

# MUSIC AND LEARNER AUTONOMY IN THE EFL CLASSROOM

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<p>Tiivistelmä - Abstract</p> <p>Asiantuntijuus ja taito oppia nopeasti uusia asioita ovat tärkeitä nykypäivän ja tulevaisuuden työelämässä. Oppimaan oppimisen taidot saavat pohjan peruskoulussa ja opettajien tulisikin tukea oppilaitaan kasvussa tehokkaiksi autonomisiksi oppijoiksi. Kaikkien aineiden opettajat voivat työssään tukea oppilaidensa oppimistaitoja. Yksi tapa tukea oppimista on musiikin käyttö. Tässä tutkielmassa keskitytään englannin kieleen, ja siihen, miten musiikkia voi käyttää opetuksessa. Musiikin ja kielen oppimisen yhteyksiä on tutkittu paljon mutta tutkimuksia, jotka keskittyvät nuoriin oppilaisiin, on vähän.</p> <p>Tämän tutkielman tarkoituksena oli ensinnäkin selvittää miten alakoulun kuudesluokkalaiset kokevat musiikin käytön englannin opetuksessa. Lisäksi haluttiin tietää toteutuuko oppijan autonomia silloin, kun englannin tunnilla käytetään musiikkia kielenoppimistarkoituksiin. Lopuksi haluttiin selvittää, käyttävätkö kuudesluokkalaiset metakognitiivisia taitoja kuunnellessaan englanninkielistä musiikkia vapaa-ajallaan. Tutkielma toteutettiin laadullisena tutkimuksena haastatellen yhdeksää alakoulun kuudennen luokan oppilasta. Haastatteluista saatu aineisto analysoitiin sisällönanalyysiä käyttäen.</p> <p>Tutkimustulosten mukaan kuudesluokkalaiset pitävät musiikin käyttöä englannin opetuksessa positiivisena asiana. Oppijan autonomia ei juurikaan toteudu silloin kun musiikkia käytetään kielenoppimistarkoituksessa englannin opetuksessa. Suurin osa haastatteluista yrittää selvittää englanninkielisen laulun sanoja vapaa-ajallaan, eli he käyttävät metakognitiivisia taitoja. Lisää tutkimusta aiheesta kuitenkin kaivataan, jotta tuloksia voisi käyttää yleistäen.</p>	
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## 1. INTRODUCTION

In the future many employees will need intellectual and transferable skills. Unfortunately though, education today is not flexible enough to develop and enhance those skills (Hakkarainen, Lonka, & Lipponen 2004: 11-12). Today's quickly changing information society brings us problems that are complex and the education system cannot provide knowledge that is needed to solve those problems (Hakkarainen et al. 2004: 13-14). However, a basis for intellectual skills and expertise, which are needed when solving these problems, can be created through education (Hakkarainen et al. 2004: 14). Guiding and encouraging students to become self-regulative and self-reflective is one of the main challenges of education (Ruohotie 2008: 120).

It is acknowledged that a person's or an organisation's expertise and its development will be emphasized in the working life in the future (see for example Hakkarainen et al. 2004 and Eteläpelto & Tynjälä 1999). Self-regulation, ability to constantly learn and renew one's actions, creative use of knowledge, ability to act in changing situations and demands; to name a few features that are associated with expertise (Ruohotie 2008: 106). Expertise is basically action with certain aims (Ruohotie 2008: 106). Intentional learning is a viewpoint according to which both cognitive and metacognitive processes are necessary when learning is seen as aimful action, not as a result of an arbitrary teaching-learning process (Ruohotie 2008: 107). From the learner's point of view, metacognition directs the learner's ability to reflect, understand and control his own learning process (Ruohotie 2008: 107). Motives, aims, beliefs and emotions direct the actions taken by a learner who has certain aspirations (Ruohotie 2008: 107).

Motivation is also needed since metacognitive skills alone will not be enough for the learner to use his ability to think and reflect (Ruohotie 2008: 108). Along

with motivation, also support from one's parents is important, since practicing many skills must be started at a young age (Hakkarainen et al. 2004: 69). Essential are both the quality and the quantity of practicing; if there are no results when practicing a certain skill, one must revise the means used rather than assume that a person's innate characteristics are insufficient (Hakkarainen et al. 2004: 75) Also, children should be given opportunities to pursue things they are interested in and to which they have tendencies (Hakkarainen et al. 2004: 75). Important is also that the child does the practicing willingly with support and encouragement (Hakkarainen et al. 2004: 76). Hakkarainen et al. (2004: 100-108) give examples on how the development of learning skills can be supported: teaching learning strategies, supporting self-regulation skills, giving feedback, guiding and supporting learning and learning diaries.

Learning does not take place only at schools. Students study and learn also outside school surroundings; at home, at hobbies, with friends etc. If learning skills and metacognitive skills are taught at school, the students can use those skills also in their spare time, sometimes even unconsciously. For example, trying to figure out a meaning of a word or an expression of an English song playing on a car radio. Many of us are introduced to popular music at an early age. Along with TV and films, music is a common source of hearing the English language in Finland. The learning skills taught at school are put to a test when one is eager to find out what the lyrics of one's favorite song mean in Finnish. We cannot assume that all the students use their skills in this way, yet I believe that teachers can encourage students to do so by creating a spark for learning. One way of doing this could be using English songs as a teaching material in English lessons.

Using music in English lessons has been studied in many countries. However, since music with its lyrics is always culture-bound and differently perceived in different countries and cultures, it is worthwhile to investigate songs in language teaching in the Finnish context. Also, most studies have focused on

older students. The present study aims to present two aspects. First, the benefits of using music in English lessons and second, how learner autonomy can be taken into account when that music is used. The purpose of this study was to find out what elementary school pupils think about using English songs as a teaching material and do they ever reflect on the lyrics when listening to an English song, that is, use metacognitive skills. The data was collected in May 2015 with interviews from nine 6<sup>th</sup> grade students. The overall structure of the present study is as follows. Chapter two focuses on the theoretical background relating to music and its application to English lessons. Chapter three focuses on the aspect of learner autonomy. Chapter four presents the present study, the data collection and the analysis. The findings of the present study are discussed in chapter five. Conclusions are drawn in chapter six.

## 2. MUSIC AND LANGUAGE LEARNING

As Pasanen (1992: 81) says, music has no limits. Traditionally, in Finland, the barriers between different school subjects are quite strong, although not as evidently in lower levels as from secondary school onwards (Pasanen 1992: 81). Music can be integrated into almost all school subjects and it is possible to combine different parts of the curriculum more diversely (Linnankivi et al. 1981, as cited by Pasanen 1992: 81). Schander, Balma and Massa (2013: 409) discuss uniting art and language in EFL classroom. They as well argue that these two subjects should not be taught separately, instead, integrating them would be more motivating for the students (2013: 409). Furthermore, music is a way to create a relaxed and anxiety-free atmosphere in the classroom (see for example Shen 2009, Lopera 2003, Schoepp 2001, Pasanen 1992).

Schoepp (2001) discusses the use of songs in ESL and EFL classrooms. As he mentions, songs are essential in people's lives and they can be valuable when

used in English lessons. Also, thanks to the Internet, music and song lyrics have become easily accessible. However, Keskinen (2014: 74) found out in her research, that the excessive amount of entertainment available these days may decrease the students' appreciation of music when it is used in language classrooms for educational purposes.

Lopera (2003: 136) lists several reasons for using songs in English classrooms. For example, music may affect the students' moods; it also serves as stimulus, entertainment and a source of joy, not to mention as an effective learning tool. Music also inspires and motivates students in spite of their age or level of language learning (Schander et al. 2013: 410). Music and singing games are especially suitable for students in primary schools (Pasanen 1992: 101). Physical action along with singing supports the understanding and memorizing of the lyrics (Metsola & Törmänen 1990 as cited by Pasanen 1992: 101). In their research Schön et al. (2008: 982) found out that in the early phases of learning a new language the motivational and structuring features of songs can be beneficial. In secondary school the older students have already such linguistic skills that enable them to exchange ideas and views (Pasanen 1992: 105). Therefore Pasanen suggests using songs which take a stance on specific issues thus provoking conversation (1992: 105).

Schoepp (2001) lists three reasons for using songs in language classroom; affective, cognitive and linguistic reasons. Affective reasons are based on Steven Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis. According to this hypothesis ideal language learning takes place when the filter is weak, that is, a person has a positive attitude in terms of language learning, which, according to Schoepp (2001) is the case when songs are used in English lessons. The main cognitive reason for using songs in English classroom is that they provide potential for improving one's language automaticity, i.e. a part of language fluency (Gatbonton and Segalowitz 1988, as cited by Schoepp 2001). Finally the linguistic reasons for using songs in English classrooms are that songs represent

models of vernacular, informal language. Song lyrics are authentic examples of English, and if students enjoy the songs used in classroom, they may listen to them also outside the classroom, which in turn supports language learning. Furthermore, song lyrics are usually repetitive, and listening to them may enhance the automatization of informal English. (Schoepp 2001)

York (2011: 64), on the other hand, has a slightly different view on the song lyrics. He argues that some songs may not serve as a good and truthful model of English, since there is repetition in the lyrics, the order of the words may not rhyme and intonation and melody do not always correspond. Despite this, he argues that music and singing are useful for students and teachers alike (2011: 62). Music lowers the affective filter of the students; it helps them to practice pronunciation and develop automaticity; it also enhances the acquisition of the language (York 2011: 62). For teachers, music offers ways to practice the students' listening and speaking skills (York 2011: 62). Schander et al. (2013: 410) point out that songs can be used when teaching different language themes and thus they can help the teachers to reach teaching objectives. Using songs in ELT is a means to make teaching more enjoyable and effective (Shen 2009: 88). Songs serve as a perfect language teaching tool since they are a combination of music and language and they offer a countless amount of features which can be used in language teaching, for example culture and themes; idiomatic and poetic expressions; therapeutic possibilities (Shen 2009: 88).

## 2.1 How does music affect language learning

Salcedo (2002) studied the effect of songs on text recall and involuntary mental rehearsal when used in foreign language classroom. She found out that using songs is beneficial to text recall (2002: 120). Also, when the second language input is in the form of a song, involuntary mental rehearsal generally takes place (Salcedo 2002: 120). Music and memory have also been linked in a research conducted at the University of Edinburgh (Gray 2013). It was found out that singing foreign language words while trying to learn them has a

positive influence on the recollection of those words (Gray 2013). Henriksson-Macaulay (2014) states that music training is the only technique that is proved to enhance the child's intellectual, linguistic and emotional capabilities. According to research, only one hour a week of music training improves language skills and increases IQ (Henriksson-Macaulay 2014). Henriksson-Macaulay (2014) suggests that the reason for the Finnish people being so fluent in several languages is their custom of taking babies and toddlers to music training already at that young age. Learning a foreign language and the development of mother tongue both profit if a child starts music training before the age of seven since through that training they gain larger vocabularies, a better grasp of grammar and a higher verbal IQ (Henriksson-Macaulay 2014). According to a research by Aho and Kumpulainen (1977, as cited by Pasanen 1992: 84) the students who were in music classes (i.e. classes that put an emphasis on musical training) in the comprehensive school had a better average value and smaller dispersion of foreign language grades than the students in comparison classes. This also demonstrates the benefits of musical training for language learning.

The research also shows that using music can support for example learning to pronounce foreign languages and cognitive abilities like attentiveness and deduction. Especially if the exposure to music starts early, it molds the brain in a positive way. A person with dyslexia benefits from musical rehabilitation since it supports linguistic development and the development of hearing abilities. Furthermore, a young child finds it rewarding and motivating. (Siponmaa 2015)

Music activates both brain hemispheres and it also enhances brain functions (see for example Shen 2009, Salcedo 2010 and Toikkanen 2014). A child's musical hobby enhances attentiveness and has a positive effect on the hearing system and the development of motoric skills (Toikkanen 2014). Some studies have concluded that the prerequisites for learning to read are better for children with musical hobbies; those children have a more accurate perception of sounds

(Toikkanen 2014). Furthermore, functional brain research has enabled the scientific studying of the influence of music, which has made the possibilities of music as a part of chronic disease treatment more and more interesting (Kalso 2014). Listening to music activates the large network of bilateral brain which takes care of for example attentiveness, memory, motoric functions and emotions; music can refresh the brain function of a patient with dementia or improve the cognitive recovery of a patient with apoplexy (Kalso 2014).

## 2.2 How to use music in language learning

There are multiple ways to use music and songs in a language classroom. Neisa (2008: 164) mentions that using music in language learning has become more and more common with the possibilities that the Internet offers and, on the other hand, because of the increased research done on the subject. Neisa (2008) discusses combining rock music and language learning. He points out that using rock music for educational purposes requires thorough preparations, for example selecting the songs carefully (2008: 165). Using rock music in language teaching also requires considering the songs not purely as entertainment but as teaching material (Neisa 2008: 165). Also Lopera (2003: 136-137) advocates for systematic and organized work when using songs in language classroom.

The choice of music depends on the teaching aim, how the music will be used in the language classroom and the availability of music (Pasanen 1992: 88-89). Pasanen also gives us a useful reminder; the teacher should also consider some of the following issues which are usually seen as opposites: music for teaching vs. recreation purposes; teacher's aims vs. students' preferences; music with singing vs. instrumental music; pop music vs. other music genres; songs designed for teaching purposes vs. authentic songs (1992: 88). The content of the song, that is the lyrics and the message they convey, is important (Pasanen 1992: 90). Many pop songs deal with current social issues or issues of everyday life, which are topics that young people are interested in (Pasanen 1992: 90). The choice of music should not be one-sided; although pop songs have benefits, the

picture of the musical culture of a certain language area will stay quite narrow if other music genres are not used (Pasanen 1992: 95). Despite the genre, the criteria for choosing the songs for teaching purposes usually contain at least the following: the song preference, the age-appropriate level of difficulty in lyrics and the relevance of the lyrical content (Pasanen 1992: 95).

Using music in language teaching brings multiple possibilities for both teachers and students (Neisa 2008: 167-168). Music presents language in different forms and the teaching possibilities are unlimited: it can be used, for example, to introduce cultural issues, new vocabulary and expressions, pronunciation and topics of discussion (Neisa 2008: 168). Enriching a certain theme or a textbook chapter (Pasanen 1992: 104) and presenting a new topic (Pasanen 2012: 2, Eken 1996 as cited by Schoepp 2001) are also cases when music can be used. Using songs in language teaching can also be used to present or reinforce grammatical issues, to create a relaxed atmosphere in the classroom, or to discuss the topic of the song (Lopera 2003: 137). Furthermore, as Lopera (2003: 137) and Neisa (2008: 167) mention, using songs in the English classroom gives the teacher an opportunity to practice the students' listening, speaking, writing and reading skills. Next I will present some ways of using music when practicing these different language skills.

### 2.2.1 Listening

In order to understand speech, one must be able to listen (Pasanen 1992: 98). Already at the early language learning level the teacher can make the students practice listening skills by asking them to concentrate on the lyrics of the song and paying attention to, for example, which name, season or colour is mentioned (Pasanen 1992: 98). According to Neisa (2008: 166) and Shen (2009: 91), listening is considered one of the most difficult language skills. The teaching material aimed at practicing listening skills may not always be the most intriguing, however, using music for practicing listening abilities may change that, since students usually find music as entertainment (Neisa 2008:

166). The songs chosen for teaching purposes should be interesting for the students, since one song is most likely listened to more than once (Beasley & Chuang 2008). Shen (2009: 91) mentions that it may not be easy for an EFL learner to understand a native speaker's fluent speech yet listening to English songs can prepare learners for those situations.

Lopera (2003: 140) and Neisa (2008: 169) suggest that the students should be given pre-, while- and post-listening tasks in order to get the full potential of songs when they are used as teaching material. Pre-listening tasks will give the students some background information and present expressions that they will encounter while listening to the song (Lopera 2003: 141). Right after the pre-listening task the students should listen to the song, and possibly view the music video, after which they should be given an opportunity to discuss the song/video (Lopera 2003: 142). While listening, the task could be, for example, to identify the expressions mentioned in the song (Lopera 2003: 142). The purpose of the while-listening task is to make the students active and reflective listeners (Lopera 2003: 142). For post-listening tasks, Lopera (2003: 143) suggests discussing the theme of the song and sharing one's own opinion.

### 2.2.2 Reading/Vocabulary/Grammar

Listening skill is not the only language skill that can be practiced through song lyrics (Neisa 2008: 176). The lyrics offer a number of possibilities to connect different language skills, for example, reading skills are always involved when the lyrics are dealt with (Neisa 2008: 177). Neisa (2008: 177) also mentions that the vocabulary of the song is easier to understand, since the words are embedded in a certain context in the lyrics. There might be some difficult new words in the song lyrics, but as Shen (2009: 92) points out, if the song is liked by the students, it is easier for them to remember what the words mean. As in any vocabulary learning, important words and phrases should be repeated in the song lyrics; in that way they are easily remembered (Beasley & Chuang 2008). Shen (2009: 92) discusses the repetition of lyrics as well, saying that both easy

and difficult grammatical structures are more easily memorized through songs. Also Pasanen (1992: 101-103) suggests using songs for practicing vocabulary, grammar structures and revising. According to Salcedo, music differs from talking in multiple ways (2010: 76). As music entails pitches, melodies, rhymes and beats, it may help vocabulary or grammar recall (Salcedo 2010:76). Salcedo suggests using songs after dealing with a particular language structure in class; songs can function as a reinforcement of memorization (2010: 77).

### 2.2.3 Speaking/Pronunciation/Communication

Singing is considered an important part of practicing pronunciation (Pasanen 1992: 99). Pasanen admits, however, that many teachers do not consider themselves capable of teaching singing, in which case she suggests getting help from a colleague or even from some of the students (1992: 99). Teachers also assume that teenagers are reluctant to sing, however, according to Pasanen, this can be avoided if the songs chosen are not too childish (1992: 99). She also points out that in some songs the melody and the rhythm may distort the length of the sounds or relocate the stress of certain words, which may lead to learning a wrong way of pronouncing a word (Pasanen 1992: 99). This can be prevented by practicing the pronunciation of the lyrics before singing and paying attention to those words which are pronounced differently when they are sung (Pasanen 1992: 99).

Also Neisa (2008: 177) regards singing as a good means for practicing pronunciation which can thus enhance speaking skills. Additionally, speaking skills can be practiced when the students discuss the themes in the songs and express their opinions (Neisa 2008: 177). Properly designed group activities enhance the communication between the students and make learning interactive (Lopera 2003: 138). York (2011: 65) mentions that songs can be used when practicing the pronunciation of certain phonemes. For example, he suggests using *Mary Had a Little Lamb* and *Row, Row, Row Your Boat* if /l/ and /r/ sounds need to be practiced (2011: 65). Also according to Shen, songs serve

as an aid to practice pronunciation and phonological rules of English (2009: 91). He advocates for native-like pronunciation which can be taught through songs of native singers from, for example, Britain or Canada (Shen 2009: 92). In my opinion, it is inadvisable to require Finnish students to aim for native-like pronunciation, since it can rarely be achieved. I find it more useful if the students feel at ease when communicating in English, without the pressure of sounding native-like. Salcedo points out that most foreign language learners' L1 influences their L2 pronunciation (2010: 66). It may sometimes be difficult for students to pronounce foreign languages correctly, but songs are an excellent means to practice pronunciation skills and moreover, songs can make it enjoyable (Salcedo 2010: 66).

#### 2.2.4 Writing

Writing skills can be enhanced by asking the students to answer written questions about the songs, thus finding out what they have understood about the song lyrics (Neisa 2008: 177). Songs can be utilized in creative writing as well (Pasanen 1992: 106-107 and Shen 2009: 93). The tasks for creative writing do not have to be strictly controlled by the teacher, on the contrary, the students have an opportunity to express themselves in a number of ways (Pasanen 1992: 106). Pasanen (1992: 107) lists several creative writing activities, for example: making up an additional verse to a song, making up lyrics to a simple melody, translating a Finnish song into English, comparing two or more songs which have a similar theme. Also Shen (2009: 93) suggests that the students make up their own lyrics to a familiar tune. In that way, the students can express themselves and show creativity and imagination through an enjoyable writing exercise (Shen 2009: 93).

### 2.2.5 Background music/Culture

As discussed above, music can be used in a number of ways in language learning and teaching. In addition, music can be used in EFL contexts which are not directly connected to language learning. Sometimes teachers may want to play some music just for the sake of music itself, for example to create a certain atmosphere or just to enjoy a nice piece of music. If the music is used as background music for relaxation, it seems to be important to select the right type of music, since students prefer different kinds of music and the type that one student prefers might annoy another student (Leivo & Rikkola 2011: 27-28). With trial and error, however, the teacher is able to find background music that is approved by the whole class (Leivo & Rikkola 2011: 28).

According to Lopera (2003: 137) and Shen (2009: 89), listening to music in the classroom can create a relaxed atmosphere. Anxiety, fatigue, disinclination and boredom can prevent the students from learning efficiently, thus, music can be used in the classroom for relaxation and recreation purposes (Pasanen 1992: 82). Adding background music into learning situations has a positive effect on listening comprehension and recall (Mann 1979 as cited by Pasanen 1992: 84). Background music enhances concentration, obstructs external distractions and helps to create an image of a specific topic at hand (Mann 1979 as cited by Pasanen 1992: 97). Background music may be used when the students are working independently doing writing or reading tasks (Pasanen 1992: 96). On the other hand, though, it should be carefully considered how often music is played in the background since many students listen to music everyday outside the classroom and it is not the teacher's purpose to reinforce the habit of doing other things while music is played, because it can lead to students ignoring the music when the music itself is used for actual teaching purposes, for example, learning new vocabulary (Pasanen 1992: 97). When music is used during intermission, it serves as a break from continuous studying or it can be used as a bridge between different activities (Pasanen 1992: 96).

According to the National Core Curriculum, one of the purposes of foreign language teaching in Finland is to educate the students to understand and appreciate different languages, speakers of different languages and different cultures (NCC 2014: 219). Students are guided to take an interest in the diversity of languages and cultures of the surrounding world (NCC 2014: 219). For example in the English lessons of grades 3-6 the students should be guided to observe the linguistic and cultural diversity of both the near surroundings and the world, and they should notice the status of English as a language of global communication (NCC 2014: 219). The vast variety of music available could thus be a great means to present different languages and cultures.

Kilickaya (2004) discusses the teaching of cultural content in EFL classroom. According to him, teaching cultural issues to students is a means to make them realize that they need to speak and use the target language, in other words, the students will be more motivated to learn the language (McKay 200 as cited by Kilickaya 2004). However, it is mentioned that the overuse of cultural content should be avoided since it may act as a de-motivator (Kilickaya 2004). According to Dufva (1993: 12) a foreign language learner should be taught to listen to the different forms of the target language, to see some communication features that are typical of it and to reflect on the culture. Thus, a foreign language learner learns cultural awareness (Dufva 1993: 15). As music can be considered a part of a certain culture, it does not always have to be used in language learning contexts in the classroom, instead, it can be used to acquaint the students with the culture (Pasanen 1992: 105). Shen (2009: 89) states that through songs the native speakers of English are able to express their own culture. Also Pasanen (2012: 2) found out in her study that among other things, teachers use music samples in English lessons to teach something about the target culture. Folk songs serve well the cultural aims of language teaching; they reflect the character, history and the way of life of a certain nation, they have a lot of repetition, they are easy to learn and they are easily modified for teaching purposes (Osman & McConochie 1978 as cited by Pasanen 1992: 95). Salcedo, as well, states that some cultural aspects, such as social situations,

historical events and geographical issues can be introduced to students using songs (2010: 77).

### 3. LEARNER AUTONOMY

The students' expertise as language users can develop only if they truly participate in the teaching and learning situations. Teachers can enhance the students' participation by explaining why certain issues are studied and linking them to an entity. This alone is not enough, though; what is needed is true ownership in the learning process. In language teaching this can be achieved by paying attention to the choices of working habits, materials and evaluation policies. Practices that enable cooperative learning and empower students in their own learning process should be used. (Luukka et al. 2008: 240)

Traditionally language learning and teaching concentrates on the structure of language. However, when learning a language, one should not aim only at language awareness but also at cultural and interaction awareness. Important is also becoming aware of the learning process, which includes reflecting on the learning strategies and styles, and discussing teaching styles and means. It is quite impossible for a teacher to make students aware of all of these issues, thus, a teacher must make choices depending on his/her own knowledge and skills and also depending on the needs of the students. From the learners' point of view, those methods that offer a possibility to invent, discover and observe should be emphasized. Furthermore, methods such as reading or learning strategies should be emphasized, since they help students to utilize resources that they were not at all aware of. (Dufva 1993: 12-21)

Dörnyei (1994) deals with motivation in the foreign language classroom. He introduces teacher-specific motivational components which include, for example, a suggestion that a teacher should be more of a coordinator or an

arranger than an authority in the classroom. A teacher should also encourage and improve learner autonomy by reducing the external pressure and control from the teacher, allowing the learners to choose different ways to achieve their goals, giving the learners some responsibility when constructing their learning process, giving them an opportunity to design tasks and enhancing peer-teaching and project work where students can be in charge. (Dörnyei 1994: 282)

Luukka et al. (2008) conducted a vast study of Finnish upper comprehensive school student and teachers' habits of reading and writing in both mother tongue and foreign language classes as well as in their spare time. The students' own choices of texts - such that are normally part of their spare time - are rarely used as teaching or learning material (Luukka et al. 2008: 153). According to Luukka et al. textbooks are used especially in foreign language classes (2008: 151). Grammar teaching at English classes traditionally relies on textbooks. Many teachers who support autonomous learning in their lessons often have doubts when it comes to grammar; they are hesitant in shifting the responsibility of learning grammar issues to their students (Legenhausen 2011: 27). According to Legenhausen, teachers should focus on raising the students' language awareness instead of teaching explicit grammatical issues (2011: 28). Every student has individual linguistic needs and the teacher's task is to help the students to identify those needs themselves, by introducing such tasks and activities that raise the students' language awareness (Legenhausen 2011: 30). It is important that the students find the activities interesting and they adopt a role of a language researcher (Legenhausen 2011: 30). Legenhausen advocates for using the target language in authentic communicative situations; this is how the students become aware of the fact that they will gain language and communicative competence only by using the language (2011: 35).

Now I shall briefly look at the National Core Curriculum (NCC). The NCC for basic education (2014) sets a framework for teaching foreign languages in Finnish schools. Since the present study was conducted on 6<sup>th</sup> graders, I shall look at the NCC section for 3-6 graders. One of the teaching aims in English is

to learn effective ways to learn a language, for example the active use of new words and phrases in one's own expressions, means for memorizing and deducing meaning of an unknown word by its context (NCC 2014: 220). One of the aims is getting used to evaluating one's own language skills for example with the help of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (NCC 2014: 220). These examples taken from the NCC are meant to support the development of students' metacognitive skills and thus promote learner autonomy. Important in that development is becoming aware of the language. Using music as a language teaching tool provides a somewhat different, almost informal learning environment, and different learning styles can be taken into consideration as there are multiple ways to use music in language learning, as was discussed in chapter 2.2.

### 3.1 Lifelong learning

Tuomisto (2003) discusses lifelong learning. He points out that learning is pleasant when it is based on one's own curiosity, exploring and studying issues, and collecting experiences (Tuomisto 2003: 64). As a result of this kind of learning, one gains new experiences and knowledge which usually bring joy and pleasure (Tuomisto 2003: 64). On the contrary, learning is unpleasant when it is compulsory and the pace is forced, when it is determined by other people and evaluated constantly (Tuomisto 2003: 65). According to Tuomisto (2003: 65), spontaneous and voluntary studying represents pleasant learning in the best way. However, of course, compulsory learning is somewhat inevitable in Finnish schools. In autumn 2016 up to 50 Finnish upper secondary schools are given a chance to participate in an experiment where the students are allowed to study more independently and they can focus on subjects of their own choice and leave out subjects that they are not interested in (Liiten 2016). This seems like a good idea when thinking about learner autonomy, especially if a student already knows what he or she wants to do in the future, after upper secondary school. It allows him/her to concentrate on subjects which are relevant for further studies or occupation. However, the experiment has also received

criticism. Some fear that the students' common knowledge is at risk, since they can actually choose not to study for example history or biology. If one looks at this from the perspective of lifelong learning, there should be no fear of the lack of common knowledge, since learning is not limited to upper secondary school.

Front (2003) discusses the learner's autonomy as a challenge for lifelong learning. When teaching adults, it seems ideal to teach independent, autonomous learners, who take control over their own learning. However, the reality might be different, since adult learners may have weak learning skills and many years since their last studying experiences. Thus, adult learners may have major difficulties in adopting the role of an active, autonomous learner. As a result, an autonomous, self-directive learner is not a starting point, it is an aim. Self-directivity is not a quality related to age, one has to grow into it with support and encouragement from an instructor or a teacher (Front 2003: 125)

Perhaps learning and studying as an adult would be easier if active and autonomous learning skills were practiced from an early age. Even the Finnish NCC presents a perception of learning which sees the students as an active learner (NCC 2014: 17). This matter will be discussed in more detail in chapter 5.2. It would seem that we need learning skills throughout our lives since learning does not cease after graduation. Teachers of all subjects should encourage and support their students to become active learners already at a young age and music serves as an excellent means for that purpose.

### 3.2 Informal learning

According to some estimates, approximately 75% of learning is informal, empirical learning, which takes place in everyday life. Nevertheless, educators and politicians usually consider and develop formal learning which takes place in organized education institutions. Informal learning refers to the lifelong process in which every person acquires and increases knowledge, skills and changes his attitudes and opinions on daily experiences and environment. This

kind of learning can occur at home, at work or in spare time; it can be influenced by the example or opinions of family and friends, travelling, reading newspapers or books, listening to the radio or watching television and films. Informal learning is unorganized, unsystematic and, at times, it is not even target-oriented. In spite of that, it forms a majority of an individual's – even those highly educated – learning during life span. (Tuomisto 2003: 61-70)

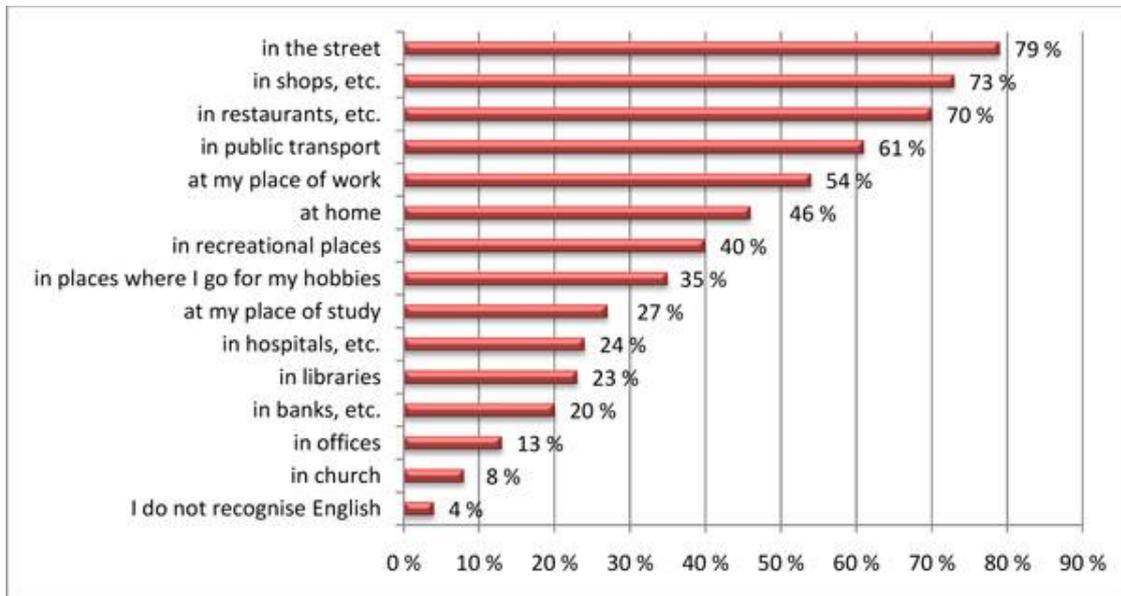
Likewise, the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) acknowledges the importance of informal learning ([www.oecd.org](http://www.oecd.org) n.d.). The OECD pursues to be considered as an organization that creates the best policies for sustainable economic growth, improving employment and enhancing well-being ([www.finlandunesco.org](http://www.finlandunesco.org) n.d.). The OECD points out that informal learning is not fully appreciated or understood and in 1996 the OECD education ministers decided to create strategies to support lifelong learning. The OECD concept of “from cradle to grave” covers all kind of learning; formal, non-formal (e.g. adult education institutes) and informal. With the participating countries it was agreed that non-formal and informal learning should be made visible and recognized, for example by providing certifications or competence documents. (To find out more on country practices, visit the OECD website [www.oecd.org](http://www.oecd.org) n.d.)

In popular culture, which includes for example music, television, films and video games, the prominence of English language is quite obvious, and such popular culture is widely available in Finland. Thus the exposure to English language seems inevitable. As a consequence, one could argue that informal learning of English can take place almost anytime and anywhere. VARIENG was a shared project of the universities of Helsinki and Jyväskylä between 2006 and 2011. The project studied the variation, contact and change in English language in the contexts of everyday and professional life, communication and education

(<https://www.jyu.fi/hum/laitokset/kielet/tutkimus/hankkeet/paattyneet->

hankkeet/varieng/en). In the following chart the VARIENG project's results considering the presence of English in the lives of the Finns are presented.

Figure 1. English in Finns' lives



(<https://www.jyu.fi/hum/laitokset/kielet/tutkimus/hankkeet/paattyneet-hankkeet/varieng/en/survey/results/result2>)

There were 1 495 respondents aged from 15 to 74. The results show that English is present in everyday life of the respondents and they also reinforce the viewpoint of most of learning being informal instead of formal. Perhaps informal learning of English is not as recognized in Finnish schools as it could be. Concentrating on textbooks in English lessons and ignoring the value of informal learning might be worth re-examining.

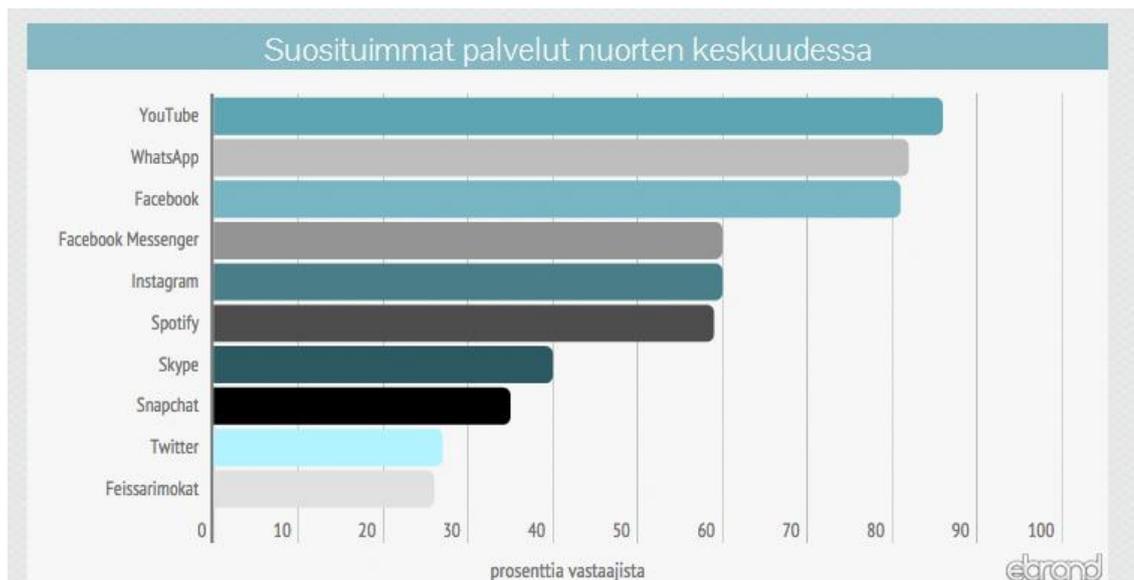
### 3.2.1 The use of media

Finland's Media education society (Mediakasvatusseura) has united studies and statistics into a compilation called the Mediaworld of the Young in a Nutshell (Rahja 2013). They have studied the media usage of 13-29 olds. The publication remarks the presence of informal learning as a part of media usage. It is stated

that independent learning, learning from other people and self-improvement through the Internet, without the support of formal learning environments, is a part of everyday life. In 2009 the most used medium in the lives of 10-29 year-olds was television. In a few years there has been a significant change since the Internet is now available in different mobile devices, not just the computer. At the same time, the amount of time spent on the Internet has surpassed the time spent on watching television. For the young, the Internet may not be just a device or a medium among others, it is a part of lifestyle and time is spent on the Internet in versatile ways and in social contexts. (Rahja 2013: 4, 22)

In 2015 ebrand Suomi Oy, in cooperation with the Educational and Cultural Services of the city of Oulu, conducted a study on the usage of social media of Finnish youngsters and young adults. Altogether 2 618 13-29 year-old people participated in the study. The majority of the participants, 92% of them, use their smartphones when using the social media services. The most popular social media services are pictured in the following chart:

Figure 2. The most popular social media services



(<http://www.ebrand.fi/somejanuoret2015/tiivistelma/>)

According to the study, YouTube is the most popular social media service for the young. The Finnish youngsters read and watch different contents and like the contents created by others. Listening to music has become a major pastime habit in social media services, mainly due to the popularity of YouTube and Spotify. When asked what they actually do in the social media services, listening to music became the third in the participants' answers.

([www.ebrand.fi](http://www.ebrand.fi))

When listening to music online, streaming seems to have replaced downloading ([www.aalto.fi](http://www.aalto.fi) 2015). In line with ebrand Suomi Oy's study, a research conducted in Aalto University in 2015 YouTube and Spotify are overpoweringly the two most popular sources for music in the lives of Finnish students who are over 20 years old. The study found out that people still use their old CDs and MP3-files when listening to music, the difference is, that they do not acquire new music in that way. ([www.aalto.fi](http://www.aalto.fi) 2015)

Almost 70% of the youngsters would like to have social media studies in formal education institutes as well. This might be because they want the teaching and learning to be less formal and bringing their spare time activities into school environment could provide some informality. The study states though, that the role of homes should be considered when discussing the teaching of social media practices. ([www.ebrand.fi](http://www.ebrand.fi))

### 3.3 Motivational aspects of using music in language teaching

Dörnyei introduces a L2 motivation framework which has three levels: Language Level, Learner Level and Learning Situation Level (1994: 279). Considering music and language learning, what seems to be relevant is the Learning Situation Level which is divided into three motivational components: course-specific, teacher specific and group-specific components (Dörnyei 1994: 280). The course-specific motivational components are again divided into four categories which describe L2 classroom motivation: interest, relevance, expectancy and satisfaction (Dörnyei 1994: 277). He then gives suggestions on

how teachers can manage these categories in the classroom (1994: 281-282). The suggestions include for example making the course content more attractive for the students by using authentic or unusual teaching materials; talking about the material choices with the students; and using versatile and challenging tasks (1994: 281). In my opinion, bringing music in the classroom fills the task since music can be considered authentic material, the students can be allowed to choose songs for teaching purposes and the tasks related to music can be very diverse. Bernaus & Gardner (2008) studied the effects of language teaching strategies on students' motivation and English achievement. One of their conclusions is that if a teaching strategy is supposed to affect the student's attitudes and motivation, it must be considered effective by the students, thus, it is advisable for the teacher to survey the students' opinions on a specific strategy used (2008: 399). It can be advisable also because making the students aware of a certain strategy being used increases their language awareness.

Music is an excellent way to motivate students (Pasanen 1992: 88). It can often be difficult to inspire the students to express themselves or to find out what topics of discussion would really interest them (Pasanen 1992: 88). Everyone has some experiences and personal opinions about music, thus it is easy for the students to discuss music (Pasanen 1992: 88). Listening to English songs will make the EFL learners eager to grasp the target language as well as generate interest and motivation towards it (Shen 2009: 94). Shen reminds though, that it is relevant how the songs are used by the teacher in the classroom; there should be some educational value if a song is used (2009: 91, 94). Salcedo (2002: 74) points out that when teaching students who are non-native speakers and do not live in a target language community, music may be a good way to motivate the students to learn the language. Salcedo (2002: 110), who studied text recall of college students, is of the opinion that if the students enjoy the song, they are more motivated to learn the lyrics and thus recall is easier. Alipour, Gorjian & Zafari (2012) studied the use of songs when teaching vocabulary. They found out that using songs as teaching material had positive effects on the class; the

students were more interested in the lesson and they were more focused on learning new vocabulary (Alipour et al. 2012: 143).

### 3.4 Metacognitive skills

Metacognitive skills are an essential part of learner autonomy. To become an autonomous learner one must first learn *how* to learn. What is first needed, is a change in the school environment; a shift from the teacher-led learning to the student-led learning (Thanasoulas 2000). Autonomous learners are expected to take control of their own learning, though teacher's role remains important; the teacher provides the materials and methods the students will need in order to become autonomous learners (Thanasoulas 2000). Rasekh & Ranjbari (2003) conducted a study in which they tried to find out whether specific metacognitive strategy training would improve EFL students' vocabulary learning. They came to a conclusion that if students are trained to plan their vocabulary learning, the learning will be more effective (Rasekh & Ranjbari 2003: 12).

What are metacognitive skills? First of all, they should be separated from cognitive skills which are related to thinking and processing knowledge. Cognitive skills, however, are not dealt with in detail here. As Anderson (2002) expresses, metacognition is simply "*thinking about thinking*". Every learner faces situations when they do not know what to do next. However, learners who possess metacognitive awareness know what to do in those situations; they have certain strategies to help them figure out what to do next. Teaching and encouraging students to use metacognitive skills is one of the most important tasks of the teacher. Students will gain better learning skills if they *learn to think* about the process of language learning, and teachers can help them doing so. According to Anderson (2002), metacognition consists of five components; (1) preparing and planning learning, (2) selecting and using learning strategies, (3) monitoring one's strategy use, (4) organizing and orchestrating multiple strategies and (5) evaluating strategy use and learning. (Anderson 2002)

Now I shall present brief examples of each of these components which could be easily adapted in an English classroom of even young students. The first component, (1) preparing and planning learning: a teacher sets a clearly articulated goal for the class after which the students set learning goals for themselves. For example, the teacher asks the students to study the vocabulary of a certain chapter in the textbook and the students decide to study them so that they will be able to answer the teacher's questions related to the chapter. Secondly, (2) selecting and using learning strategies: to be able to do this, the teacher must have taught the students certain strategies and how to use them. For example, when facing an unknown word in the chapter, the student decides to use a guessing strategy to decode the meaning of the word. The third component is (3) monitoring one's strategy use. It means that the students should ask themselves every now and then whether they are still using the chosen strategy as intended. The fourth component is (4) organizing and orchestrating multiple strategies. As the teacher has taught the students multiple strategies on how to decode an unknown word, the students should be able to realize if one strategy is not functioning and if another strategy could be more useful. Finally, (5) evaluating strategy use and learning. The students are truly using their metacognitive skills when they contemplate on whether their strategy use is effective. (Anderson 2002)

Also Cook (1993, as cited by Thanasoulas 2000) lists some metacognitive learning strategies:

- directed attention, when deciding in advance to concentrate on general aspects of a task;
- selective attention, paying attention to specific aspects of a task;
- self-monitoring, i.e., checking one's performance as one speaks;
- self-evaluation, i.e., appraising one's performance in relation to one's own standards;
- self-reinforcement, rewarding oneself for success. (Cook 1993 as cited by Thanasoulas 2000)

As well as Anderson's (2002) metacognitive components, also these strategies by Cook (1993) could be utilized in the English classroom of younger students. The amount of time needed to teach students these metacognitive strategies may be an issue in the Finnish schools. A teacher is not able to teach multiple metacognitive skills during one 45 minute lesson. It takes various lessons and even years for the students to master this kind of strategy use and that is why they should become an obvious part of every lesson. Teaching the students little by little, starting from an early age, would most likely be the best strategy to teach metacognitive strategies.

### 3.5 Promoting learner autonomy in language learning through the use of music

It may not be an easy task for the teacher to choose music for educational purposes in English classes (Keskinen 2014: 73). Many studies conclude that students' opinion should be taken into account when choosing the music (see for example Beasley & Chuang 2008, Pasanen 1992, Neisa 2008). In that way the students' experience of autonomous learning can be supported and they can participate in the learning process from the beginning. However, if music is supposed to function as a tool for language learning, the students cannot be solely in charge of the music choices; much depends on the educational purpose that the music should serve (Pasanen 1992: 89). Instead of constantly using EFL textbooks and other ready-made materials in English lessons, teachers can sometimes introduce authentic materials, such as music. It can be time-consuming for the teacher to gather and prepare authentic materials which are appropriate for the learners' language level (Matsuata as cited by Kilickaya 2004). However, giving the students an opportunity to participate and choose songs for teaching may ease the teacher's workload.

Nowlan (2008) discusses motivation and learner autonomy. He (2008) points out that both teachers and students are aware of the limitations of studying English in the classroom for a few hours a week. Thus, there is a demand for

autonomous learning techniques. Outside the traditional school environment, the Internet and other types of technology are quite obvious and widely used means to learn languages. In their spare time, many students download English music, films and TV shows, which offer a wide variety of accents and expressions. An autonomous learner must be aware of his/her own strengths and weaknesses and have multiple resources which will give exposure to different language skills and enhance them. Nowlan reminds, though, that not all of the students are keen on learning English on their own or possess these characteristics which are needed. Furthermore, listening to music or watching films is not the best way to learn English skills for specific purposes, such as business situations. Also, it is quite likely that listening to music without paying attention to the language used does not lead to learning the language. Thus, the role of the teacher or the instructor is important. They give guidance, support and encourage to critical thinking. (Nowlan 2008)

As has been discussed so far, the benefits of using music in language teaching are indisputable. Using music in English teaching in various ways and allowing the students to take part in the learning process helps them to become independent, autonomous learners, which is an aim presented in the NCC as well. The previous research on music and language learning has mainly concentrated on older students. Since the basis for autonomous learning styles and strategies is founded at already an early age, it is important to investigate younger students as well. Next the present study will be introduced. Chapter 4 concentrates on the overall structure of the research process. In chapter 5 the analysis is presented and finally chapter 6 concludes this paper.

#### 4. THE PRESENT STUDY

In this chapter the aims and the research questions of the present study are introduced. The aim of the present study is, first of all, to find out elementary school students' opinion about using music for teaching purposes in English classes. Furthermore, the purpose is to find out the participants' stance on getting them involved in the teaching and learning process, that is, how would they feel if they could, for example, choose music and songs for their English classes. In addition, one of the aims is to learn whether the participants listen to English music in their spare time and do they ever contemplate on the lyrics and their meaning, that is, use metacognitive skills. There are two hypotheses: first, the participants are not involved as much as they could be when the teacher uses music in English teaching, and second, they would like to be more involved, bringing their own interests and tastes to English lessons.

The research questions are:

1. What is the students' opinion on using music in learning English?
2. Are the students' own interests and tastes in music taken into account in English lessons?
  - Students choose the music used, students design tasks and activities related to music etc.
  - That is, is there learner autonomy?
3. Are metacognitive skills used outside English lessons?
  - When trying to figure out the lyrics of an English song

The results of the present study offer teachers valuable information on the students' perception of music as a teaching tool in English lessons and the students' stance on learner autonomy. The study also offers a glimpse of the students' personal life when it comes to the role of music in it, and whether the students use metacognitive skills - which could and should be taught at school - in their free time. The results of the present study also help the teachers in developing the use of music in language teaching. In chapter 4.1 the data collection and the participants are introduced. Methods of the analysis are presented in chapter 4.2.

#### 4.1 Data collection and participants

Interview was selected as a data collection method. Using this method one intends to get information of a phenomenon and also to bring forth the interviewee's own opinions and perceptions (Dufva 2011: 131). One of the advantages of interview is its flexibility; the interviewer has a chance to repeat the question, correct misconceptions and clarify oneself (Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2009: 73). As the interviewees of the present study were quite young, about 12-year-olds, the flexibility of the interview situation became important. The interviewees may be nervous and they may need clarification or paraphrasing of questions. If the data collection method had been, for example, a written enquiry, this kind of flexibility would not have been possible. The pupils were interviewed separately for a couple of reasons. Firstly, during the individual interview one has a better chance to concentrate on the answers of the interviewee (Dufva 2011: 135). In a group interview some participants may not speak as much as some others, and also, there may be overlapping when speaking, which would make the transcription of the interviews inconvenient (Dufva 2011: 135).

The data was collected in May 2015 in an elementary school located in southern Finland. The participants were classmates, nine 6<sup>th</sup> grade pupils who were at the time 12 years old. At the time they had been studying English for four years.

The data was gathered using interviews and each of the participants were interviewed separately. Before the interviews a written permission from the participants and their guardians was collected. The interviews took place in a storeroom at the school since there were no vacant classrooms available at the time. The class teacher allowed the participants to leave the classroom for the interview. The interviews were carried out using the pupils' mother tongue Finnish in order to get as accurate answers as possible. Each of the interviews were recorded using a recording application on a mobile phone and the duration of the interviews varied between 5 and 10 minutes. The recordings were downloaded on a computer and then transcribed. The transcriptions were used as a help for the analysis. The interview questions are attached both in Finnish and English.

## 4.2 Methods of the analysis

The method that was used to carry out the analysis was content analysis. It is a basic analysis method that can be used in any qualitative research (Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2009: 91). With this method one tries to acquire a summarized verbal description of the research target and draw conclusions from it (Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2009: 103). As Silverman (2011: 64) describes, "In content analysis researchers establish a set of categories and then count the number of instances that fall into each category." As an aid for the analysis, the interview questions of the present study were divided into two categories: *at school* and *out of school* questions. Both categories included a few general questions which did not directly give answers to the research questions rather than introduce the interviewees the subject at hand. The present study's data-based content analysis proceeded in the following way: after transcribing the interviews I read them through several times trying to detect recurring themes and then detecting and categorizing similarities and differences according to their relevance to the study questions. The answers of the participants fell quite easily into the categories. The recurring themes had to do with, for example, the use of music in the participants' spare time and their perceptions of using music

in English lessons. The findings of the analysis are introduced in the following section.

## 5. ANALYSIS

The previous chapter 4 concentrated on the process of implementing the present study. In this chapter, the findings of the present study are presented. The chapter is divided into three parts according to the research questions listed in chapter 4. First, in chapter 5.1 the students' opinion on using music in English teaching will be presented. Chapter 5.2 deals with learner autonomy, more specifically, whether it can be seen when the students attend English classes where music is used as a teaching material. Finally, in chapter 5.3, we shall learn whether the students use metacognitive skills while listening to music outside the classroom. Henceforth, when referring to the nine participants of the study, the following identifiers will be used: P1-P9.

### 5.1 Students' opinion on using music in English teaching

The participants were asked whether songs had been used in English lessons for teaching purposes. Five of the nine participants mentioned that the songs from the textbook were used, four of the participants answered yes, but they did not specify where the music was taken from. All of the participants agreed that it is a positive thing if music is used when learning English at school and most of them also agreed that there has been enough music. Three of the participants thought however, that music could be used more often in English lessons for teaching purposes.

The participants gave somewhat vague answers when they were enquired how the music is used in English classes. Four of the participants were able to

mention that either vocabulary or grammar were taught through songs. Here are examples from two of those:

- (1) P2: "No silleen et opetellaan niinku kielioppi tai sanastoo tai sit siinä on se niinku joku adverbi tai sellanen mitä siinä niinku opetellaan."

[P2: "Well, we kind of like learn vocabulary or grammar, or there is that some adverb that we are trying to learn."]

- (2) P9: "Me opetellaan siitä esim jos on vaik verbejä ni sit siinä laulussa on verbejä ja niitä me kuunnellaan."

[P9: "We learn for example verbs and the verbs are in the song that we are listening to."]

One of the participants does not seem to know why the songs from the textbook are used as she said that they only listen to the songs and then sing them. Perhaps these answers that the participants gave indicate that teachers should be more specific when using songs as teaching material and let the students know what is being taught and why the songs are used, thus making them aware of the language learning process. This might be beneficial for language awareness because then the students might truly concentrate on the songs and also they might learn how to concentrate on song lyrics in their spare time. As discussed previously, the students' participation in the learning process might improve if the teacher explains the purpose of studying certain issues (Luukka et al. 2008: 240). Furthermore, discussing specific language teaching strategies (music in the case of the present study) with the students might increase the motivation to learn (Bernaus & Gardner 2008: 399).

Clearly, the participants are used to a certain way of using music in English classes, that is, they are used to the fact that the songs in the textbook are listened to and either vocabulary or grammar is learned through them. Of course, this does practice the students' pronunciation, vocabulary and grammar skills. However, varying the music related tasks might be refreshing for both the teacher and the students. In addition, the students could learn the multiple possibilities of learning English through music. Most of the participants, six of

them, could not come up with any other ways of using music in English classes. P2 and P4 mentioned that background music could be used and P4 even specified why background music could be beneficial:

(3) P4: "No sitä vois ehkä käyttää samalla ku tehään töitä ni se saattais tehostaa sitä työntekoa."

[P4: "It could be used while we work so it might enhance working."]

The role of background music was discussed in chapter 2.2.5. Indeed, background music can create a relaxed atmosphere and help the students to concentrate on studying (see for example Pasanen 1992, Lopera 2003 and Shen 2009). However, the teacher should spend some time on choosing the music for background, since one type of music may irritate some students, thus making the use of it pointless (Leivo & Rikkola 2011: 27-28).

P8, who listens to music daily in various situations, is of the opinion that she has learned most of her English vocabulary through English music and TV programs. She seems to be eager about using music as a learning material, and as well as using the songs from the textbook, she suggests having YouTube-themed English classes. This seems like a request to step outside the textbook and bring a piece of the students' spare time to the English lessons. Previously Dörnyei (1994) discussed student motivation and how to enhance it. One suggestion was to bring unusual teaching materials to English classes and introducing versatile and challenging tasks (Dörnyei 1994: 281). Therefore, introducing songs and activities outside the English textbook might enhance the students' motivation to learn the language. As mentioned previously, if the students enjoy the song which is used as teaching material, they are more motivated to learn the lyrics (Salcedo 2002: 110). For example Pasanen 1992 and Neisa 2008 state that students' opinion should be taken into account when choosing the music. However, the teacher should take part in the choosing of music since much depends on the educational purpose of the English lesson (Pasanen 1992: 89).

To sum up, music mainly from the textbook is used in the participants' English lessons and the participants are happy with the fact that music is used for teaching purposes. Most of the participants feel that there has been enough music in the English lessons but three of them would like to see more music used. The participants did not seem unanimous when required how songs had been used in their English lessons. The answers varied from learning vocabulary or grammar to just listening and singing. This indicates that perhaps the students should be made aware of the teaching goals to get the full potential of the songs. This of course applies to any teaching material, not just songs and music. The participants are used to a certain way of using music in English lessons, that is, the songs are taken from the textbook. Most of the participants could not name any other ways of using songs when learning English. If the teachers also used music from other sources than the textbook and introduced versatile activities related to them, perhaps it would encourage the students to be active learners in their spare time while listening to music, since the tools for learning through music would be given at school.

## 5.2 Learner autonomy in the English classroom

Learner autonomy in the English classroom can be taken into account in a number of ways as was discussed in chapter 3. The present study focused on finding out whether learner autonomy actualizes when the participants attend English classes where music is used as a teaching material. Six of the nine participants stated that the music that is used in English lessons is always chosen by the teacher. Three of the participants said that students get to choose the music only rarely. The participants were also asked to imagine a situation in the English classroom where they would listen to an English song and then do tasks related to that song. Eight of the nine participants said that they would enjoy such a task. One of them mentioned that he would enjoy the task depending on the song, that is, he would enjoy the task if he liked the song. Then it was enquired whether the participants would enjoy the task more or less depending on who, the teacher or the students, chooses the song and

composes the tasks related to the song. Eight of the nine participants answered quite expectedly that the task would be more enjoyable if the students were allowed to choose the song. Here are some examples of their answers:

(4) P1: "No kyl se varmaan ku oppilaat osaa valita parempia biisejä."

[P1: "I guess the students can choose better songs."]

(5) P3: "No kyl se varmaan silleen et jos me valittais ni se ois vähän niinku nykyaikaista musiikkia, silleen et kaikki ehkä tykkäis siitä."

[P3: "Well, I think that if we make the choice, it would be current music and everyone might like it."]

(6) P7: "Kyl mä luulen et se on mukavempaa jos oppilaat ois valinnu sen koska jos se on sen opettajan ni se voi olla vähän sellanen laulu mistä oppilaat ei pidä ja sit jos on huonoo musiikkia ni ei sitä halua sillain kuunnella."

[P7: "I believe that it would be nicer if the students pick the song because if it is the teacher's it can be the sort of a song that the students do not like and if the music is bad you do not want to listen to it."]

(7) P8: "No opettajat on vähän semmosia vanhanaikasia et ne valitsee jonkun 1800-luvun biisiin ja sitä ei jaksu kuunnella ja ei halua laulaa ja toivoo et kunpa tää loppuis nopeesti, ni sen takia oppilaat vois valita sen."

[P8: "Well, teachers are a bit old-fashioned so they would choose a song from the 1800's and you do not want to listen to it or sing it and you just want it to end quickly, so that is why the students could choose it."]

The participants seem to believe that the teachers listen to older music than the students. Whether this is due to the young age of the participants or the age of their own English teacher is not solved in the present study.

The participants were also enquired whether they would enjoy the imagined task more if they could come up with the activities related to the song themselves, or alternatively, if the teacher comes up with them. There was an underlying assumption that the participants would give an answer similar to the previous question, that they would enjoy the task more if the activities were compiled by the students. This, however, was not the result. One of the

participants suggested that the teachers and the students could cooperate when designing the activities and two of the participants could not tell which style would be better in their opinion. Most of the participants, six of them, stated that they would prefer if the teacher compiled the activities. One of the six participants could not specify why she would prefer teacher-led activities. Five of them, however, were quite unanimous in their answers. Here are some examples of them:

- (8) P2: "No jos ne on oppilaat keksiny ni sithän niistä tulee aika helppoja et jos se opettaja on ne keksiny ni saa myös haastetta ja silleen."

[P2: "If the students come up with them they will be quite easy so if the teacher comes up with them one gets a challenge."]

- (9) P4: "Ne tehtävät laatis mun mielestä mieluummin opettaja koska se osaa niinku laatia paremmin ni se on enemmän opettavainen se tehtävä."

[P4: "In my opinion the teacher should come up with the activities because the teacher can do it better and they will be more educating."]

- (10) P5: "No jos ne oppilaat on keksiny ni niistä ei varmaan ois mitään hyötyä, sen takii kannattaa opettajan keksii ne tehtävät."

[P5: "Well, if the students come up with them, they will probably be unuseful, that is why the teacher should come up with the activities."]

These participants agreed that the students cannot come up with activities which would contribute to learning the language. Instead, they would be happy to rely on the teacher's knowledge and expertise. This supports for example Pasanen's (1992: 89) stance that the students should be given a chance to choose the songs for teaching purposes but they cannot be in charge of the educational purpose. One of the reasons for the participants' answers might be their young age; they may see the teacher as an authority who assigns the learning tasks. The reactions of the participants may well be emphasized by the teacher-led learning culture of Finnish schools. However, the teachers should give their students more opportunities to be a part of the learning process, thus enhancing their cognitive and metacognitive skills which are needed throughout the

school years and beyond. Even the NCC (2014: 17) promotes a perception of an active student who will learn to set goals and solve problems both independently and in cooperation with others. Learning is thinking, planning, researching and evaluating of these processes, and the development of learning to learn is a basis for goal-oriented and lifelong learning (NCC 2014: 17).

As discussed in chapter 3.3, the students should be allowed to take part in the learning process. This can be rather easily achieved by letting the students choose the songs which are used as teaching material. Naturally, the teacher is the one who ultimately approves the song but it might ease the teacher's workload to shift some of the responsibility to the students and thus give them practice at becoming autonomous learners. To sum up this chapter, most of the music for teaching purposes in the participants' English lessons is chosen by the teacher. Thus, learner autonomy does not actualize, at least not when it comes to choosing the songs. There are also other ways to get the students involved in the learning process; those are not investigated in the present study though. Most of the participants would enjoy the task they were asked to imagine and most of them also said that they would enjoy it more if the song was chosen by the students themselves instead of the teacher. On the contrary, most of the participants would prefer activities designed by the teacher, not the students. That is because they felt that the teacher-led activities would be more educational and they would benefit from them more.

### 5.3 Metacognitive skills outside the school environment

All of the participants reported that they listen to music in their free time. An easy access to music became apparent since every one of them used their own mobile phone when listening to music. This result is in line with ebrand Suomi Oy's (2015) study in which 92% of the young people used their smartphones when spending time on social media services, such as YouTube or Spotify, through which music is listened to. As well as using their phone, seven of the nine participants also listen to music either on the radio, a computer or a tablet

computer. Most of the participants, that is six of them, listened to music daily; one of them even pointed out that she listens to music for several hours per each day. One of the participants said that she listens to music almost every day, around five or six times a week. Two of the participants listen to music a couple of times a week. The amount of time spent on listening to music indicates that music is an important part of the participants' lives. The prominence of English music in the music industry is quite obvious and due to, for example, the Internet there is a vast amount of English music available for Finnish youngsters. This became evident in the participants' answers to a question 3 which enquired how much of the music they listen to is sung in English. Two of the participants reported that around half of the music they listen to is English music. Five of them said that they mostly listen to English songs. Two of the participants informed that they do not listen to songs in any other language than English. As the participants grow older and learn more and more English, the amount of English music that they listen to may grow as well, since they will understand the lyrics more easily.

The participants were further asked in what kinds of situations they listen to music. As mentioned above, all of the participants use their mobile phones as a source of music. Thus, the answers varied since they can listen to music basically anywhere. Most of the participants mentioned that they listen to music when they are alone. Other situations when music is listened to were in a car, with friends, while doing homework, while cycling or jogging and on a way to/from school. As well as the amount of time spent on listening to music, also the large variety of situations where the students listen to music in their spare time suggest that music is of great significance to the students. It is a part of everyday situations and places. Many of the answers revealed that music is played in the background while doing something else.

(11)P2: "No autossa on radio päällä, no sitte kavereitten kaa jos me pelataan meil saattaa olla jotain musiikkia siinä."

[P2: "In the car the radio is on and if me and my friends are playing we might have some music."]

(12)P8: "No aina ku mä oon yksin, ku mä matkustan esim bussil tai junal, ja sit aamuisin mä laitan musiikkii ku mä meikkaan, ja sit iltaisin ja sit jos mä oon kaverin kaa meillä ni sit mä kuuntelen kaiuttimista."

[P8: "Well, always when I'm alone, when I'm on a bus or a train, and in the mornings I listen to music when I put on make-up, and in the evenings, and if I'm with a friend I listen to music from the speakers."]

Although it was mentioned previously that background music can help to concentrate and relax, only two of the participants reported that they listen to music while doing homework.

(13)P6: "Sillon ku mu lei oo tekemistä tai sillon ku mä teen läksyjä."

[P6: "When I have nothing to do or when I'm doing homework."]

(14)P7: "No kotona ku pitää tehdä jotain, siivota, tehdä läksyjä, tehdä ruokaa. Sellasta niinku taustamusiikkia. Ja jossain koulumatkoilla saatan kuunnella kuulokkeilla ja autossa matkalla jonnekki."

[P7: "Well, at home when I have to do something, cleaning, doing homework, cooking. And on my way to school I may listen to music with earphones and in a car."]

Of course, as mentioned previously, it depends on each person; some may benefit from background music while doing homework yet it may not suit for everyone. P1 even mentioned that he cannot concentrate on homework if he listens to music:

(15)P1: "Emmä läksyjä tehdessä ku sit mä en pysty keskittyä."

[P1: "Not while I do my homework because then I cannot concentrate."]

It might be worthwhile though, if teachers advice their students to at least try background music when doing homework. It may just be the question of the right kind of music; perhaps instrumental music would work the best.

In an attempt to find out whether the participants use metacognitive skills while listening to music, they were asked if they ever concentrate on the song lyrics and try to figure out the meaning.

(16)P5: "Joo, yleensä jos mä katon jotain videoo ni mä yritän saada niistä selvää."

[P5: "Usually if I'm watching a video I try to work them out."]

Participant 5 listens to music many hours a day using a mobile phone, a tablet computer or a computer. All of the music she listens to is in English. Her answer to the question indicates that she does not try to work out the meaning of the song lyrics unless she is watching a music video. One could assume though, that as she is such a big consumer of music, according to her answers at least, she may not do it consciously. Perhaps she does it consciously while watching a music video, since almost always a music video tells a story and the lyrics are related to the video or vice versa; thus she wants to know the story behind the video and therefore tries to figure out the meaning of the lyrics.

Using metacognitive skills *consciously* while listening to music may be becoming more and more uncommon since nowadays one does not have to browse through an actual dictionary; instead, one can just search the web and find the information needed, as one of the participants does when asked whether she tries to figure out the song lyrics:

(17)P9: "No emmä hirveesti, mut sit joskus jos sen biisin nimi on joku outo ni sit mä googlekääntäjästä katon sen."

[P9: "Well, not really but if the name of the song is weird then I use the Google translator."]

Furthermore, there are all sorts of mobile phone dictionary applications available, which make the translation of the lyrics perhaps too easy. One receives the required information so quickly that there may not be time left to use metacognitive skills, neither consciously nor unconsciously. Two of the nine participants informed that they never try to figure out the meaning of the song lyrics. Most of the participants, that is five, said that they do it sometimes and two of them said that they always try to understand the lyrics.

The participants were asked if their English teacher or some other teacher had ever given them advice on how to learn English through music. As Nowlan (2008) mentions, the English teacher may have a major impact on the students and the teacher should encourage the students to learn English also outside school. This could be done by, for example, encouraging and advising the students to be active when listening to English songs or watching English TV programs or films. Concentrating and contemplating on the English language is good training when it comes to metacognitive skills. For instance, guessing the unknown song lyrics before translating them is a useful means that students should be encouraged to use. Six of the nine participants reported that their teacher had never given them such advice and three of the participants said that they do not remember their teacher doing so.

As a summary, music seems to be a large part of the participants' lives. An easy access to music, as every participant uses at least their mobile phone, means that almost all of the participants listen to music daily. All of the participants listen to English music and most of them state that English music is what they mainly listen to. There are various situations where music is listened to and an easy access to music can also be seen in these situations. The situations vary from being alone to being with friends. Most of the participants reported that they *sometimes* try to figure out the lyrics of the songs, that is, use their metacognitive skills. It was assumed that perhaps an easy access to the Internet or mobile phone applications make the translation of the unknown words in a song too easy and thus metacognitive skills are not always used. The participants did not recollect any of their teachers to have advised them on how to learn English through music by themselves. Teachers should perhaps teach learning strategies to their students and encourage to use them also in their spare time.

## 6. CONCLUSION

The purpose of the present study was to find out the participants' stance on music as a teaching material in English lessons. The study also aimed at finding out whether learner autonomy actualizes when the participants' attend English lessons. That is, are the participants' own interests taken into consideration when music is chosen for language learning purposes? Furthermore, the study intended to learn whether metacognitive skills are used in the participants' spare time when they listen to music. The answers to these research questions are summarized in the next paragraph.

The findings indicate that music is used in English lessons and even though the music is nearly always related to a teaching topic and taken from the textbook, the participants find the use of music as a teaching material a positive thing. Learner autonomy can be taken into consideration in a number of ways in any school subject. The present study focused on English lessons and the songs used as teaching material. Through the answers of the participants, it was transpired that their own tastes and interests in music are not considered when music is used as a language learning tool in English lessons. Lastly, the findings show that most of the participants use metacognitive skills when listening to music in their spare time. That is, most of them ponder on the song lyrics at least occasionally.

During the implementation of the present study, it became apparent that music - especially English music - has a major role in the participants' lives. The amount of English music the participants listen to may be explained at least by the availability of it; there is a clear dominance of English music in the music industry. All of the participants use at their mobile phones as a source of music. Thus, music can be listened to basically anywhere, which became apparent in the participants' answers. Perhaps English teachers could and should take this into consideration when planning lessons; bringing the students' personal life and interests into the classroom via music and songs. For, as Pasanen (1992: 88)

states, music is an ingenious means to motivate students to learn and as everyone is likely to have an opinion on music, it is an excellent topic of discussion. Furthermore, it is not just through music that people hear English language. Hearing and using English has become a major part of people's everyday lives, as the VARIENG project showed in chapter 3.2. Salcedo (2002: 110) studied text recall and stated that if the students like the music that is used as teaching material, they are more motivated to learn the lyrics of the song and thus recall will be easier. Therefore, it might be valuable and more useful to also use music outside the textbooks.

Most of the participants claimed that they try to understand the unknown lyrics of a song at least occasionally, that is, use metacognitive skills. None of them, however, recalled any of their teachers ever to present learning strategies that could help them in figuring out the lyrics. As metacognitive awareness is an important part of becoming an efficient learner, teachers should make their students aware of the language learning process and encourage them to become autonomous learners also in their spare time. The students could be taught how to plan their learning and thus make the learning more effective (Rasekh and Ranjbary 2003: 12). To take listening to music as an example, if the teachers would teach their students how they can learn English through songs, the students might learn to use these learning strategies in their spare time as well and become effective learners. Most likely, this kind of strategy use would not be limited to English language and songs; the students could make use of the learning strategies in other instances as well.

The strength of the present study is the young age of the participants. Many of the previous studies on the subject focus on older students or even teachers. There is a Finnish saying which is roughly translated to English as follows: what one learns while young, one masters when old. The students should be encouraged to become autonomous learners from a young age and those learning skills should be supported through school years. As was discussed in the first chapter of this thesis, the information society changes quickly and employees will need means to cope with changing situations and problems they

have to face (Hakkarainen et al. 2004: 13-14). Learning to solve problems from an early age will quite likely assist a person throughout his life. The basis for intellectual skills that will help to solve problems is created during school years (Hakkarainen et al. 2004: 14).

There are some limitations to the present study which should be taken into consideration in further studies of the same topic. First of all, as the data of the study was quite limited, the results cannot be generalized. The interview was selected as a data collection method since the participants were quite young and the flexibility of the interview questions became important so that the participants were able to make clarifying questions if necessary. Also, it would be useful to get answers from other elementary school students, not just 12-year-olds. The present study intentionally did not focus on the participants' gender, though it might be interesting to learn whether there are differences between the answers of males and females. Furthermore, further studies could explore and concentrate on what kind of metacognitive skills are used when listening to English songs.

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## APPENDIX

## Haastattelukysymykset/The interview questions

KOULUN ULKOPUOLELLA/OUTSIDE THE SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT:

1. Kuunteletko musiikkia? Radio/kännykkä/CD/tietokone?

Do you listen to music? Radio/mobile phone/CD/computer?

2. Kuinka monta kertaa viikossa?

How many times a week?

3. Kuinka paljon kuuntelemastasi musiikista on englanninkielistä?

How much of the music you listen to is in English?

4. Missä tilanteissa kuuntelet musiikkia?

In what situations you listen to music?

5. Kuunteletko laulujen sanoja/yritätkö ymmärtää ja ottaa selvää mitä sanat tarkoittavat?

Do you try to understand the lyrics and find out what they mean?

6. Onko opettaja neuvonut tapoja tai keinoja opetella englantia itsenäisesti musiikin avulla?

Has your teacher given you advice on how to learn English independently through music?

KOULUSSA/ AT SCHOOL:

7. Onko englanninkielistä musiikkia käytetty koulun englannin tunneilla kielenoppimistarkoituksessa?

Has English music been used in English lessons for language learning purposes?

8. Onko mielestäsi hyvä että musiikkia käytetään englannin tunneilla?

Do you find it a positive thing that music is used in English lessons?

9. Onko musiikkia käytetty mielestäsi riittävästi englannin tunneilla?

Do you think that music has been used enough?

10. Miten musiikkia on käytetty?

How has music been used?

11. Miten musiikkia voisi mielestäsi käyttää englannin tunneilla?

Can you come up with other ways to use music in English lessons?

12. Kuinka usein englannin tunnilla käytetty musiikki on opettajan valitsemaa (esim. oppikirjan laulut/ opettajan CD/ Youtube)? Entä oppilaiden (esim. Youtube/ oppilaan CD)?

How often the music used is chosen by the teacher/ the students?

13. Kuvitellaan tilanne, jossa englannin tunnilla kuunnellaan englanninkielistä laulua ja tehdään siihen liittyviä tehtäviä, jotta opitaan esim. uusia sanoja. Olisiko mielestäsi tällainen tehtävä mukava?

Let's imagine a situation where, for example, new words are learnt through a song and activities related to that are done. Would you like that kind of an activity?

14. Kuinka tehtävän mukavuuteen voisi vaikuttaa se, kuka laulun on valinnut (opettaja/oppilaat)?

What effect would it have if the song chosen for the activity was chosen by the teacher/the students?

15. Entä kuinka tehtävän mukavuuteen voisi vaikuttaa se, kuka lauluun liittyvät tehtävät on laatinut (opettaja/oppilaat)?

What effect would it have if the activities were compiled by the teacher/the students?