

Adult EFL learners:
Views of exercises in coursebook

Candidate's thesis
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<p>Oppikirjoilla on keskeinen rooli vieraiden kielten opetuksessa ja oppimisessa. Aiemmin englannin oppikirjoja ovat arvioineet lähinnä tutkijat. Joissakin tutkimuksissa on myös tuotu esille opettajien ja oppilaiden mielipiteitä englannin oppikirjoista. Harvat tutkimukset ovat kuitenkaan keskittyneet oppikirjojen arviointiin aikuisopiskelijoiden näkökulmasta tai pelkästään arvioimaan oppikirjojen tehtäviä. Tämän kandidaatintutkielman tarkoituksena oli selvittää englannin aikuisopiskelijoiden mielipiteitä heidän oppikirjansa <i>English for you, too! 3</i> tehtävistä. Lisäksi tavoitteena oli saada selville millaisista tehtävätyypeistä aikuisopiskelijat pitivät eniten.</p> <p>Kyselytutkimukseen osallistui kolme englannin kansalaisopistoryhmää Keski-Suomesta ja Pirkanmaalta. Tulokset osoittivat, että aikuisopiskelijat ovat tyytyväisiä englannin oppikirjansa tehtävien moniin eri piirteisiin, kuten vaikeusasteeseen ja työskentelytapojen monipuolisuuteen. Lisäksi aikuisopiskelijat olivat varsin tyytyväisiä kielen eri osa-alueita mittaaviin tehtäviin ja he pitivät eniten perinteisistä tehtävätyypeistä. Tuloksia pyrittiin selittämään vastaajien iän ja englannin opiskeluvuosien perusteella.</p> <p>Tutkimustuloksia voidaan hyödyntää englannin oppikirjojen suunnittelussa, sillä tulokset osoittivat, millaisia tehtäviä aikuisopiskelijat haluaisivat tehdä englantia opiskellessansa. Lisäksi tutkimustulokset auttavat opettajia muuntelemaan tehtävien eri piirteitä, vaikka tulokset olivat varsin positiivisia.</p>	
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1 Introduction

The adult population in Finland has become significantly more interested in studying in adulthood by the 21st century according to Statistics Finland (2000). The number of adult learners has nearly doubled since the 1980s. This has also meant a growth in the number of adults studying foreign languages in Finland. Moreover, a study by Statistics Finland (2000) revealed that Finnish adults thought that the need to improve one's language skills would be the second most important occupational reason for beginning to study in adulthood. In addition, it should be noted that the growth in overseas travel has contributed to the increased number of adult people studying foreign languages in Finland.

The idea for the present study arose from my own experiences. Having studied rarer foreign languages in Finland in adult education centres, I wanted to examine an aspect of adult language learning and teaching with which I was not content, namely coursebooks. I found the coursebooks that I used in the courses rather inadequate in many respects. Therefore, I wanted to find out whether this also applies for a common language in Finland, that is, English.

Coursebooks play an important role in foreign language learning and teaching and therefore they should be evaluated. Various evaluations have been conducted on EFL coursebooks. It should be noted that most of these evaluations have been done by researchers. For instance, Tomlinson et al. (2001) evaluated eight adult coursebooks in the UK by using an extensive checklist. Moreover, some evaluations have been carried out from teachers' and/or learners' perspective. For instance, over 100 teachers and supervisors were asked to evaluate a sixth-grade English coursebook in Saudi Arabia in Abdulrahman's (2008) study. Furthermore, previous studies have examined many features of coursebooks at once, such as general appearance, flexibility, language skills, exercises, teaching methods and testing. In the present study I will focus on the evaluation of a specific aspect of an EFL coursebook, namely exercises, from adult learners' perspective in order to examine it in further detail given the limitations of a candidate's thesis. In addition, the exercise preferences of the adult language learners are examined to a lesser extent.

First of all, I will introduce the theoretical framework of the present study. After that I will move on to present the data and the methods of analysis. Then, the results are analyzed.

Finally, in the conclusion section I will summarize the results, present reasons for the results, deal with the limitations of the study and suggest topics for further studies.

2 The significance and the evaluation of coursebooks

2.1 The multifaceted roles of EFL coursebooks

Before discussing the role of coursebooks in EFL classrooms, it is important to define some central terms. EFL is an abbreviation for English language learning. The terms *coursebook* and *textbook* are used interchangeably in EFL material literature. A *coursebook* will be used in the present study when referring to a published language material package in the form of a book because the other term can also be used to refer only to a set of texts as usually in Finland. Thus, the aim is to avoid ambiguity.

Many researchers have acknowledged the importance of coursebooks in EFL classrooms (Dubin and Olshtain 1986:167; Hutchinson and Torres 1994:315; Sheldon 1988:237). For example, Hutchinson and Torres (1994:315) stress that a coursebook can be seen as a nearly universal component in different EFL teaching contexts. Moreover, some teachers are more dependent on coursebooks than others. Coursebooks can serve as a syllabus of an entire course (Garinger 2002; Sheldon 1988:238), additional material or a starting point for activities in lessons (Garinger 2002).

Coursebooks are valued among language learners. They often hold the view that published materials are better than the materials made by a teacher regardless of their quality (Sheldon 1988:238). McGrath (2006:171-179) conducted a metaphorical study where he collected metaphors and similes of coursebooks from secondary school learners and teachers in Hong Kong. The images revealed that coursebooks are significant for many learners and teachers. Learners considered them to be mostly a resource (for example, “a textbook is a window to the world or is like milk”), a support (for example, “a textbook is a helper or like my mother”) or a constraint (for example, “a textbook is a barrier or is a mountain”). Thus, coursebooks had either a negative or a positive effect on learners. Teachers regarded coursebooks mainly as a support (for instance, “a textbook is a blind man’s stick or is petrol”) or a resource (for instance, “a textbook is like oil in cooking or is a tool”). McGrath points out that teachers should ponder their metaphors of coursebooks and what effect they have on how they use

coursebooks. Moreover, a learner's attitude towards an EFL coursebook seems to have an effect on his or her attitude towards learning English, which in turn affects how well he or she learns the language. Hassani and Rahimi (2011:66-72) carried out a study about Iranian high-school students' attitudes towards their EFL coursebooks. The results revealed that there is a correlation between a positive attitude towards an EFL coursebook and a positive attitude towards learning English. The study suggests that coursebooks have an important role in EFL classrooms because they can increase learners' motivation and contribute to the development of positive attitudes.

Researchers in the field have pointed out various advantages of using coursebooks in EFL classrooms. Hutchinson and Torres (1994:317-318) refer to Torres' (1993) study where he asked language learners and teachers why they wanted to use a published coursebook. The study revealed some benefits of using a coursebook. Learners wanted to use them because they thought that they help them to make their learning more organized in the classroom and in their free time. In addition, teachers answered that using coursebooks facilitates their work, for example when giving homework. Moreover, the study revealed that using a coursebook gives teachers security and confidence. Bell and Gower (1998:117) add that a coursebook is a valuable support for inexperienced teachers. O'Neill (1982:109) emphasizes that using a coursebook is practical: For instance, it is easy to use because one can browse the whole material in order to familiarize oneself with it. Most of all, many other researchers hold the view that using a published coursebook saves times compared to making one's own teaching material (Bell and Gower 1998:116; Litz 2005:5; O'Neill 1982:107; Richards 2002:2; Sheldon 1988:238). A coursebook is also rather inexpensive compared to materials made by a teacher (Litz 2005:5). Furthermore, it enables learners to keep track of what has been taught in a course and know beforehand what will be handled in a course (O'Neill 1982:106). In addition, a coursebook generates among other things input to the classroom (Hutchinson and Torres 1994:317).

Some researchers (Hutchinson and Torres 1994; Richards 2002; Sheldon 1988) have examined the other side of the coin. Sheldon (1988:237) argues that ELF coursebooks are often considered to be "poor compromises between what is educationally desirable on the one hand and financially viable on the other". Hutchinson and Torres (1994:315) elaborate on this: A teacher may rely only on a coursebook without revising it because it was produced by professionals, who, in a teacher's opinion, know what should be taught and how, which is

seldom true. Richards (2002:2) has drawn attention to the fact that using a coursebook as the main source of teaching may deskill a teacher since his or her only role may then be a presenter of material. Moreover, Sheldon (1988:239) has expressed his disappointment with the modernity of coursebooks: they resemble each other year after year as learning material designers do not take into account either new research findings or learners' and teachers' opinions.

2.2 Evaluating exercises in EFL coursebooks

Coursebooks have a significant role in foreign language teaching and learning as discussed above. They can have both positive and negative effects on teaching and learning a language. Therefore it is important to carry out evaluations on EFL coursebooks. Tomlinson (2003:15) defines materials evaluation as a process that estimates the value of learning materials.

Researchers have divided types of learning materials evaluations into three categories. Ellis (1997:36-37) presents two kinds of evaluations: a predictive evaluation and a retrospective evaluation. A predictive evaluation is done in order to decide what materials to use in classroom. There are two options how a teacher can evaluate language learning materials predictively: A teacher can read published reviews of EFL coursebooks or evaluate the materials by himself with the help of checklists that are produced by researchers in the field. After using the materials, a retrospective evaluation is carried out to find out whether the materials were suitable. Thus, it gives information about whether to use the materials also in the future and which exercises need modification. Teachers evaluate language learning materials retrospectively, but they usually do it impressionistically. For instance, an exercise is judged by the interest of the learners in it. Thus, empirical evaluations are rarer because it takes more time to carry them out. The way teachers usually carry out retrospective evaluation resembles the third type of evaluation that Tomlinson (2003:24) has suggested: A whilst-use evaluation concerns particular aspects of a set of material while using it in the classroom. It can focus on, for example, the appearance of the material or the motivating effect of the material.

Most of the evaluations on teaching materials have been predictive (Ellis 1997:36). However, Celce-Murcia and Daoud (1979:306) point out that it would be useful to carry out both predictive and retrospective evaluations because it would help to gain more comprehensive evaluations of textbooks. In addition, Sheldon (1988:245) emphasizes that both a whilst-use

evaluation and a retrospective evaluation should be conducted in order to evaluate comprehensively the success of a coursebook. Celce-Murcia and Daoud (1979:306) have expressed a similar view.

Although Sheldon (1988:241) thinks that “no one is really certain what criteria and constraints are actually operative in ELT context worldwide, and textbook criteria are emphatically local”, they can still be used as guidelines according to Peacock (1997:1). Moreover, one needs to take into account that an evaluator's view on language learning and teaching may have an effect on the criteria that he or she chooses for evaluating learning materials. While the literature on evaluating exercises of a coursebook is limited, some generalizations can be drawn from lists that can be used by teachers, learners or educators before or after using a coursebook.

The following criteria have been used either in theoretical or empirical studies. One of the most common criteria for evaluating exercises seems to be their meaningfulness and communicativeness (Celce-Murcia and Daoud 1979:304; Litz 2005:41; Sheldon 1988:244). Many researchers have emphasized the variety of exercises. Firstly, a balance of controlled and free exercises should also be taken into account (Abdulrahman 2008:107; Garinger 2002; Litz 2005: 41). Controlled exercises leave little room for self-expression (Johnson 2008:256). With regard to free exercises, they enable a learner to express himself or herself without the need to practice a certain language structure (Johnson 2008:267). Secondly, Garinger (2002) highlights the importance of the variety of different exercise types as a motivating and challenging factor. Thirdly, Celce-Murcia and Daoud (1979:304) suggest that it is important to provide learners with opportunities to practice different kinds of writing assignments. Fourthly, Litz (2005:41) thinks that the exercises in a coursebook should be a mixture of group, individual and pair work. Peacock (1997:7) suggests that whole-group work should also be taken into account. Moreover, Celce-Murcia and Daoud (1979:304) and Sheldon (1988:244) set a criterion for the ability of exercises to test learners' knowledge and the appropriateness of exercises for revision purposes. Furthermore, Abdulrahman (2008:107) has emphasized to the sufficiency of exercises. Peacock (1997:7) has drawn attention to the level of difficulty of the exercises: They should not be too either too easy or too challenging for learners. Furthermore, he suggests in his extensive checklist for coursebook evaluation that activities can be adapted to different teaching and learning styles. Regarding language skills in a coursebook, he points out that the balance between the development of the four language

skills (speaking, writing, reading and listening) should be suitable to different learners and learning settings. Garinger (2002) sets a criterion for the ability of the exercises to contribute to the learners' development in language skills. Finally, Sheldon (1988:244) highlights the age-appropriacy of the whole language learning material. However, this criterion can also be adapted to evaluating exercises of an EFL coursebook.

2.3 The characteristics of adult language learners

Adult language learners form as heterogeneous a group as any other language learner group. However, research on learning languages in adulthood has suggested the following characteristics that distinguish adult language learners from younger ones: Adult language learners have various reasons for studying foreign languages. The reason can be, for example, the need to use a language at work or on holiday, a desire to measure one's skills or an interest in a language itself (Smith 1984: 4). With regard to the success in learning a foreign language, Salville-Troike (2009: 82) points out that some studies have suggested that adult learners have the advantage over children at the beginning as the rate of learning is greater, but learners who begin learning a foreign language in childhood achieve better language skills. However, there is no general agreement about these findings among researchers in the field. In addition, Knowles (1989: 59) suggests that adults have a life-centered orientation to learning, which means that they put time and effort into learning if they think that it helps them to cope with different situations in real life. Furthermore, they come with their life experience and vast knowledge to the class and they can be valuable resources for a teacher (Smith 1984: 7). Therefore, Knowles (1989: 57) feels that experiential learning activities, such as group discussions and problem-solving tasks, should be used with adults. Many adult language learners have developed suitable learning strategies for themselves (Horrocks and Rogers 2010: 79; Smith 1984: 8), which enable them to learn new things faster (Smith 1984: 8).

However, if adult learners have become accustomed to using specific learning strategies, it can have a negative effect on teaching: it can be difficult for a teacher to deal with various learning strategies in his or her group (Smith 1984: 8). There are also other disadvantages related to the characteristics of adult learners. A teacher should take into account learners' experiences as they define adult learners' identity and that is why they may think that devaluating their experiences means devaluating them (Knowles 1989:58). Adult learners are

extremely concerned about their self-image and therefore taking part in speaking activities may be difficult for them if they do not believe in their own skills (Smith 1984: 7). They also have different expectations for teaching. For example, they are used to some teaching methods and that is why they may not want to try new ones (Horrocks and Rogers 2010: 79; Smith 1984: 6). Furthermore, the critical period hypothesis suggests that children have the advantage over adults in learning languages. The theory claims that children have a limited time during which acquiring L1 fully is possible (Salville-Troike 2009: 82). This theory may also be relevant in second language learning (Lenneberg 1967:176).

3 The present study

3.1 The research questions

The aim of the study was to evaluate the exercises of an EFL coursebook from learners' point of view. Researchers have made various evaluations on EFL coursebooks and some of them have been done from teachers' and/or learners' perspective. However, none of these studies focuses solely on all kinds of exercises of an EFL coursebook. The exercises of an EFL coursebook were chosen as the object of the study since they are a crucial part of every foreign language coursebook. Moreover, the topic was examined from learners' perspective because their opinions should be taken into account when choosing learning materials. More precisely, adult language learners were selected as the target group as literature on language learning materials for adults is rather limited. There are two research questions in the study. The main research question relates to Finnish adult intermediate learners' views' about the exercises of their own EFL coursebook:

1. How do Finnish adult intermediate learners view the exercises of their EFL coursebook?

Another research problem, which I will examine to a smaller extent, concerns Finnish adult intermediate learners' opinions about ideal EFL exercises:

2. What kinds of EFL exercises do Finnish adult intermediate learners like the most?

3.2 Data collection

In order to gather the data for the study, I approached three different adult education centres. Two of them were situated in Central Finland and one school in Pirkanmaa. The majority of the participants (N=39) of the study were 50-69 years olds and female. The adult English language learners used the same course book, *English for you, too! 3* (Haukkapää et al. 2003). The learners had been studying English 5.5 years on average.

A questionnaire (see Appendix) was chosen as a data-collecting method because it seemed to be suitable on the grounds of earlier studies in the field. In addition, the aim of the study was to get an overview of the issue for which using a questionnaire is appropriate (Alanen 2011:148). Moreover, I wanted to gain some qualitative data, which can be collected by using a questionnaire which includes both closed and open-ended questions (Alanen 2011:148). Thus, the data was gathered by using both quantitative and qualitative methods. An interview could have been a suitable data-collecting method for the study if the only purpose had been gathering in-depth data.

I conducted a pilot study on three people in order to see whether there was something to improve in the questionnaire. As a result, I modified the instructions of the questionnaire to make them more understandable. The questionnaire was given to the participants at the end of March and at the beginning of April. The questionnaire contained three pages and consisted of four parts. At very first, I asked about the background of the participants. The participants were asked about their age, gender, the number of years learning English, and reasons for studying English. The second part comprised ten closed questions which gauged adult intermediate learners' views on the exercises of their coursebook generally. These questions were in Likert-scale form so that answering them would be easy for the learners. This part dealt with the variety, the level of difficulty and the age-appropriacy of exercises, among other things. Some of the questions were adapted from checklists made by researchers (Garinger 2002, Litz 2005, Peacock 1997, Sheldon 1988). The third part consisted of five questions where the participants had to choose between the alternatives *yes* and *no* and give reasons for their choice. The questions concerned learners' views about speaking, writing, listening and reading exercises of their course book and the sufficiency of those kinds of exercises. The last question of this part (question 15) will not be discussed due to the scope of the study. The fourth part included one question that sought to find answers to the second research question about what kinds of EFL exercises Finnish adult intermediate learners like

the most. The question contained a list of exercise types and the participants were asked to tick five exercise types that they preferred.

3.3 Methods of analysis

The data of the study were examined qualitatively. However, the results of sections 4.1, 4.2 and 4.3 were analyzed slightly differently. The means of analyzing the results in the different sections are presented below:

- Section 4.1: Firstly, the data of the questions were calculated in percentages. Then, graphs were made for each question in order to draw conclusion more easily from the results. This section of the study includes graphs about questions that generated the most interesting results.
- Section 4.2: Percentages were again calculated for each question. Moreover, a descriptive analysis was used for examining the reasons given by the participants.
- Section 4.3: The results of the most preferred exercises types were examined descriptively.

The background information of the participants, which was collected in part I of the questionnaire, was used for finding reasons for the results of the present study. Thus, the results were examined in relation to two background features, namely the learners' age and the number of years learning English.

4 Adult language learners' views on the exercises of their EFL coursebook

4.1 The features of the exercises

As discussed above (see 2.2), there are various criteria that could be taken into account when evaluating exercises of a language coursebook generally. In part II of the questionnaire (see Appendix) the participants were asked to answer a set of closed questions about the exercises of their EFL coursebook. Likert-scale, which consists of five response alternatives, was used. The participants could choose one of the following alternatives:

- 1=to strongly disagree
- 2=to slightly disagree
- 3=no opinion
- 4=to slightly agree
- 5=to strongly agree

This first part of the results analysis deals with the first research question: How do Finnish adult intermediate learners view the exercises of their EFL coursebook? Against expectations, the adult language learners were content with the exercises of their ELF coursebook from this point of view. These positive results can partly be explained by their background. It should be noted that the number of respondents is indicated either in parenthesis after each percentage or in parenthesis with each percentage after a semicolon. Moreover, the total number of respondents in each question is only given if it deviates from the total number of participants in the study (n=39).

4.1.1 The difficulty level and the age-appropriacy of the exercises

Questions 2 and 3 concerned the suitability of the exercises to adult learners in two respects. The participants were asked about the difficulty level of the exercises in question 2: 38.5 % (15) of the respondents felt strongly that the exercises were appropriate in terms of their level of difficulty, and the majority of the adult learners (51.3 %; 20) agreed with the statement to some extent. Only 2.6 % (1) of the respondents reported to completely disagree. Thus, a clear majority of the adult learners thought that the exercises were not either too easy or too difficult.

It goes without saying that certain exercises are more appropriate for adults than for younger language learners (see 2.2). Therefore, in question 3 the participants were asked to answer the question about the suitability of the exercises for adults. A total of 43.6 % (17) of the respondents strongly agreed that the exercises of their coursebook are pitched at the suitable maturity level. Moreover, the same percentage of the respondents felt that the exercises were rather well targeted to adult learners. Only 2.6 % (1) strongly disagreed with the statement. Thus, the emphasis was again agreeing with the statement.

4.1.2 The number and diversity of the exercise types

The questionnaire included four questions about the number and the diversity of different exercise types. Question 1 approached this theme from a general point of view with the statement that the exercise types are varied enough in my English coursebook. The diversity of the exercise types can be understood to include different criteria, such as working methods, as discussed above (see 2.2). Some of these criteria are dealt with separately in the following questions. However, the aim of question 1 was to get an overview of the diversity of the exercise types in the EFL coursebook. The collected data indicated that the exercise types are varied enough in the coursebook: approximately one-third of the respondents (32.4 %; 12/37) agreed strongly, while over half of them (59.5 %; 22/37) slightly agreed with the statement. Only a small number of the adult learners (8.1 %; 3/37) felt strongly against the statement and no one disagreed strongly.

Questions 6, 7, and 8 (Figure 1) provided a more detailed look at the theme. In these questions the participants were asked whether their coursebook includes a sufficient number of exercises that require the use of different working methods, namely pair, individual or cooperative group work. A major difference between cooperative group work and traditional group work is that each member of a group is responsible for each other's and one's own learning in the former one. Thus, there is a positive interdependence between group members.

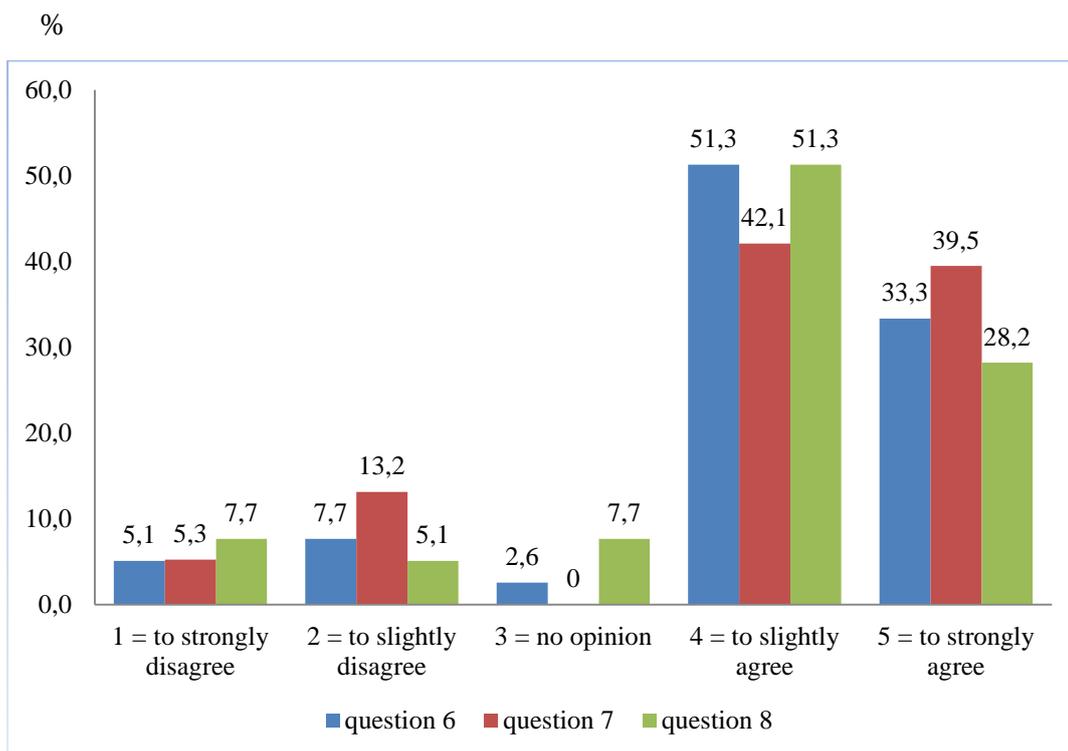


Figure 1. The different working methods in the exercises

As can be seen in the Figure 1, question 7, which concerned pair work exercises, received the highest ratio of answers *to strongly agree* (39.5 %; 15/38). Almost equally, 42.1 % (16/38) of the respondents were quite content with the number of pair work exercises. However, a rather noticeable number of respondents (18.5%; 7/38) disagreed slightly or strongly with the statement. With regard to individual exercises (question 6), 33.3 % (13) agreed strongly that there is a suitable number of individual exercises in the coursebook. Furthermore, over half of the adult learners (51.3 %; 20) slightly agreed with the statement. A small number of the adults (5.1 %; 2) disagreed strongly. When the participants were asked about the number of cooperative group work exercises in their coursebook in the question 8, 28.2 % (11) were fully content with the number, while 51.3 % (20) were rather satisfied. Only 7.7 (3) of the respondents disagreed strongly.

To summarize, the adult learners were content with the amount of pair work, individual and cooperative exercises in their coursebook. The three questions received quite equal ratios with regard to alternatives *to strongly agree* and *to slightly agree*. That is, approximately one-third of the respondents were fully content and half of them were rather content with the number of individual and cooperative group work exercises. Moreover, about two-fifths of the adult learners strongly agreed and slightly agreed with the statement when asked about the number of pair work exercises. An interesting as well as surprising discovery was that the respondents

seemed to be the most satisfied with the number of cooperative exercises although many language coursebooks tend to focus on providing learners with pair work and individual exercises in Finland. However, this finding can be explained by the adult learners' preference for individual and pair work. Thus, they may be content with even a small number of cooperative exercises in their coursebook.

4.1.3 The exercises as sources of creativity

Questions 4 and 5 (Figure 2) were designed in order to find out whether the exercises of the coursebook promote creativity among the adult learners.

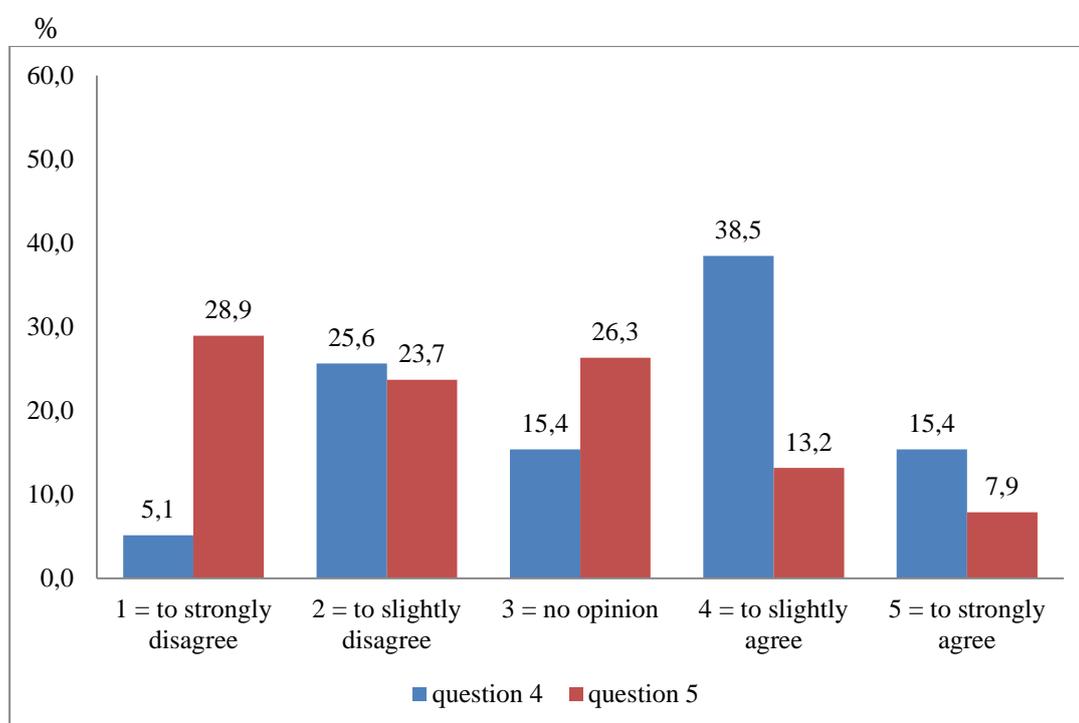


Figure 2. The exercises as sources of creativity

As the Figure 2 shows, in question 4 only 15.4 % (6) of the respondents strongly agreed that the exercises stimulate them to be creative. However, 38.5 % (15) slightly agreed with the statement. Moreover, a noticeable number of respondents (25.6 %; 10) slightly disagreed, and 15.4 % (6) of the participants did not have any opinion on this matter. Thus, the majority of the respondents were content with this feature of the exercises at least to some extent. In question 5 the adult learners had to take a stance on the following statement: *The exercises of my English coursebook hinder me from expressing myself in English*. The question was formulated so that it would act as a counterpoint for question 4. Therefore, this question generated somewhat similar percentages in reverse as question 4: 28.9 % (11/38) of the

respondents did not feel that the exercises leave room for self-expression. Moreover, 23.7 % (9/38) slightly disagreed with the statement. However, a smaller number of respondents agreed slightly or strongly (21.1 %; 8/38) with the statement in question 5 as those who disagreed slightly or strongly (30.7 %; 12) with statement in question 4. Therefore, a remarkable number of the respondents (26.3 %; 10/38) were undecided in question 5.

To conclude, the adult learners were not as content with the exercises in this respect as with other features of the exercises. That is, only slightly over half of the respondents agreed to some extent that the exercises enable them to be creative, and approximately one-third of them disagreed slightly or strongly.

4.1.4 The exercises as sources of interest

In the last two closed-ended questions (Figure 3) the adult learners were asked to evaluate whether the exercises of their coursebook create interest towards learning English (question 9) and promote classroom participation (question 10).

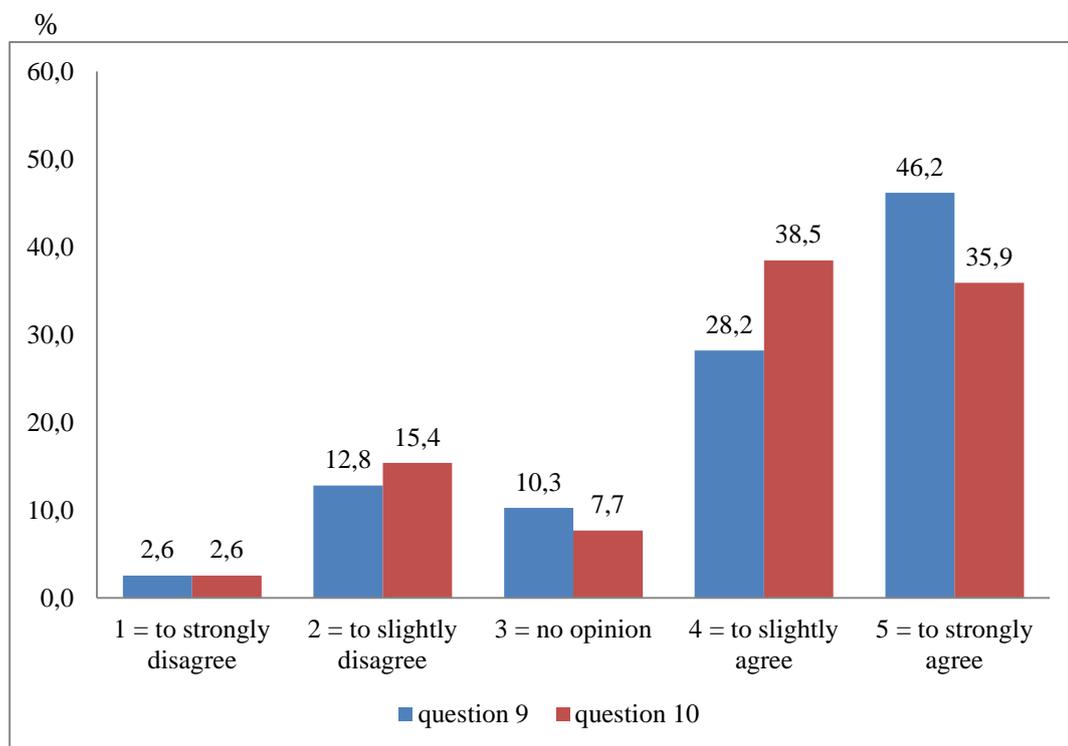


Figure 3. The exercises as sources of interest

A large percentage of the respondents (46.2 %; 18) agreed strongly that the exercises create interest towards learning the English language. Moreover, 28.2 % (11) slightly agreed with the statement. Thus, the adult learners were satisfied with the exercises in this respect.

Question 10 gave similar results as can be seen from the Figure 3. A total of 35.9 % (14) of the adult learners agreed completely that the exercises make them want to participate in the English lessons. Almost equally, 38.5 % (15) slightly agreed with the statement. Less than 16 % (12.8 %; 5 in question 9 and 15.4 %; 6 in question 10) slightly disagreed with the two statements.

The results indicated that the adult learners thought that the exercises of the EFL coursebook create interest towards learning the language and stimulate them to participate in class quite well. Nearly four-fifths of the respondents chose either the alternative *to slightly agree* or *to strongly agree* in both statements. Only approximately one-sixth of the adult learners did not agree with the statements and therefore they felt that the exercises are not very good sources of interest.

4.2 The exercises on the four language skills

The third part of the questionnaire, which provided more in-depth answers, approached the main research question from a different perspective. The purpose of the questions was to find out whether the adult learners like the exercises on the four language skills, namely speaking, writing, listening and reading, in their EFL coursebook. In the questionnaire the participants were asked to choose between the alternatives *yes* or *no* and give reasons for their choice. The learners' opinions about the exercises on both receptive (listening and reading) and productive (speaking and writing) skills are summarized at the end of this part. It should be noted that the number of respondents is indicated either in parenthesis after each percentage or in parenthesis with each percentage after a semicolon. All the participants of the study (n=39) answered each question in this part.

4.2.1 The speaking exercises

In question 11 the respondents were asked to evaluate the speaking exercises, including pronunciation exercises, in their coursebook. The adult learners were of the same mind: 92.3 % (36) liked the exercises and therefore only 7.7 % (3) were not content with the speaking exercises of their coursebook: 25 out of 36 adult learners gave reasons for choosing the alternative *yes*. Two major reasons arose from the data. The most common reason was the importance of speaking skills, especially the ability to pronounce English correctly. The following extracts (1 and 2) exemplify the main reason:

- (1) Se [puhuminen] on välttämätöntä osaamisen kannalta.
(It [speaking] is an essential part of being able to use a language.)
- (2) Ääntäminen on yksi tärkeimmistä osa-alueista. Ilman oikeaa ääntämistä en tule ymmärretyksi.
(Pronunciation is one of the most important language skills. I cannot make myself understood without correct pronunciation.)

The second most common reason was interesting as the adult learners reported that they like the exercises because they want to learn to speak English or improve their English speaking skills. The answers of two respondents (3 and 4 below) sum up rather well the adult learners' thoughts:

- (3) Haluan oppia nimenomaan puhumaan [englantia].
(I particularly want to learn to speak [English].)
- (4) Itselläni on heikoin osa-alue suullisen kielen ilmaisu.
(Speaking is my weakest skill.)

Various other reasons were given by the respondents. Some reported that the exercises encourage them to speak English. Furthermore, the exercises were said to be clear. In addition, the adult learners thought that the exercises are suitable for revising and learning something new about the English language. Only one of the three respondents who chose the alternative *no* provided an explanation for his answer (5). He thought that the exercises lack the translation and pronunciation models of new words:

- (5) paljon sellaisia sanoja [tehtävissä] ettei ole suomennosta eikä ääntämisohjetta
(a lot of words without translation and pronunciation instructions [in the exercises])

Based on the data it seems that the adult learners were content with the speaking exercises of their EFL coursebook. What was specifically interesting in the answers was the fact that eleven adult learners reported to like the exercises since they wanted to improve their speaking skills or they thought that speaking is an important language skill to master.

4.2.2 The writing exercises

In question 12, 84.8 % (34) of the respondents chose the alternative *yes* when asked whether they like the writing exercises in their coursebook. Thus, 13.2 % (5) reported that they are not satisfied with the writing exercises in their coursebook. One participant did not answer this question. The reasons for choosing the alternative *yes* were provided by 19 out of 34

respondents. The most common reason concerned the orthography of English. Here are some answers (6-7) that were given by the adult learners:

- (6) Hahmottaa paremmin kirjoitetun ja lausutun eron.
(It helps to learn to notice the differences between written and spoken language.)
- (7) On hyvä osata myös kirjoittaa sanat oikein.
(It is important to be able to write words correctly.)

What became very evident in this question was that the adult learners had differing opinions why the writing exercises are good. The following extracts (8-11) illustrate the varying reasons:

- (8) aiheet ovat tarpeeksi monipuolisia
(the topics are varied enough)
- (9) Mielestäni [oppikirjassa] on riittävästi harjoitustehtäviä ja eivät ole liian vaikeita.
(In my opinion, there are enough writing exercises [in the coursebook] and there are not too difficult.)
- (10) Myös kirjallinen ilmaisu pitää olla hallinnassa kun kommunikoi esimerkiksi sähköpostissa.
(One has to be able to write in English when one for example writes an email.)
- (11) opittua kertaavia/oppimista edistäviä
(suitable for revising or learning new things)

The reasons were related to the diversity of topics, the difficulty level, the sufficient number of the exercises and the suitability of the exercises for revising purposes and learning new things. Moreover, a couple of respondents answered that it is important to be able to write in English. The reason why question 12 generated such diverse answers may be due to the fact that writing is perhaps still the most common method used in learning English in many English lessons. The learners had a great deal to say about the writing exercises since they are so experienced with them.

Each participant who chose the alternative *no* explained their choice. One respondent justified her answer by stating that one does not need writing skills when traveling. The three other adult learners answered that there are not enough writing exercises in their coursebook. Moreover, they thought that the exercise types are not varied enough. One respondent sums up the main reason behind discontent with the writing exercises:

- (12) Pienten aineiden kirjoitusta ei ole ja tehtäviä saisi olla enemmän [oppikirjassa].
(There are not any short written assignments and there should be more writing exercises [in the coursebook].)

4.2.3 The listening comprehension exercises

In question 13 the respondents evaluated the listening comprehension exercises in their coursebook. A clear majority of the respondents (79.5 %; 31) liked the listening comprehension exercises. The reasons related mostly to the diversity of speakers with different accents, the challenging feature of the listening comprehension exercises and the desire to learn to understand spoken English. The following extracts (13-15) illustrate these most common features in the replies:

- (13) Lukijat ovat eri kielialueilta.
(The speakers are from different linguistic areas.)
- (14) Olen huono ymmärtämään puhuttua. Ehkä kuuntelemalla oppii [sitä].
(I am bad at understanding spoken language. Maybe I will learn to understand [it] by listening to [it].)
- (15) vaikka kuullunymmärtäminen on minulle hankalaa
(although I find listening comprehension difficult)

A noticeable percentage of the adult learners (20.5 %; 8) did not like the listening comprehension exercises. The reasons for choosing the alternative *no* could be divided into three categories: too fast a speech rate, too difficult exercises and too few listening exercises. The following examples (16-18) represent the three categories:

- (16) liian nopeasti puhuttua, en saa selvää
(too fast so that I cannot understand)
- (17) hiukan vaikeita minulle
(a little bit too difficult for me)
- (18) pitäisi olla enemmän [kuuntelutehtäviä oppikirjassa]
(there should be more [listening comprehension exercises in the coursebook])

Again a clear majority of the adult learners were content with the exercises of their coursebook. However, this question received slightly fewer *yes* answers than the other three questions. What was specifically interesting in the answers was the fact that seven out of 19 respondents who provided an explanation for choosing the alternative *yes* reported liking the exercises although they are too difficult or challenging for them. However, one respondent who did not like the exercises gave a similar explanation.

4.2.4 The reading comprehension exercises

In question 14 the adult learners were asked whether they like the reading comprehension exercises of their coursebook. This question received the highest percentage: 94.9 % (37) of the respondents chose the alternative *yes*. The adult learners gave varying reasons why they liked the reading comprehension exercises. The reasons were related to the difficulty level and the vocabulary of the exercises among other things. Here are some answers (19-22) that were given by the adult learners:

- (19) tälle tasolle sopivia
(the difficulty level is suitable)
- (20) Sanasto on laadittu niin, että pystyy hahmottamaan kokonaisuuden, vaikka kaikkia yksittäisiä sanoja ei heti ymmärrä.
(The vocabulary is compiled so that one can get the big picture although one does not understand every single word right away.)
- (21) hauskoja tarinoita, [niitä] saisi olla enemmän [oppikirjassa].
(funny stories, there should be more [of those in the coursebook])
- (22) Joutuu lisäämään tarkkaavaisuuttaan ja pohtimaan.
(One has to be more attentive and reflective.)

Only 5.1 % (2) of the respondents reported not liking the reading comprehension exercises in the coursebook. The respondents answered that the topics of the exercises were strange or their own vocabulary knowledge was inadequate.

In this part the exercises of both receptive and productive skills of the EFL coursebook were evaluated by the adult learners. A clear majority of the respondents chose the alternative *yes* in each question. As discussed above, the adult learners were the most satisfied with the reading comprehension exercises of their coursebook: 94.9 % (37) liked those exercises. Almost equally, 92.3 % (36) of the adult learners were content with the speaking exercises. The writing exercises and the listening comprehension exercises divided opinions slightly more clearly: 84.8 % (34) of the respondents chose the alternative *yes* when they were asked to evaluate the writing exercises. The listening comprehension exercises received the lowest percentage of *yes* answers: 79.5 % (31) were content with the exercises. Thus, small but significant percentages of the adult learners did not like either the writing exercises (13.2 %; 5) or the listening comprehension exercises (20.5 %; 8). Despite the discontent with the exercises among some learners, the results indicated that the adult learners were very content with the exercises of all four skills.

4.4 The most preferred exercise types

Needless to say, there are certain exercises that are preferred by adult language learners rather than younger ones. This last part of the results analysis deals with the second research question: What kinds of EFL exercises do Finnish adult intermediate learners like the most? That is, the purpose of part IV in the questionnaire was to find out what kinds of exercises adult language learners prefer. These results would therefore indicate which exercise types are suitable for adult language learners. The participants were asked to choose five most interesting exercises from 12 options. Moreover, they were given the opportunity to add an exercise type to the list. However, none of the participants wanted to add anything to the list. Moreover, six respondents chose fewer than five exercise types. Below Figure 4 illustrates the results of the most preferred exercise types.

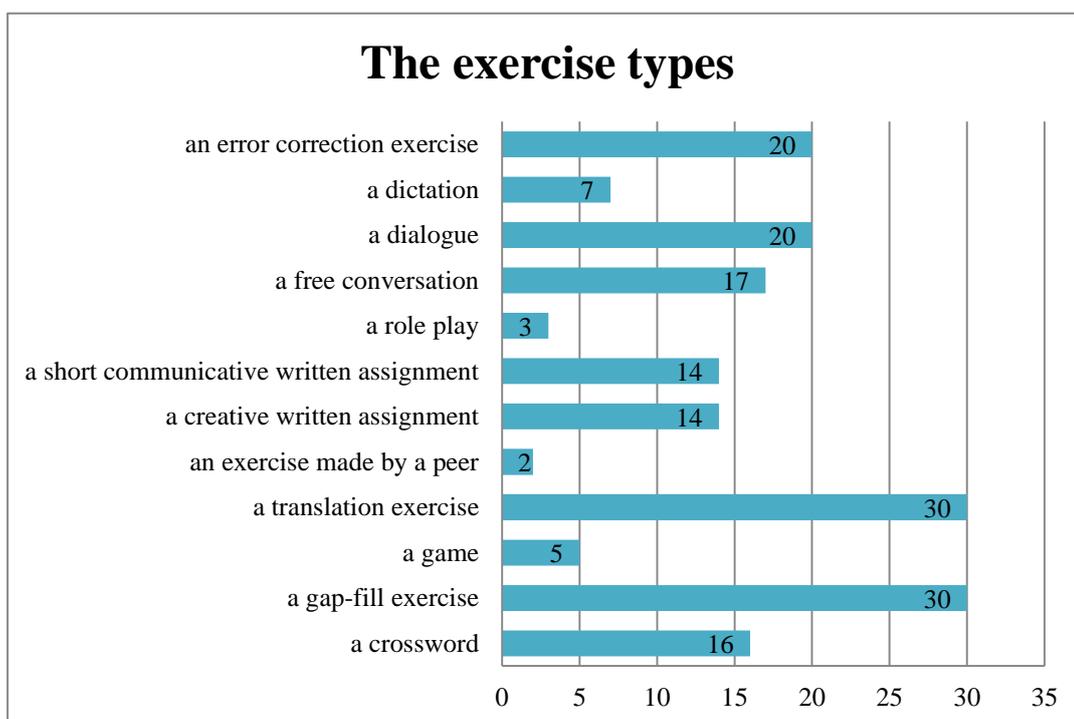


Figure 4. The most preferred exercise types with the number of votes

The adult learners were quite unanimous about two exercise types: 30 adult learners (out of 39 respondents) chose a gap-fill exercise as one of their favorite exercise types, and likewise, 30 respondents preferred translation exercises. Moreover, 20 adult learners selected a dialogue, which resembles an oral translation exercise as the lines are given in their mother tongue to learners, who have to translate them into another language. Furthermore, an equal number of adult learners preferred error correction exercises. Crosswords were also quite popular. A

total number of 16 respondents favored it. In addition, a dictation was chosen by seven adult learners.

The list also included more modern and freer exercises, which means that they enable language learners to express themselves more freely than traditional exercises. Against expectations, some of these options were quite popular. A free conversation was the most preferred one with 17 votes. Moreover, 14 respondents chose a creative written assignment. A short communicative written assignment seemed to be as popular as the creative written assignment. Other exercises of this category were not so favored by the adult learners: five of them preferred games and three of them chose roles plays. Furthermore, only two respondents would have preferred exercises made by a peer.

Thus, the results suggested that the adult learners preferred traditional exercise types rather than more modern ones. The most preferred exercise types were a gap-fill exercise, a translation exercise, a dialogue and an error correction exercise. All these exercise types are considered traditional. However, three more modern exercise types received quite a few votes: a free conversation, a short communicative written assignment and a creative written assignment.

5 Conclusion

The purpose of the present study was to evaluate the exercises of the English language coursebook *English for you, too! 3* from learners' perspective. The results did not agree with my previous experience with foreign language coursebooks used in adult education centres. The findings indicated that the adult learners were content with the exercises of their EFL coursebook. The results showed only small differences between the questions in the second part of the questionnaire, where the respondents were asked about several aspects of the exercises. In each question the emphasis was agreeing with the positive statements. Thus, the respondents were satisfied with the number and the diversity of the exercise types, the difficulty level and the maturity level of the exercises. Moreover, they feel that the exercises are good sources of creativity and interest. With regard to the exercises of the four skills, the respondents were very positive. At least 79.5 % of respondents liked the exercises of each language skill. Furthermore, the results indicated that the adult learners preferred traditional exercises to more modern ones.

The results of the present study can be partly explained by two background features of the participants, namely their age and the number of years learning English. The majority of the participants were 50-69 years old. Moreover, nearly half of the participants have probably studied English already at school in their childhood. They went to school in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s. The reason why the adult learners were positive about the different aspects of the exercises and the exercises of the four skills may be related to both background features. The ones who have studied English as a child may appreciate the exercises of their coursebook more since they have developed quite a lot since they went to school when traditional exercises, such as translation and gap-fill exercises, dominated in teaching languages. Nowadays language coursebooks include both traditional and more modern exercises. Moreover, it should be noted that most of the participants have learned some other foreign language at school in their childhood. Swedish was studied as the first foreign language at school in Finland in the 1950s and the 1960s. In addition, German was more often chosen as the second foreign language than English at school until the 1970s. Thus, the ones who have studied Swedish or German may have similar experiences of traditional language exercises. On the other hand, the other adult learners who do not have any experience of learning a foreign language other than English may not be critical of the coursebook since they have maybe one coursebook or none at all to compare with. The reason why the traditional exercise types seemed to be more popular may also be examined in relation to both background features. As discussed above, most of the learners may have studied English or another language as a child and therefore it can be assumed that most of the exercises that they have done in English lessons back in those days have been traditional. Thus, they may have become so accustomed to certain exercise types that they think that they are the best ones. A similar tendency with regard to teaching methods has been noticed by three researchers (Horrocks et Rogers 2010:79; Smith 1984:6). Although the results show a clear preference for traditional exercises, it should be noted that some adult learners are also willing to try more modern exercises.

There are some aspects that could be improved in the study. The limitations of the study are related to the questionnaire and the small number of participants. Firstly, in order to get a broader view of the exercises in the coursebook a more detailed study should be done. Thus, a broader study including more questions would give more detailed information of what aspects of the exercises should be improved. However, conducting a large-scale study would not have been possible given the limitations of a candidate's thesis. Secondly, the questionnaire could

have included a question about whether the respondents have studied English or other languages in their childhood. This would have given valuable information for explaining the results as discussed above. Thirdly, a clearer distinction between traditional group work and cooperative group work should have been made in the questionnaire. Thus, the questionnaire should have included a question about the number of both exercise types. It would have been interesting to know whether the adult learners can make a difference between traditional group work exercises and cooperative group work exercises. The chances are that most of the adult learners may have thought about traditional group work exercises instead of cooperative exercises when answering question 8. However, I chose to include only cooperative exercises in the questionnaire as they are generally considered to be more beneficial to learning a language and group work skills than traditional group exercises. Fourthly, the number of participants could have been greater in order to gain more valid and varied results.

The results of the present study are important because they give information about what is good in the exercises and which aspects of the exercises need modification. Thus, a teacher could adapt the exercises based on the results. Furthermore, the study presents exercise types that adult learners may prefer and thus gives valuable information for the development of adult language learning materials in Finland.

The present study gives interesting implications for further studies. Instead of evaluating all the exercises of a coursebook, a study could focus on the exercises of one language skill, for instance oral skill exercises. This would give more in-depth information about the speaking exercises since more aspects of the exercises could be examined. Moreover, it would be important to conduct a study on the learners' and teachers' opinions about the exercises of a coursebook. Taking into account both learners' and teachers' opinions would give a broader view of the exercises in a coursebook.

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Hei!

Opiskelen englannin kielen opettajaksi Jyväskylän yliopistossa. Olen tekemässä kandidaatintutkielmaa, joka koskee aikuisopiskelijoiden mielipiteitä ja käsityksiä heidän englannin oppikirjansa tehtävistä. Toivon, että vastaisit kaikkiin kysymyksiin huolellisesti. Käsittelen tiedot luottamuksellisesti. Kiitos jo etukäteen osallistumisestasi!

Linda Lounasvuori

I Taustatiedot

Ikä (ympyröi oikea) 20-29 30-39 40-49 50-59 60-69 70-79 80-89

Sukupuoli (ympyröi oikea) Mies Nainen

Kuinka monta vuotta olet opiskellut englantia? _____

Miksi opiskelet
englantia? _____

II Seuraavaksi esitän kymmenen väitettä, jotka koskevat englannin oppikirjasi tehtäviä yleisellä tasolla. Ympyröi vaihtoehdoista se, joka on lähimpänä omaa mielipidettäsi. Valitse jokaisesta kohdasta vain yksi vaihtoehto.

	Täysin eri mieltä	Jonkin verran eri mieltä	Ei mielipidettä	Jonkin verran samaa mieltä	Täysin sama mieltä
1. Englannin oppikirjani tehtävyytypeissä on tarpeeksi vaihtelevuutta.	1	2	3	4	5
2. Englannin oppikirjani tehtävät ovat vaikeustasoltaan sopivia.	1	2	3	4	5
3. Englannin oppikirjani tehtävät ovat sopivia aikuisille.	1	2	3	4	5
4. Englannin oppikirjani tehtävät antavat tilaa luovuudelle.	1	2	3	4	5
5. Englannin oppikirjani tehtävät rajoittavat ilmaisumahdollisuuttani.	1	2	3	4	5
6. Englannin oppikirjassani on sopivan verran itsenäisiä tehtäviä.	1	2	3	4	5
7. Englannin oppikirjassani on sopivan verran parityöskentelyyn kannustavia tehtäviä.	1	2	3	4	5
8. Englannin oppikirjassani on sopivan verran yhteistoiminnalliseen työskentelyyn kannustavia ryhmätehtäviä.	1	2	3	4	5
9. Englannin oppikirjani tehtävät lisäävät mielenkiintoani opiskella englantia.	1	2	3	4	5

10. Englannin oppikirjani tehtävät lisäävät 1 2 3 4 5
halukkuuttani osallistua tunnilla.

III. Seuraava osio sisältää viisi kysymystä, jotka koskevat mielipiteitäsi englannin oppikirjasi kielitaidon eri osa-alueisiin liittyvistä tehtävistä. Valitse vaihtoehdoista kyllä tai ei ja perustele vastausvaihtoehdosi omin sanoin. Otathan huomioon, että sanasto ja kielioppi ovat mukana kaikissa neljässä kielitaidon osa-alueissa, joita alla olevat kysymykset koskevat.

11. Pidätkö englannin oppikirjasi suullista taitoa (mukaan lukien ääntäminen) harjoittavista tehtävistä?

- a) kyllä
- b) en

Miksi/Miksi et? _____

12. Pidätkö englannin oppikirjasi kirjoitustaitoa harjoittavista tehtävistä?

- a) kyllä
- b) en

Miksi/Miksi et? _____

13. Pidätkö englannin oppikirjasi kuullunymmärtämistehtävistä?

- a) kyllä
- b) en

Miksi/Miksi et? _____

14. Pidätkö englannin oppikirjasi luetunymmärtämistehtävistä?

- a) kyllä
- b) en

Miksi/Miksi et? _____

15. Onko englannin oppikirjassasi riittävästi eri osa-alueita (suullinen taito, luetunymmärtäminen, kuullunymmärtäminen, kirjallinen taito) harjoittavia tehtäviä?

- a) kyllä
- b) ei

Miksi/Miksi ei?

IV Seuraava osio käsittelee mielipiteitäsi mielenkiintoisista tehtävistä. Vastaa kysymykseen annettujen ohjeiden mukaan.

16. Millaisia tehtäviä pidät parhaimpina? Valitse ympäröimällä viisi mieluisinta vaihtoehtoa.

- | | |
|---|--|
| 1) ristikko | 8) roolipeli |
| 2) aukkotäydennystehtävä | 9) vapaa keskustelu annetusta aiheesta |
| 3) peli (esim. muistipeli, lautapeli) | 10) keskustelu parin kanssa suomeksi annettujen repliikkien mukaan |
| 4) käännöstehtävä | 11) sanelu |
| 5) opiskelutoverin tekemä tehtävä | 12) virheiden korjaaminen |
| 6) luova kirjoitustehtävä (esim. tarina, runo) | 13) muu. Mikä? _____ |
| 7) lyhyt kirjoitustehtävä (esim. sähköposti, kortti) | |