF indexes (1.1–1.7) indicated that multicollinearity was quite low (see also correlation matrix, Appendix 5), this model was accepted.

The most significant predictor of *Disempowerment* was the sum variable of *Stressful and discouraging assessment.* It explained 34.3% of the variance in *Disempowerment* (see Appendix 2; the beta weights and standardised betas in the last model are presented in Appendix 3). Students felt that assessment caused them too much stress and discouraged and demotivated them. When compared with the sum variable of *Disempowerment*, this sum variable had one item (*Assessment has discouraged me or diminished my willingness to study*) which overlapped with some of those of Disempowerment, which may explain its high explanatory power to some extent. However, the two sum variables and their items were by no means identical (see Appendix 4).

In the next step, a sum variable indicating that students did not consider pressurised tests useful for their learning, *No pressurised or high-stakes tests*, was added to the model[2]. Thus, it was the second most significant predictor of *Disempowerment*. In other words, these students regarded tests with aids – e.g. cheat-sheet or open-book tests – as beneficial for learning, whereas more pressurised assessments such as course tests or the Matriculation Examination were not considered good or useful for learning purposes. This sum variable accounted for an additional 7.9% of the variance. Alone, as the only predictor in the linear regression analysis, it would have explained 12.1% of the variance.

The next step added a feedback sum variable, *Grades over feedback,* which accounted for an additional 6.4% of the variance. Alone, it would have accounted for 11.3% of the variance. *Grades over feedback* meant that students were more interested in their grades and scores than in teacher comments or corrections, which they did not necessarily even consult carefully. They may even have rejected feedback.

The sum variable of *Good and versatile assessment* was the fourth most significant predictor of *Disempowerment,* accounting for an additional 3.9% of the variance in this model. As it was negatively related to *Disempowerment,* it means that disempowered students felt that assessment had *not* been good and versatile. Alone, this sum variable would have accounted for 27.1% of the variance of *Disempowerment*, which was caused by their high mutual correlation (r = -.52, p < .01), but its high correlation with *Stressful and discouraging assessment* (r = -.57, p < .01) reduces its additional explanatory power (see Appendix 5).

The following step in the regression model added another feedback sum variable, *Inadequate feedback*. Inadequate feedback refers to students wanting more feedback both from their teachers and peers. *Inadequate feedback* accounted additionally for 2.1% of the variance – as a single predictor, it would have accounted for 12.6% of the variance.

The sixth step added the sum variable of *Success-oriented goals*: students stated a good school-leaving certificate and good grades in the Matriculation Examination as well as a study place in the field of their choice after graduation as the main objectives of their studies in upper secondary school. This sum variable and *Disempowerment* had a negative relationship, i.e. success-oriented goals predicted *Disempowerment* negatively: the higher the success-orientation,

the less disempowered those students felt. It accounted for an additional 1.7% of the total variance (alone: 2.8%).

Slightly contradictorily, the sum variable of *English for life, not for the Exam* also related negatively to *Disempowerment*, and was the penultimate predictor of *Disempowerment* (an additional 1.4% of the variance: alone, 3.1%). In other words, the more the students considered that they were studying English for themselves, not for the Matriculation Examination, the less disempowered they felt.

Finally, one more sum variable improved the explanatory power of this model, namely the sum variable of *Personality affects assessment*: students felt that assessment favours some student and personality types. It accounted for an additional 1.5% of the variance. However, alone it would have predicted as much as 20.0% of the variance.

All in all, according to this stepwise regression analysis, the five most significant predictors of disempowerment, accounting together for over 50% of the variance, were *Stressful and discouraging assessment, No pressurised or high-stakes tests, Grades over feedback, Good and versatile assessment*, which related negatively with disempowerment, and *Inadequate feedback*. In other words, disempowered students felt both stressed and demotivated by assessment. Test anxiety was a clear predictor: no high-stakes tests but 'softer', i.e. more formative and less pressurised assessment was called for. The current assessment methods were not considered good and versatile enough, and they did not give students a fair chance to show all their skills or knowledge. Furthermore, feedback had failed to serve its purpose of facilitating learning. Feedback was either overshadowed by grades, and therefore insufficient attention was paid to feedback and it was considered less important than grades or scores, or students had not received enough feedback to guide and enhance their learning. In addition, students' ownership of their English studies as well as their goal-orientation played a role in assessment (dis)empowerment. Students' personality was also seen as a factor that influences assessment.

4.3 Focus on individuals: three student cases

To illustrate how students as individuals behind these means and quantitative analyses *experienced* assessment, I will present three student cases. The cases, a disempowered, a non-disempowered and an empowered student, were selected on the basis of two main criteria: they represent their category in a clear and illuminative manner, and they had answered a sufficient number of the open-ended questions so that there was enough data in their own voices to "provide depth, detail, and individual meaning" (Patton, 2002, p. 16). Accordingly, the following account primarily relies on the students' open-ended answers. The answers were originally written in Finnish but I have attempted to maintain both their meanings and style as faithfully as possible. The students' quantitative answers are presented in Figure 2 below.

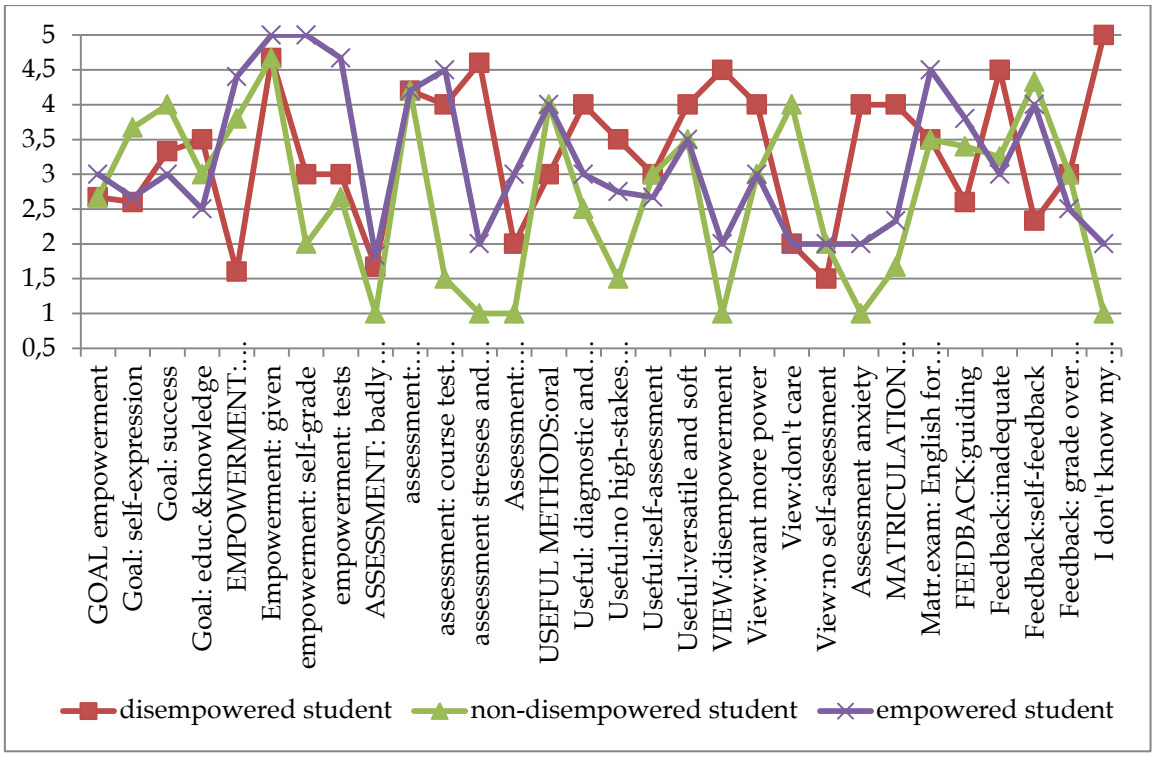

Figure 2. The sum variable means of the three individual students.

4.3.1 "I'm beside myself with fear"

The highest value for the sum variable of *Disempowerment*, 4.5, was by a second-year female student who had studied five English courses with four different teachers in upper secondary school. Her final English grade in basic education two years earlier had been 9, but now her English grade was 7. She seemed to consider the grade quite fair since she would have given herself the same grade. She also regarded the assessment methodology as quite versatile and fair (see Figure 2). Yet, assessment caused her stress and anxiety to such an extent that she seemed to have lost trust in her ability to learn English as well as her willingness to study it: "I am crap at English" she wrote twice in her answers, and "I hate English" were her final words in the questionnaire. She had answered all the questions in a detailed and thorough manner, so I do not think the comments above were mere bursts of teenage rant but sincere comments.

Why did she consider herself so poor at English? Why had she lost her self-efficacy as a learner of English? One explanation might lie in pressurised test situations and high-stakes tests. Although not considering herself unfairly or badly assessed, she felt that the course test influenced the final course grade too heavily and thus caused too much stress. She would have preferred less stressful assessment methods. She also hoped for more formative assessment:

> There could be grammar tests that don't affect the grade. They would be excellent groundwork/practice for the course test. Assessment methods in English have to be versatile so that vocabulary, grammar, listening comprehension and pronunciation are all assessed. I'd like to have two grammar tests in each course. This way, things would still be fresh in your mind and you wouldn't face a horrible excess of grammar that is hard to digest and learn in the test week. Cheat-sheet tests are also good and could be used more because you learn well when you write down notes. In my opinion, in assessment, more

> attention should be paid to whether you have taken part actively in group or pair discussions because they assess how actively and confidently you speak English and what your attitude is to it in other respects as well. (Q1)

She also regarded chances to compensate for some weaknesses with extra effort as useful for learning:

> Some assessment methods motivate you more to work harder. Motivating 'tips' like vocab tests that improve your grade are good. Perhaps there could be some extra tasks etc. you could do to improve your grade as well in the course? (Q6)

However, these compensatory methods, or any assessment methods, should not significantly increase the student's workload at home, and therefore, she did not consider home assignments useful for learning. She also wanted to have more power to influence assessment so that she could organise her use of time more rationally and efficiently:

> I want to influence how many vocabulary tests we have and which ones of them affect the grade. This way, I can plan my own timetables with regards to my studies at least a little and also concentrate on other languages I study. Self-assessment method is good, it may help open the teacher's eyes, too. (Q8)

She did not appear very self-regulated on the basis of her answers in goal-orientation sum variables nor in the sum variable of *Self-feedback*, which refers to students seeking feedback themselves from various teaching and learning situations (e.g. checking homework) without being given feedback explicitly by the teacher or peers. Consequently, she also considered feedback inadequate and would have liked to have feedback "Orally and in writing as often as possible" (Q10).

All these answers give a picture of a student for whom languages were not her forte and who needed to work hard at them. She was probably busy outside school, and thus did not like to work at home very much. On the basis of her answers, her ambition to do quite well at school as well as her lack of self-efficacy as a learner of English had probably started prior to her upper secondary school studies. She had had a very good English grade (9) in her final report of basic education, but yet the idea of her poor English had affected her study choices for upper secondary school at that time. She explained her choices when asked about her thoughts about the Matriculation Examination:

> In upper secondary school, the thing I am most afraid of is that Matriculation exam. I chose Advanced Maths so that I won't have to take the Advanced English exam. I'm beside myself with fear because I don't believe I'll pass it with dignity. I think my English Matriculation exam grade will be the tarnish of my diploma. But what can you do if you are crap at something. (Q9)

Nonetheless, despite her negative and anxious comments, she considered assessment needed: "It tells the student about the level of their skills and knowledge. So, yes, it is needed." (Q11)

Yet, she saw assessment and its function in a rather static and summative way: its purpose is to tell the students the level of their skills.

4.3.2 "I'll manage, no matter what method"

Next, the opposite of the disempowered student is portrayed by a totally non-disempowered student. He was one of the three male students whose value in the sum variable of *Disempowerment* was the lowest possible (1). He was a second-year student, with 9 as his previous grade. Although he would have given himself a 10, he did not feel that assessment had been unfair. In his opinion, the assessment methodology had been versatile and good: the course test did not carry too much weight and personality did not affect assessment. Furthermore, assessment caused him no stress, anxiety or disempowerment at all, not even the forthcoming Matriculation Examination he was planning to sit the following autumn: "I'll pass it even if I have my eyes shut and hands tied behind my back." (Q9)

There appeared to be a clear reason for his extreme non-disempowerment. He trusted his English skills so much that he felt convinced he would manage well no matter what methods were used in assessment. Therefore, he did not want more power to influence assessment methodology:

> No, I personally just don't care how a course is assessed. It makes no difference what methods are used, my English is so good that I'll manage with them all. Often even without studying/reading. And yes, I am a little arrogant. (Q8)

As assessment methodology did not matter to him, he did not offer his opinions on what methods should be used more, or what would be useful for learning. However, he had an opinion on what *not* to use:

> Cheat-sheet tests and tests with your book and/or notes. They don't assess any other skills than perhaps how to find information and if you can bring your notes, then also how well you can write notes. The main thing is to test your ENGLISH SKILLS, right? I just can't see how they could be useful for anything or anyone. (Q7)

As could be seen, this student did not appear disempowered by assessment in the slightest. Assessment did not seem to matter to him, and, accordingly, he did not want to have or use any power to influence the assessment, either. Although not answering the question on the need and function of assessment at school, the student appeared to perceive the purpose of assessment at school as assessment *of* learning rather than assessment *for* learning.

4.3.3 "It's good to listen to us, too."

The final case depicts an empowered student. He was a third-year student and he had very high means in all sum variables dealing with empowerment (see Figure 2). His English grades, both the final grade of basic education and the previous grade as well as his own suggestion, were all 9. He had already taken the English Matriculation Examination the previous autumn and was relatively satisfied with its result – "Yes, totally fair considering how much I studied for it" (Q5) – but not quite happy with the examination itself: "There's no oral part. Yet it's one of the basic elements of language skills. Anyways, the exam has become "too" difficult over the years, doesn't require real English skills anymore." (Q9)

Oral skills seemed very important for him, and he emphasised the importance of assessing them in general as well: "Discussion, or talking in front of the class

to be precise! Pronunciation and speaking need to be focused on more as they are extremely important things." (Q1)

Furthermore, he criticised the course test as a testing method, basically because of its reliance on memory-retention and recall:

> The course test begins to be a pretty old format. Memorising things by heart is altogether a bit outdated (you can find everything real quick on the net). I'm not saying that remembering everything by heart is a bad thing, on the contrary it is good to remember! but as I said, a bad format. (Q2)

In his opinion, another useless assessment method would be "a course grade based on self-assessment" (Q7).

He scored 2 in the Disempowerment sum variable, so although his score was lower than the average (2.48), it was not low enough to include him in the group of non-disempowered students. What made him different from the non-disempowered student above was his attitude towards power and agency in his English studies. He had clearly taken charge of his chances to influence assessment procedures as well as the knowledge of assessment goals, criteria and methodology. He also felt empowered by this, as can be seen in the sum variables dealing with agency and empowerment (see Figure 2). Hence, he had opinions on assessment methodology and their usefulness, and he welcomed the chance to have a say on assessment: "At the end of the day, it's the teacher who decides. However, everybody's a different learner so it's good to listen to our opinions on assessment." (Q8)

Moreover, he considered assessment useful and it had a clear purpose for him: "To tell us what should be improved, for instance things that I haven't paid any attention to myself. It is really needed!"

Thus, the empowered student considered assessment necessary and he saw the role of assessment as improving and guiding learning, in other words as assessment *for* learning, and not only as stating the level of skills (i.e. assessment *of* learning).

5 Discussion and conclusions

The first research question of this article was to find out, in rather general terms, if the students who found assessment disempowering differed from the whole group in any clear respect. Next, this article aimed to focus on factors that could best predict disempowerment. Finally, the aim was to explore how assessment empowerment and disempowerment manifested themselves on an individual level.

According to the descriptive statistics in the first round of analysis, most students in the disempowered student group were female. Compared to the non-disempowered student group as well as to all respondents, the average of their English grades was also slightly lower. Also, the means of the sum variables indicated several other factors where these student groups differed from one another. Yet, the different means of the sum variables did not adequately explain what might best predict disempowerment. Therefore, a stepwise regression analysis was run and it produced a model with eight predictors. The five most significant predictors of disempowerment, accounting together for over 50% of the variance, were *Stressful and discouraging assessment*, *No pressurised or high-stakes tests*, *Grades over feedback*, *Good and versatile*

assessment, which related negatively with disempowerment, and *Inadequate feedback*. However, even though the descriptive statistics showed differences between the previous grades, gender and year of the disempowered and non-disempowered student groups, none of these background variables predicted disempowerment in the stepwise regression analysis. Finally, three student cases were presented to illuminate how individual students experienced assessment disempowerment, non-disempowerment and empowerment.

All the analyses of this study resulted in the same conclusions on disempowerment. First of all, assessment seemed to cause the disempowered students a great deal of anxiety and stress. The disempowered students feared high-stakes testing, such as the Matriculation Examination, but even course exams had too much weight or pressure for their comfort. Thus, test anxiety (see e.g. Cassady, 2010; Hembree, 1988; Knekta, 2017) had a clear connection with assessment disempowerment. In line with earlier studies (e.g. Hembree, 1988; Knekta, 2017), test anxiety and stress was more prominent with female students. Students also felt that their personalities could play too strong a role in the grading process. All in all, the current assessment methodology was not considered either good or diverse enough, and the students felt that they were not given a fair chance to show all their English skills or knowledge. That could, in turn, contribute to the loss of self-efficacy and motivation in their English studies (e.g. Harlen, 2012). Therefore, the disempowered students would have liked more power to influence the assessment methodology as they hoped for more formative and less pressurised assessment methodology.

Secondly, feedback and how it was experienced played a significant role. Feedback had not met students' expectations and needs: either they had not had enough feedback, or it had not been helpful. In some cases, the dissatisfaction had resulted in students ignoring teacher comments and concentrating on grades only. Focusing on grades which had not always met their expectations may have, in turn, decreased students' intrinsic motivation as well as self-efficacy and self-confidence (Butler, 1988; Kohn, 2011; Pulfrey et al., 2013).

Thirdly, the disempowered students did not seem to feel *ownership* of their English studies: they seemed to study English more for the sake of the grades, or the Matriculation Examination, rather than for their own goals. Yet, they did not seem to have a strong success-orientation, either. In general, they exhibited lower scores in all goal-orientation sum variables on average than other students.

However, the disempowered students also acknowledged the given empowerment. They had been informed of the goals as well as the assessment processes and criteria at the beginning of the courses and they had had a fair chance to discuss and to influence them if willing to do so. Yet, even though they wanted to have more power to influence assessment, they had probably not experienced or assumed that power even when possible. One possible reason for this might be that, in their own opinion, their self-assessment skills were lacking as they did not know their strengths and weaknesses in English. Thus, they did not engage in self-feedback as much as some other students. Some seemed to have very low self-confidence as learners of English. However, although the disempowered student group had the lowest previous grade in comparison with all respondents or the non-disempowered student group in the descriptive statistics, the grade as a background variable did not predict disempowerment in the stepwise regression analysis.

Compared to the disempowered students, the non-disempowered students scored slightly higher in the goal-orientation and the empowerment sum

variables. Nonetheless, the clearest differences between the non-disempowered and the disempowered students were in the personal experiences of assessment anxiety and stress as well as feedback. In other words, the non-disempowered students seemed happier with assessment and they got more benefit from assessment and feedback. Their self-assessment skills seemed better and they knew their strengths and weaknesses in English.

The non-disempowered students were conceptually an interesting group. In terms of the theory of empowerment (Zimmerman, 1995, 2000), they manifested a clear intrapersonal component of psychological empowerment as they trusted their skills and themselves. However, some of the non-disempowered students did not exhibit the behavioural component of active involvement. They were happy to be passive objects of assessment and did not wish to have any active agency in assessment. Yet, their self-efficacy seemed strong. They also manifested an interactional component of psychological empowerment as they appeared to "act as they believe appropriate to achieve goals they set for themselves" (Zimmerman, 1995, p. 589). Hence, if empowerment is considered to entail the right to choose whether to use their power or not (Leach et al., 2001; Rodwell, 1996), then they, too, were empowered.

As often maintained in empowerment literature, empowerment is not the same for everyone (e.g. Leach et al., 2000, 2001; Zimmerman, 1995, 2000), nor is everyone equally willing or ready to assume the given power and resources. On the basis of this study, I cannot but agree with Leach et al. (2001, p. 298): "Similarly in assessment, learners will vary in their desire and confidence to make judgements about their own work." In the case of the non-disempowered students, they did not all necessarily have a *desire* to take charge of their power, while in the case of the disempowered students, they probably did not have the tools and, moreover, *confidence* to take charge of their given power. The empowered students, however, had desire, tools and confidence to participate actively in the assessment process.

Practically speaking, if the objective of education is to educate learners who will all have high levels of self-regulation and autonomy, then perhaps all the non-disempowered students should somehow be motivated to assume a more active decision-making role. However, in my opinion, the truly disempowered students need attention first. Decreasing their anxiety and enhancing their confidence, ownership and feelings of self-efficacy in learning and studying would be vital. Being such a prominent phenomenon at school, assessment inevitably plays a crucial role in the empowerment process. For example, introducing less pressurised testing situations such as cheat-sheet tests or home exams occasionally, or as an alternative method, might ease some of their anxiety. Smaller tests as well as more formatively-oriented assessment might also help to decrease their stress. Formative assessment could gradually build their confidence and self-efficacy as they could see that they do learn all the time. It would also give them a chance to 'fill the gap' between the desired outcome and their performance during the learning process (Sadler, 1989), instead of just stating the shortcomings afterwards (Black & Wiliam, 1998). It would be important to foster their ownership of their English skills, to make them see that even if they do not get full marks in tests, their English skills are useful and worthwhile.

The disempowered students would most likely benefit from more personalised feedback. Furthermore, feedback should feed forward, help them to improve their future performance instead of just scrutinising their present or past performance (Hattie, 2009). Giving feedback without grades might help

them to focus on their skills and not only on (possibly disappointing) grades (Butler, 1988; Kohn, 2011).

In addition, students should be both invited and trained to engage in self-assessment. Small, clearly defined self-assessment tasks, against clear, tangible goals and criteria might foster their trust both in their self-assessment skills and in their English skills. Making concrete choices, such as choosing how many vocabulary tests to take, might safely train them in using their decision-making power but also make them aware that they do have some power.

This study was limited to one school only, and thus the findings cannot be generalised as such. Furthermore, since the academic achievement of the student population in this school is above the national average, this study did not have many respondents who struggled with their upper secondary studies. With larger and more varied student groups, students' (dis)empowerment experiences might look different, as they might also in other contexts and cultures. Moreover, other data collection instruments, for instance a different questionnaire, might have altered the findings. Although the students seemed to have answered the questionnaire quite attentively, it was extensive and would have benefitted from further pruning. As all the data was collected simultaneously, this study cannot exhibit potential changes in empowerment over time or in different situations, either. Hence, alternative methods, such as student interviews or narratives, might have yielded additional information.

There is plenty of room for further research regarding students' views on assessment both in foreign language education and in education in general. Also, students' experiences of what disempowers or empowers them in assessment should be examined further, and with more varied student samples and methods. A longitudinal study could indicate how and whether students' assessment experiences change over time. The questionnaire of the present study could also be retested and refined further. Nevertheless, this study allows some insight into students' own experiences of assessment and the factors that may empower or disempower them in assessment. Moreover, it shows tangibly that behind all the means and averages, individual students react to assessment in highly individual ways. It is thus a new opening in important but under-researched areas of both FL and upper secondary school assessment. I hope this study shows that assessment should be versatile and it should take students' perceptions and ideas into consideration during the whole assessment process in order to also cater for those students who currently may feel disempowered by assessment. After all, "assessment of any kind should ultimately improve learning" – of all students (Gardner, 2012, p. 106).

Endnotes

[1] The principal component analysis does not explicitly assume normal distribution (Chatfield & Collins, 1980, p. 58). However, as the components were used in a further statistical analysis, it is worth mentioning that most variables used in the PCA were slightly skewed to the right.
[2] Although this sum variable had a rather low internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha .50), it was kept in the analysis because its content was considered relevant for the analysis. This was the case with the sum variables of *Grade over feedback* and *English for life*. With those two, the reason for a rather low internal consistency was a small number of items in the sum variable; with *No pressurised or high-stakes* tests it was the low inter-item correlation. Nonetheless, with no explicitly determined cut-off value for Cronbach's alpha, some researchers have suggested values of .70, .60 or even .50 (see Jokivuori & Hietala, 2007, p. 104). In this study, I have chosen the value of .60. However, the most crucial reason for including or excluding some sum variable has been the relevance of its content.

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Appendices

Appendix 1

The 28 sum variables based on a varimax-rotated principal component analysis of each topic area of the questionnaire (each topic area is mentioned at the beginning of the name of the sum variable) as well as two additional variables (in italics)

GOAL: empowerment as goal
Goal: self-expression as goal
Goal: success-oriented goals
Goal: education and knowledge as goal

EMPOWERMENT: experienced empowerment
Empowerment: given empowerment
Empowerment: self-grade empowerment
Empowerment: test empowerment

ASSESSMENT: badly assessed
Assessment: good and versatile assessment
Assessment: course test too weighted
Assessment: stressful and discouraging assessment
Assessment: personality affects assessment

USEFUL METHODS: oral
Useful: diagnostic and formative
Useful: no high-stakes tests at all
Useful: self-assessment
Useful: versatile and soft

VIEW: disempowerment
View: want more power
View: don't care
View: no to self-assessment
View: Assessment anxiety: "Assessment causes me anxiety and stress"

MATRICULATION EXAM: fear
Matriculation exam: English for life, not for exam

FEEDBACK: guiding feedback
Feedback: inadequate feedback
Feedback: self-feedback
Feedback: grade over feedback
Feedback: "I don't know my strengths or weaknesses in English"

Appendix 2: Model Summary

Model	R	R^2	Adj R^2	R^2 Change	F Change	df 1	df 2	Sig. F Change
1	.586	.343	.339	.343	72.2	1	138	<.001
2	.650	.422	.414	.079	18.7	1	137	<.001
3	.697	.486	.475	.064	17.0	1	136	<.001
4	.725	.526	.512	.039	11.2	1	135	.001
5	.739	.546	.530	.021	6.1	1	134	.014
6	.751	.564	.544	.017	5.3	1	133	.022
7	.760	.578	.555	.014	4.3	1	132	.040
8	.770	.593	.568	.015	4.9	1	131	.028

Predictors:

M1: Stressful and discouraging assessment
M2: Stressful and discouraging assessment, No pressurised or high-stakes tests
M3: Stressful and discouraging assessment, No pressurised or high-stakes tests, Grade over feedback
M4: Stressful and discouraging assessment, No pressurised or high-stakes tests, Grade over feedback, Good and versatile assessment
M5: Stressful and discouraging assessment, No pressurised or high-stakes tests, Grade over feedback, Good and versatile assessment, Inadequate feedback
M6: Stressful and discouraging assessment, No pressurised or high-stakes tests, Grade over feedback, Good and versatile assessment, Inadequate feedback, Success-oriented goals
M7: Stressful and discouraging assessment, No pressurised or high-stakes tests, Grade over feedback, Good and versatile assessment, Inadequate feedback, Success-oriented goals, English for life, not for the Matriculation exam
M8: Stressful and discouraging assessment, No pressurised or high-stakes tests, Grade over feedback, Good and versatile assessment, Inadequate feedback, Success-oriented goals, English for life, not for the Matriculation exam, Personality affects assessment

Appendix 3: The beta weights and standardised betas in the last model

	Unstandardised Coefficients		**Standardised Coefficients**		
	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
(Constant)	1.587	.684		2.320	.022
Stressful and discouraging assessment	.291	.080	.266	3.650	.000
No pressurised or high-stakes tests	.355	.074	.289	4.826	.000
Grade over feedback	.209	.052	.247	3.992	.000
Good and versatile assessment	-.197	.097	-.147	-2.038	.044
Inadequate feedback	.167	.066	.157	2.506	.013
Success-oriented goals	-.244	.079	-.184	-3.104	.002
English for life, not for the Matriculation exam	-.130	.058	-.135	-2.241	.027
Personality affects assessment	.126	.056	.150	2.223	.028

Appendix 4: The eight predictors of disempowerment

The sum variables, their items and their loadings

Stressful and discouraging assessment (Cronbach's alpha .68):

- Assessment (tests, essays, etc.) has caused me too much stress.	.654
- Participation in class has affected the grade too much.	.566
- Assessment has discouraged or diminished my willingness to study.	.561

No pressurised or high-stakes tests (Cronbach's alpha .50):

- Matriculation Exam	-.666
- The grade is mainly based on the course exam/test	-.646
- No course test at all	.518
- Book/notes allowed in the test	.486

Grade over feedback (Cronbach's alpha .55):

• The test mark or score interests me more than the teacher's comments or corrections.	.770
• I always check my mistakes and corrections carefully when I get my tests or essays back.	-.600

Good and versatile assessment (Cronbach's alpha .75):

- There have been assessments steadily and evenly throughout the course.	.673
- Assessment methods have been versatile	.653
- All parts of language proficiency have been taken into account in assessment.	.588
- I know why I have received the grade I have received.	.550
- Assessment has given me a good overall picture of my skills.	.534

Inadequate feedback (Cronbach's alpha .72):

- I would like to have more teacher feedback on my skills.	.894
- I would like to have more teacher feedback on how to develop my studying.	.825
- I get enough feedback from other students.	-.590
- My teacher writes enough feedback at the end of the essay, for instance.	-.539

Success-oriented goals (Cronbach's alpha .66):

- Good results in the Matriculation Exam.	.856
- To gain access to study for the career I want after upper secondary school.	.701
- Good final upper secondary school diploma.	.695

English for life, not for the Matriculation Exam (Cronbach's alpha .55):

- I study English for life and for my future, not for the Matriculation Exam	-.857
- For me, the most important goal of my English studies is a good grade in the Matriculation Exam.	.760

Personality affects assessment (Cronbach's alpha .61):

- The student's personality has affected the grade.	.745
- Assessment has favoured some students or student types.	.708

Appendix 5

The correlation matrix of the eight predictor sum variables and disempowerment

	Disempowerment	**stress**	**No pressurised test**	**Grade over feedback**	**Good & versatile assessment**	**Inadeq. feedback**	**success**	**Engl.for life**	**Personal. affects assessment**
Disempowerment									
Stress	.586**								
No pressurised test	.349**	.109							
Grade over feedback	.337**	.248**	-.149						
Good & versatile assessment	-.521**	-.574**	-.123	-.211*					
Inadeq. feedback	.355**	.273**	.252**	-.113*	-.323**				
Success	-.166*	-.055	-.075	.069	.166*	.040			
Engl for life	-.175*	-.174*	.186*	-.243**	.026	-.038	-.180*		
Personality affects assessment	.447**	.467**	.131	.225**	-.394**	.236**	.121	-.075	

Appendix 6

Open-ended questions (originally in Finnish in the questionnaire)

Q1: What kinds of assessment methods would you like to have used more than what are used at the moment?

Q2: What kinds of assessment methods would you like to have used less than what are used at the moment?

Q3: If you have received a lower grade than you think you would have deserved, what do you think was the reason for that?

Q4: If you have received a higher grade than you think you would have deserved, what do you think was the reason for that?

Q5: If you have already taken the Matriculation exam in English, did you get the grade you deserved in your opinion? Why/why not?

Q6: If you consider some assessment method(s) really useful for learning, why do you think so?

Q7: If you consider some assessment method(s) totally useless for learning, why (do you think so)?

Q8: Do you want more power to influence assessment? Why? How? Why not?

Q9: What do you think of the Matriculation Examination in Advanced English? What kinds of thoughts/emotions does the examination evoke?

Q10: If you haven't received enough feedback, how and what kind of feedback would you like to get?

Q11: In your opinion, what is the most important function of assessment? In other words, why is assessment needed at schools? Or is it needed?

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