

**POSITIVITY AS A RESOURCE FOR LEARNING:**  
Enjoyment in the English classroom in Finland

Bachelor's thesis  
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# JYVÄSKYLÄN YLIOPISTO

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Tiivistelmä - Abstract  <p>Tunteet ovat osa arkielämää, ja koulussa oppilaat kokevat sekä positiivisia että negatiivisia tunteita jatkuvasti. Positiivinen psykologia tutkimusalanana tutkii myönteisiä tunteita, joilla on mm. todettu olevan yhteys hyvinvointiin ja henkilökohtaiseen kasvuun, mutta niitä ei ole juuri tutkittu oppimisen kontekstissa omana tutkimuskohteenaan. Tämä tutkimus tarkastelee iloon tai mielihyvään rinnastettavissa olevaa tunnetta (engl. <i>enjoyment</i>) kielenopiskelussa, jonka on havaittu vaihtelevan esimerkiksi iän, sukupuolen, koulumenestyksen tai opiskeltujen kielten määrän mukaan. Tutkimus koostui kahdesta osasta: ensimmäinen osa tutki monivalintakyselyn avulla tilastollisin menetelmin, kokevatko suomalaiset yläkoululaiset ja lukiolaiset iloa englanninopinnoissaan ja millaiset oppilaiden taustatekijät siihen vaikuttavat. Toinen osa tutki kyselyn avokysymysten avulla, mitkä asiat oppilaiden mukaan lisäsivät ja vähensivät iloa englannintunneilla tähdäten tutkimusinstrumentin parantamiseen. Määrällisen analyysin tulokset osoittivat, että oppilaat kokevat merkittävästi iloa englannin opinnoissaan ja että ilon määrään vaikuttavat positiivisesti yläkoulussa koettu hyvä ryhmähenki sekä yleisesti englannin opinnoissa menestyminen. Iloa tuottavat tekijät jaoteltiin sosiaalsiin ja henkilökohtaisiin. Tulokset osoittivat, että sosiaalisten tekijöiden (esim. ryhmähengen) koettiin tuottavan enemmän iloa verrattuna henkilökohtaisiin tekijöihin (esim. ylpeys omista saavutuksista). Eniten iloa kokeneilla oppilailla kuitenkin sekä sosiaaliset että henkilökohtaiset tekijät tuottivat iloa. Laadullisen analyysin tulokset loivat tarkempaa ymmärrystä siitä, mikä oppilaiden mielestä lisää iloa englannintunneilla. Merkittävimpiä tekijöitä olivat opettajan positiivinen palaute, kommunikointi toisten kanssa englanniksi, asioiden oppiminen ja osaaminen, mahdollisuus itseilmaisuun sekä tietyt tehtävätyypit ja monipuoliset opetusmenetelmät. Iloa vähentävistä tekijöistä puolestaan merkittävin oli tietyt tehtävätyypit, joista oppilaat eivät pitäneet kokiessaan ne tylsiksi tai liian hankaliksi tai helpoiksi. Tutkimukseni tulokset osoittavat, että opettaja pystyy vaikuttamaan oppilaiden kokemukseen englannintunneista ja siten lisäämään koettua iloa sekä osaltaan edistämään heidän hyvinvointiaan. Laajemmille tutkimuksille aiheesta olisi kuitenkin tarvetta Suomessa.</p>	
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## 1 INTRODUCTION

Enjoyment and positive emotions are an essential part of everyday activities, also in the school context. Students evaluate a task based on how much they enjoyed it, they feel proud of their accomplishments and they find themselves in the flow experience when concentrating on something they find enjoyable. This positivity has often been overlooked in research, perhaps for feeling that there is more need to address the problems and negative phenomena or not understanding the power of positive emotions. However, the advancements in positive psychology show that the functions and effects of positive emotions are various and significant, as they contribute to well-being and personal growth, among other things. Graduating from upper secondary school, the students have already spent approximately 12 years in school, and even as the minimum requirement all students in Finland must attend basic education until its completion or until ten years from its initiation (Opetusministeriö 1.8.1998/628, 25§). This means that school is one of the most important environments for them and thus their well-being should be a more prominent research topic in the school context.

The study of emotions in language learning has mainly focused on the negative ones, such as language anxiety. Also, the study of emotions has only been viewed in relation to motivation, not in its own right. There is only one previous study on the topic of enjoyment, conducted by Dewaele and MacIntyre (2014), which indicates that there is a lack of knowledge of the phenomenon. Adapted from Dewaele and MacIntyre's (2014) worldwide study on Foreign Language Enjoyment (FLE), this study focuses on the phenomenon in one language, English, and brings it to the more specific context of Finland.

This mainly quantitative study aimed at finding out to what extent students in Finland experience enjoyment in their English classroom, where this enjoyment comes from and what kind of differences there might be depending on their backgrounds. I collected the data in the form of a questionnaire from secondary and upper secondary school students and, using basic statistical analysis, I approached the numerical data

of the questionnaire to find patterns in the answers. In addition, two open-ended questions were analyzed qualitatively from the point of view of improving the data collection instrument to provide a more detailed understanding of the features that bring enjoyment to students, an understanding that could be beneficial for future studies on the topic.

In Chapter 2, I will give an overview of the theoretical background of the present study, focusing on the concept and functions of positive emotions and their role in language learning, and summarize the only previous study done on the topic of language enjoyment so far. In Chapter 3, I will explain the methodological choices of this study regarding data collection and analysis. Chapter 4 reports the findings of my study and finally, Chapter 5 discusses the findings of this study considering, for instance, some possible reasons explaining the results and their possible future implications.

## **2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

This chapter will provide a review of the theoretical background of this study. First, I will look at positive psychology, the ideas of which this study is based on, explaining briefly its ideology and focuses. Secondly, I will define the concept of emotion, reviewing the different functions of positive and negative emotions. I will also consider emotions in the context of language learning through the EMPATHICS-model by Oxford (2016) and then focus more specifically on defining enjoyment. Finally, I will introduce the only previous study conducted by Dewaele and MacIntyre (2014) on the concept of (FLE), from which this study is adapted.

### **2.1 Positive psychology**

Positive psychology is a branch of psychology that focuses on well-being, happiness, flow, personal strengths, wisdom, creativity, imagination, and the characteristics of

positive groups and institutions, that is, what makes individuals and communities flourish. (Hefferon and Boniwell 2011: 2.) Its founder and head figure is Martin E.P. Seligman, who introduced his agenda to renew the old wave of psychology in 1998, but it has roots in earlier fields of study, such as the ancient Greeks, utilitarianism, the work of the scholar William James and humanistic psychology. Oxford (2016: 11) states that positive psychology is important in the sense that it does not only focus on the traditional centers of psychology such as problems and distress, but approaches the human psyche from the point of view of strengths, in a positive manner. According to Seligman (2005: 3), positive subjective experience is considered in three levels: 1) well-being and satisfaction in the past, 2) flow, joy, and happiness in the present and 3) constructive cognitions about the future, such as optimism, hope and faith. Furthermore, Hefferon and Boniwell (2011: 210) argue that education, and especially curricula, is one of the fastest-growing areas of application in positive psychology, and that approach aims at developing well-being skills, flourishing and optimal functioning in students.

## **2.2 Emotions**

Emotion is a complex concept to define, but in this study, I will follow the definition of emotion by Nolen-Hoeksema et al. (2014: 378): it is a brief, situational, multicomponent response to how people interpret their current circumstances. They explain that an emotion begins with a cognitive appraisal of the personal meaning of the current circumstances, which manifests as a subjective experience of an effective state or a feeling tone. These experiences are linked to thought-action tendencies. In addition, there are internal changes in the autonomic nervous system and facial muscle movements. The final feature of an emotion is that people react to the emotion or the situation that caused it, trying to cope with it. Nolen-Hoeksema et al. (2014:379) also note that emotions are different from moods, as they usually have a clear cause and that typically, emotions are conceptualized and categorized in a discrete way, such as

fear, anger, joy, and interest, whereas moods are seen as variation on the dimension between pleasantness and arousal.

### **2.2.1 Broaden-and-build theory of positive emotions**

Fredrickson (2004: 1367) has developed a broaden-and-build theory which describes the form, the functions, and the effects of positive emotions. Her key idea is that positive emotions, such as joy, interest, contentment, and love, broaden a person's momentary thought-act repertoire. She explains that a positive feeling sparks the urge for something - for instance, joy creates the urge to play - and that these broadened repertoires serve to build enduring personal physical, intellectual, social, and psychological resources.

Positive and negative emotions have different functions. Fredrickson (2005: 120) explains that, similarly to positive emotions, negative emotions are also linked to certain actions: fear connects to the urge to escape, anger to attack, disgust to expel etc., but with the distinction that with negative emotions these action tendencies are related to survival, an evolutionary reaction. Cohn and Fredrickson (2009: 15) contrast the two explaining that positive emotions lead to more broadened and flexible response tendencies, such as playing, exploring and learning, whereas negative emotions lead to adaptation to the threat for survival with direct and immediate benefit, narrowing down the thought-act repertoires. Fredrickson (2004: 1368, 1375) also states that positive emotions function to approach or to continue something. Regarding the more long-term functions, Fredrickson (2004: 1375) argues that positive emotions are also able to: 1) undo lingering negative emotions, 2) fuel psychological resilience, and 3) trigger upward spirals that contribute to emotional well-being.

### **2.2.2 Emotions in language learning**

The study of emotions in the context of language learning has largely focused on negative emotions, as Dewaele and MacIntyre (2014: 240) point out, and the study of

positive emotions has generally been embedded in the study of motivation. They also note (2016: 216) that positive emotions as a separate focus of study in the context of language learning is not as theoretically advanced as in other areas. This indicates a need for more research on positive emotions in language learning that could draw from the developments in positive psychology.

Oxford (2016) has introduced the 'EMPATHICS' model to connect the ideas of well-being from positive psychology with the context of language learning. The function of this model is "outlining important psychological forces that help learners achieve high well-being and progress rapidly, develop proficiency and relish the language learning experience" (Oxford 2016: 10). She explains that the letters form the following acronym:

- E: emotion and empathy
- M: meaning and motivation
- P: perseverance
- A: agency and autonomy
- T: time
- H: hardiness and habits of mind
- I: intelligences
- C: character strengths
- S: self-factors

These psychological forces form a system of components, learner's internal processes, that are not sufficient alone as single units but they all require the others in pursuing optimal well-being. This study focuses on the letter *e* of the EMPATHICS model, emotions, but as mentioned above, they are all equally important regarding learners' well-being. Oxford (2016: 14) argues that positive emotions can increase a learner's self-regulation skills and autonomy as well as impact cognitive processing. She points out (2016: 13) that because of this close connection of emotion and cognition, emotion must be considered "an inherent part of learning". This notion, as well as the whole model, suggest that there is a lot to consider in the field of positive psychology when creating one's teaching practices, to promote students' well-being through teaching.



### 2.2.3. Enjoyment

Enjoyment is an emotion that comes from meeting prior expectations or satisfying a need but also going beyond that, achieving something unexpected, as defined by Csikszentmihalyi (1990: 46). Experiencing an enjoyable episode makes our selves grow, and it requires concentration on the activity at hand. Csikszentmihalyi (1990: 49) argues that enjoyment is built from eight components, based on studies on enjoyable episodes: 1) confronting tasks that are possible to be completed, 2) concentrating on the activity, 3) the task has clear goals, 4) the task provides immediate feedback, 5) the involvement in the task is deep, but effortless, removing awareness from any other worries, 6) there is a sense of control over one's actions, 7) disappearing of the concern for the self and 8) the duration of time is sensed in an altered way. He notes that in studies, enjoyment has been experienced similarly regardless of cultural, social, or individual backgrounds of people, and in a wide variety of activities. Enjoyment is also one of the key elements of the flow experience. Moreover, Csikszentmihalyi (1988: 34) says that enjoyment leads to a selective process: enjoyable episodes are more likely to be remembered and repeated. Dewaele and MacIntyre's (2016: 216) definition of enjoyment draws from Csikszentmihalyi's work: "a complex emotion, capturing interacting dimensions of challenge and perceived ability that reflect the human drive for success in the face of difficult tasks". Dewaele and MacIntyre (2016: 216) also note that a task that possibly brings enjoyment can also bring risk or anxiety.

Dewaele and MacIntyre (2014: 242) argue that the concept of enjoyment is used daily in commenting the enjoyableness of a task, a class, or any activity, and claim that "on a daily basis, the process of language learning will implicate the two key sources of enjoyment: developing interpersonal relationships and making progress toward a goal". Oxford (2016: 14) and Dewale and MacIntyre (2014: 242) agree that enjoyment is an important emotion related to the core emotion of joy, and Cohn and Fredrickson (2009: 15) note that joy also creates the urge to push the limits, and to be creative not

only socially and physically, but in intellectual behavior as well. Thus, enjoyment can be assumed to have a similar type of an effect on a person.

### **2.3 Previous study on Foreign Language Enjoyment**

The starting point for the study conducted by Dewaele and MacIntyre (2014: 240) was the lack of investigation of positive emotion in the foreign language learning context, as well as the developments in the field of positive psychology, including the broaden-and-build theory of positive emotions. The study conducted on the concept of FLE by Dewaele and MacIntyre (2014) aimed at finding out whether FLE and Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety are two separate emotions or two ends of the same dimension, and which one is experienced more by students.

The data for the study was collected in the form of a web-based questionnaire from a total of 1746 participants, the majority (73,7%) female. The participants' age varied between 11 and 75, with the average of 24 years. They were of 90 different nationalities, from different levels of education. Almost half of them studied English as a foreign language (EFL), and the majority studied only one foreign language (later referred to as FL), some up to three FLs. They were also asked about their relative standing below average, as average or above average in the group of FL learners.

For the questionnaire, Dewaele and MacIntyre (2014) developed a new FLE scale based on Ryan et al.'s (1990) Interest/Enjoyment subscale, adapting it to the foreign language context. They investigated whether the following independent variables linked to the FLE have the same effect on Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety: the number of languages known, number of FLs studied, mastery in the FL, relative standing in the FL learner group, education level, age group, gender, and global-regional group. The questionnaire form consisted of standard 5-point Likert-scale items about the FLE factors and an open-ended question asking for a description of an enjoyable episode in a FL class.

The main findings of the study (Dewaele and MacIntyre 2014) were that enjoyment and anxiety are indeed two separate dimensions, and that FLE is in general experienced more than Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety. The quantitative analysis resulted in finding several differences between the independent variables concerning FLE. First, knowing more languages brought more enjoyment until the fifth language. Second, studying three FLs resulted in more FLE than one or two FLs. Third, high intermediate and advanced groups of FL mastery scored significantly higher on FLE than lower-intermediate and intermediate groups. Fourth, the higher the relative standing in the group reported by the participants, that is, whether they considered themselves to have above average language skills among the group, the more FLE was experienced. Fifth, there was a slight and steady increase in FLE across education levels, no significant difference between middle high school and high school groups, but the middle high school group experienced significantly less FLE than those with BAs, MAs or PhDs. Sixth, FLE increased steadily from pre-teens to those in their thirties, stabilizing after the forties. Seventh, North Americans scored significantly higher on FLE than South Americans, Arabs, Asians, or Europeans and finally, women experienced more FLE than men. The qualitative analysis resulted in the categorization of the enjoyable episodes based on main themes: 1) specific classroom activities (41.0%), 2) peer recognition (13.6%), 3) other (13.1%), 4) teacher recognition (10.8%), 5) realization of progress (10.0%), 6) teacher skills (9.1%), and 7) authentic use of FL (2.4%).

In conclusion, this chapter suggests that there is a need for more studies on positive emotions in the language learning context, as they have various positive functions and are very influential on student well-being. In other words, the topic is important and should be addressed more in research. As there is only one previous study of the concept of enjoyment, this study can provide new knowledge on the topic.

### 3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In this chapter I will introduce the methodological choices of the present study. First, I will explain the aims of the study and present the research questions to which I am seeking answers with the help of the data I collected. Secondly, I will describe the data collection process, from the participants and their background variables to creating and administrating the questionnaire. Finally, I will focus on how I processed and analyzed the data.

#### 3.1 Aims of the study

As discussed in chapter 2, there is very little research on the topic of FLE, and consequently, nothing in the specific context of Finland. With this study, I want to bring the concept of FLE into the Finnish education system, focusing on English teaching, as it is the most popular language among students: in the fall of 2014, 66.0 % of students in grades 1-6 studied English as a common A1-language or an optional A2-language (Tilastokeskus 2015). The corresponding percentage in grades 7-9 was 99.4 %, that is, almost all the students. Instead of *Foreign Language Enjoyment*, from now on I will use the term *English Enjoyment*, as the study is about one language specifically. The aim of this study is to find out if Finnish students experience enjoyment in their English studies and if there are differences between the students with different backgrounds. Also, I will ask the students about their personal experiences about what increases and decreases enjoyment for them in the English class.

The research questions which this study intends to answer are the following:

- 1) Do Finnish EFL students experience enjoyment in the English classroom and if, to what extent?
- 2) What is the effect of school level (*kouluaste*), gender, EFL mastery and number of other languages studied on English Enjoyment?

- 3) What other factors might the students contribute to the enjoyment experienced in class in addition to those mentioned in the Likert scale items?

To answer the first two questions, I used mainly quantitative methods of data collection and analysis, with an additional qualitative part to answer the third research question. I collected data from secondary school and upper secondary school students in the form of a questionnaire, the results of which I analyzed statistically. I combined the quantitative numerical data with students' descriptions of the factors that they claimed to increase or decrease enjoyment, which I will analyze with the aim of improving the data collection instrument.

## **3.2 Data collection**

The data collection process aimed at combining two approaches, quantitative and qualitative, in the different sections of the questionnaire, to get a more profound idea of the extent and type of English enjoyment experienced in the English class. I chose the questionnaire as the data collection method as it is one of the most widely used ones to get experience-based information about the participants and it is an efficient and simple way to gather information from a high number of participants (Alanen 2011: 146). Another reason supporting the choice of this method was that it was used in the study by Dewaele and MacIntyre (2014) from which my study is adapted, which makes them more comparable.

### **3.2.1 Participants**

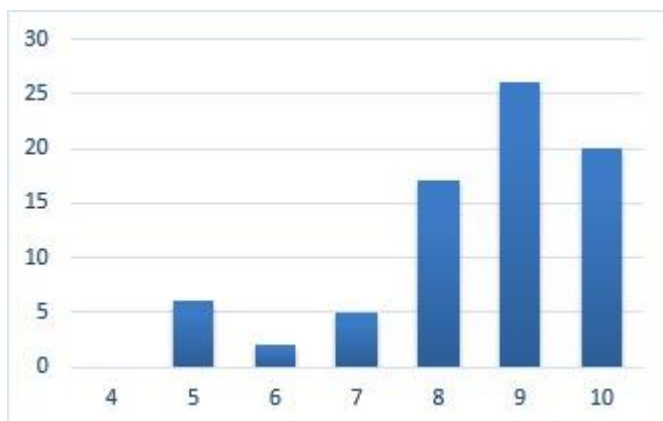
The participants in this study were in total 79 people, and they were from two schools in a town in Eastern Finland, a secondary school (*yläkoulu*) and an upper secondary school (*lukio*). The participants in the secondary school were 8<sup>th</sup> graders and in the upper secondary school 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> graders, and in this study, I have treated them as

two groups by school level, as the age difference between the upper secondary school students is minimal. The location of the data collection was chosen based on accessibility. To conduct the study in these schools, I was granted permission by the head of education of the municipality, the headmasters of the schools, their English teachers, and the participants themselves. The number of participants is demonstrated below in table 1, grouped by school level and gender.

Table 1. Participants by school level and gender

Participants	Secondary	Upper secondary	Total	
			N	%
Girls	21	23	44	55.7
Boys	15	20	35	44.3
<b>Total</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>79</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Table 1 shows that the participants were distributed quite evenly by gender and school level, although the number of girls and upper secondary school students were slightly higher. As for the other background variables, the number of other languages studied among the participants varied from only English up to three additional languages, including Swedish, Spanish, Russian, German, French, Japanese, Latin and Italian. Moreover, the participants' English mastery varied between 5 and 10 on the Finnish evaluation scale from 4 to 10. I examined each mark (*arvosana*) as a separate group, not grouping them together. The majority of the participants had good or excellent marks, as demonstrated in Figure 1 below.



### Figure 1. Participants by most recent English mark

Out of 76 students, 20 (26.3 %) reported having had the best possible mark from their most recent English course, three students not reporting anything for the most recent mark. Combining the students that had received either a very good or an excellent mark, that is 9 or 10, the number rises to 46 students, which counts for 60.5% of the participant group. This is an indicator that the general level of English mastery among the participants was high.

### 3.2.2 Questionnaire

For my study, I adapted the questionnaire developed by Dewaele and MacIntyre (2014), using the parts concerning FLE, and translated the questions into Finnish to avoid distortion of the results due to language issues. I piloted the questionnaire form with an 8<sup>th</sup> grader to make sure it is understandable for the specific target group, which led to rephrasing some of the items. I collected the data using a paper-and-pencil form, which I took to the class for the students to fill in at the upper secondary school, and in the secondary school it was filled independently and the answer sheets were then mailed to me.

The questionnaire (see Appendix 1) consisted of three parts: 1) Opinions on the English class in the form of a standard 5-point Likert-scale questionnaire, 2) Students' experiences of the English class in the form of two open questions about the factors that might increase and decrease enjoyment in the class and 3) Participants' background information.

In the first part of the questionnaire I measured the dependent variables that represent different aspects of English enjoyment. It consisted of 20 items that can be divided into two categories, as Dewaele and MacIntyre (2016: 220) found using a factor analysis:

- 1) *Social*: factors regarding the characteristics of the social setting, questions regarding the atmosphere and group relations in the class, the teacher, and the peers.
- 2) *Private*: Personal reactions to learning, inner thoughts, feelings, questions regarding personal experience and feelings.

In the second part, the students were asked to write down factors that in their opinion increase and decrease enjoyment in the English class. Finally, in the third part of the questionnaire, I asked the students about their background: age and school level, gender, the most recent English mark and what other foreign languages the participant studies.

### 3.3 Data processing and analysis

I processed and analyzed the data in two stages. First, I used basic statistical analysis for the quantitative data and secondly, I used qualitative content analysis to process the open-ended answers.

In the first part, I was looking for relations between the independent variables (school level, gender, English mastery and number of FLs studied) and the dependent variables regarding the enjoyment factors. I looked at the frequencies of the answers to each Likert scale item, which tell us if there is more enjoyment than non-enjoyment experienced by the students. I also confirmed the distribution of the dependent variables in the categories *Social* and *Private* using a factor analysis. Then, using a T-test I examined the effect of school level and gender on the dependent variables. In addition, I looked for correlations between the dependent variables and the participants' English mastery and the number of other languages studied. In chapter 4, I will report these findings in tables and figures.

In the second part, I used a content analysis to 1) reduce the data of the open-ended questions, 2) group the reduced data and 3) conceptualize it (Tuomi and Sarajärvi 2011:



108). Dörnyei (2007: 245, as cited in Dewaele and MacIntyre 2014: 255) explains, “the qualitative categories used in content analysis are not predetermined but are derived inductively from the data analysed”, which is how I formed the groupings of the data. I compared these conceptualized groups with the 20 Likert-scale items, looking for factors that did not come up in them. Looking at the open-ended answers from the point of view of improving the data collection instrument could be beneficial for further studies on the topic, if the factors mentioned in the open-ended questions were included in the English Enjoyment factors measured in the Likert-scale items.

## **4 FINDINGS**

In this chapter, I will present the findings of my study. First, I will examine the results of the quantitative analysis, both regarding general trends and in relation to each student variable to see if there are connections between them and the amount of enjoyment experienced. Secondly, I will present the categorization of the open-ended questions based on content analysis.

### **4.1 Quantitative analysis of closed questions**

The focus of the quantitative analysis was on finding out the extent to which the students experienced enjoyment and which background variables had an impact on it. The general trends aim at answering the former, and I will then move on to present, which background variables yielded statistically significant differences. Finally, I will present the distribution of the enjoyment items in two categories, *Social* and *Private*.

#### **4.1.1 General trends**

In general, the answer rate in the questionnaire was high: 65.0% of the Likert scale items were answered by all the participants. The range of the answers varied between 1 and 5, from 1=*strongly disagree* to 5=*strongly agree*. The frequency, minimum and maximum scores, mean and standard deviation of each enjoyment item are reported in table 2 below.

Table 2. General trends of the enjoyment items

Enjoyment factors	N	Min	Max	Mean	Standard Deviation
1. I can be creative	79	2	5	3.53	.875
2. I can laugh off embarrassing mistakes	78	1	5	3.82	.964
3. I don't get bored	79	1	5	3.27	.887
4. The teacher is friendly	79	3	5	4.29	.663
5. I feel as though I'm a different person during the English class	79	1	5	2.46	.984
6. I'm a worthy member of the English class	79	1	5	3.66	.749
7. I've learnt interesting things	79	1	5	3.99	.855
8. In class, I feel proud of my accomplishments	78	1	5	3.73	.949
9. It's a positive environment	78	1	5	4.10	.713
10. It's cool to know English	79	1	5	4.52	.749
11. The lessons are fun	79	1	5	3.34	.799
12. The peers are nice	78	1	5	4.06	.709
13. Making errors is part of the learning process	79	2	5	4.27	.635
14. The teacher is encouraging	78	2	5	4.13	.671
15. I enjoy the English lessons	79	1	5	3.54	.945
16. We laugh a lot	77	2	5	3.36	.916
17. There is a good atmosphere	79	2	5	3.96	.609
18. We form a tight group	79	1	5	3.85	.662
19. We have common 'legends', such as running jokes	79	1	5	2.96	1.171
20. The teacher is supportive	76	3	5	3.91	.593
<b>Total</b>				<b>3.74</b>	

On the Likert scale an average greater than 3 indicates enjoyment. As table 3 shows, students seem to experience more enjoyment than non-enjoyment, the mean of all the enjoyment factors being 3.74. It should be noted that item 5 *I feel as though I'm a different person during the English class* was the only item with a mean significantly lower than 3, thus it was an exception to the general trends of other items. The standard deviation

means the range of values on the Likert scale, the larger the number the wider the distribution.

#### 4.1.2 English enjoyment by the students

In addition to the general extent of enjoyment I was interested in finding out what factors affected the enjoyment. Below are the findings regarding gender, school level, English mastery and the number of other languages studied and their connection to English Enjoyment.

##### 4.1.2.1 Gender

According to the T-test, there were no statistically significant differences between the enjoyment experienced by boys or girls (for details, see Appendix 2).

##### 4.1.2.2 School level

When looking at the level of education, the T-test gave statistically significant results in two items, 16. *We laugh a lot* and 19. *We have common 'legends', such as running jokes*. In item 16, the mean of the secondary school students was 3.79 and of the upper secondary school students 3.02. In item 19, the figures were 3.61 and 2.42, respectively (figure 2).

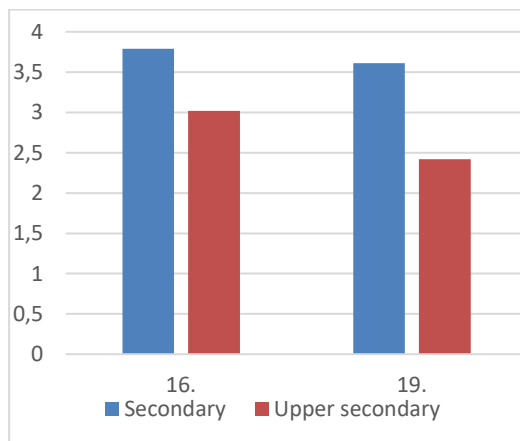


Figure 2. Distribution of items 16 and 19 by school level

Figure 2 indicates that these two enjoyment factors received significantly higher scores from the secondary school students, that is, they experienced more laughing and joking together with the group than the upper secondary school students.

#### 4.1.2.3 English mastery

Testing by nonparametric correlations it was found that seven enjoyment factors correlated strongly with the students' English mastery (table 3). This means that the higher their most recent English mark, the more enjoyment they had experienced regarding these factors.

Table 3. Correlation between English mastery and enjoyment

Enjoyment factor	Correlation Coefficient	Sig. (2-tailed)
1. I can be creative	-.074	.526
2. I can laugh off embarrassing mistakes	.207	.074
3. I don't get bored	.124	.285
<b>4. The teacher is friendly</b>	<b>.247*</b>	<b>.032</b>
5. I feel as though I'm a different person during the English class	-.124	.287
<b>6. I'm a worthy member of the English class</b>	<b>.263*</b>	<b>.022</b>
7. I've learnt interesting things	.119	.306
<b>8. In class, I feel proud of my accomplishments</b>	<b>.306**</b>	<b>.008</b>
<b>9. It's a positive environment</b>	<b>.230*</b>	<b>.047</b>
<b>10. It's cool to know English</b>	<b>.421**</b>	<b>.000</b>
11. The lessons are fun	.154	.183
12. The peers are nice	.199	.086
13. Making errors is part of the learning process	.180	.119
14. The teacher is encouraging	.217	.062
<b>15. I enjoy the English lessons</b>	<b>.233*</b>	<b>.043</b>
16. We laugh a lot	.175	.136
17. There is a good atmosphere	.128	.271
<b>18. We form a tight group</b>	<b>.234*</b>	<b>.042</b>
19. We have common 'legends', such as running jokes	.097	.403
20. The teacher is supportive	.155	.189

\*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

In the table, the significant correlations are marked in bold and with an asterisk. The figures indicate that these seven factors are perceived as bringing more enjoyment the

better the students' English mastery was, based on the most recent mark they had written down in the questionnaire. Factors 8 and 10 are marked with two asterisks, that is, the correlation is the strongest in them: feeling proud of one's accomplishments and considering it cool to know English were thus the two most significant factors that were affected by the students' level of English mastery.

#### 4.1.2.4 Number of other languages studied

According to the nonparametric correlations test, there was no statistically significant correlation between the extent of enjoyment experienced and the number of other languages studied by the students (see Appendix 3 for details).

However, there was a correlation between the number of other languages studied and the level of English mastery: that is, the students with higher marks in English were more likely to study more other languages as well (see table 4).

Table 4. Correlation between English mastery and the number of other languages

Number of other languages studied	English mastery	
	Correlation Coefficient	Sig. (2-tailed)
	.521**	.000

#### 4.1.3 Social and Private English enjoyment factors

The factor analysis confirmed the distribution of the enjoyment factors into two categories, *Social* and *Private*. Question 5, *Tunnen olevani ihan eri ihminen englannintunnilla kuin muiden aineiden tunneilla (I feel as though I'm a different person during the English class)* showed a value of -0.064 in the reliability test of these two categories, that is, statistically it did not fit either category and was therefore left out. When left out, the reliability was excellent in both categories: for the *Private* factors  $\alpha=0.855$  and for the *Social* factors  $\alpha=0.832$  as measured by Cronbach alpha coefficient

(values greater than 0.7 considered acceptable). The mean for each factor can be seen in tables 5 and 6.

Table 5. Social enjoyment factors: means

Enjoyment factor - Social	Mean
I can laugh off embarrassing mistakes	3.82
The teacher is friendly	4.29
It's a positive environment	4.10
The peers are nice	4.06
The teacher is encouraging	4.13
We laugh a lot	3.36
There is a good atmosphere	3.96
We form a tight group	3.85
We have common 'legends', such as running jokes	2.96
The teacher is supportive	3.91
<b>Total</b>	<b>3.85</b>

Table 6. Private enjoyment factors: means

Enjoyment factor - Private	Mean
I can be creative	3.53
I don't get bored	3.27
I'm a worthy member of the English class	3.66
I've learnt interesting things	3.99
In class, I feel proud of my accomplishments	3.73
It's cool to know English	4.52
The lessons are fun	3.34
Making errors is part of the learning process	4.27
I enjoy the English lessons	3.54
<b>Total</b>	<b>3.76</b>

As the tables above indicate, the students gave slightly higher scores for questions regarding the *Social* enjoyment factors. Moreover, testing by nonparametric correlations it was found that there was a correlation between the student's level of English mastery and both the groups *Social* and *Private*, as well as between the groups *Social* and *Private* (table 7).

Table 7. Correlations between English mastery, Social and Private factors

		English mastery	Private factors
English mastery	Correlation Coefficient Sig. (2-tailed)	1.000 .	.249* .030
Private factors	Correlation Coefficient Sig. (2-tailed)	.249* .030	1.000 .
Social factors	Correlation Coefficient Sig. (2-tailed)	.297** .009	.578** .000

\*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

\*\*. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

This means that the better the student was at English, the more enjoyment he or she had experienced on both *Private* and *Social* factors. This is in a way linked to the other strong correlation found here between the groups *Social* and *Private*: if a student gave high scores to *Private* factors, he or she also gave high scores to *Social* factors (table 7).

To sum up the findings of the quantitative analysis, only the students' school level and their English mastery showed statistically significant connections to the extent of the enjoyment experienced. Secondary school students experienced more enjoyment regarding two of the *Social* factors, but in general *Social* factors seemed to bring slightly more enjoyment to the students than *Private* factors. The better the English mark, however, the more enjoyment the students had experienced regarding both *Social* and *Private* factors, and in general these two categories correlated positively with each other.

#### 4.2 Qualitative analysis of open-ended questions

The content analysis resulted in forming three categories of factors that were claimed to increase and decrease enjoyment: 1) *Social*, 2) *Private* and 3) *Other*. From these categories, in this section I will raise points that the students mentioned to increase or decrease enjoyment in their opinion, and that were not explicitly included in the Likert-scale items of the questionnaire. In addition, I will discuss the significance of these items in developing the data collection instrument.

To be able to contrast the open-ended answers to the Likert-scale items on a more general, thematic level, I grouped the Likert-scale items into themes within the two

factors found in factor analysis, *Social* and *Private*. The themes of the *Social* group were: 1) reacting to mistakes, 2) the teacher, 3) the peers, 4) positive atmosphere, and 5) group spirit. Within the *Private* group there were the following themes: 1) interest, 2) accomplishment and pride, 3) feeling of being a member of a group, 4) creativity, 5) tolerating imperfection, and 6) positive emotions. The following sections present the findings of the analysis of the open-ended questions regarding factors that differ from the themes found in the closed questions grouped above.

#### **4.2.1 Additional factors that increase or decrease enjoyment: students' experiences**

The findings of the content analysis are presented below, grouped in the three categories that arose naturally: *Social*, *Private*, and *Other*. General descriptions of the answers are supported with samples of the participants' answers.

##### **4.2.1.1 Social factors**

Of the students, 5.1% mentioned the teacher as a factor that they felt to increase enjoyment in class, but all specified it to the context of receiving positive feedback from the teacher, whereas the Likert-scale items only mentioned teachers in terms of their friendliness, encouragement, and support.

There was another factor that 7.9% of the students brought up: communication. They felt that being able to interact in English and being given opportunities to have conversations in class brought them enjoyment. The following examples were originally in Finnish and have been translated into English.

*Se, että pystyn käyttämään kieltä ihmisten kanssa kommunikoimiseen.  
The fact that I am able to use the language in communicating with people*

All the *Social* factors that were experienced as decreasing enjoyment were addressed within the themes of the Likert-scale enjoyment items.



#### 4.2.1.2 Private factors

The biggest influence in increasing enjoyment in the students' opinion was learning as such. This was not explicitly mentioned in the closed questions, but 39.7% of the participants wrote it down specifically, also making the difference between learning and knowing. The majority wrote down "*uusien asioiden oppiminen*" ("learning new things"), and some specified it a bit more, for example:

*Oman virheen tajuaminen → sen korjaaminen ja sen kautta oppiminen.*  
*Realizing your own mistake → correcting it and learning through that*

Also, 15.4% of the participants mentioned the ability to express oneself as an enjoyment-increasing factor, and 5.1% mentioned the experience of realizing the development of their English skills.

Also in this group, the factors that were experienced to decrease enjoyment were the same as the Likert-scale item groupings.

#### 4.2.1.3 Other factors

Most of the other factors were related to the contents of the English lessons. Of the students, 16.7% mentioned specific classroom tasks as increasing enjoyment, some in a very concrete manner such as:

*Joidenkin outojen ja vanhojen englanninkielisten sanojen alkuperien selvittäminen*  
*Finding out the origins of some weird and old English words*

and some as more general statements, for example:

*Melkein kaikki muut tehtävät, jotka tehdään toiminnallisesti*  
*Almost all the other tasks that are done in an active way*

In addition, variety in the classroom tasks and new teaching methods were mentioned by 6.4% of the students as increasing enjoyment in their experience.

The number of students who mentioned specific classroom tasks or lesson contents as decreasing enjoyment was as high as 64.4%. The tasks that were experienced as enjoyment-decreasing were described as boring, too long, repetitive, too difficult, or too easy; there was quite a lot of variation. Also a few specific tasks such as presentations or written assignments were mentioned. The following are examples of the participants' answers:

*Opettajain pitkät selittelyt asioista.  
The teacher's long explanations about things*

*Pikkutarkkojen asioiden opettelu "poikkeuksen poikkeuksen poikkeus"  
Learning pedantic things 'an exception to an exception to an exception'*

In conclusion, there were a few additional factors that the students mentioned regarding the enjoyment experienced in class, factors that were not included in the Likert-scale items of the questionnaire. These included positive feedback, communication, learning new things, expressing oneself, specific tasks, and varied teaching methods. Most of these additional factors were very close to the Likert-scale items, but perhaps carried nuances that were not transmitted in the existing items. These factors found in the content analysis could add more perspective to the questionnaire in finding out if and to what extent English enjoyment is experienced. They could also help in creating a more versatile idea of what English enjoyment is, as the open-ended questions specifically gathered answers regarding English lessons, and what the factors are that increase or decrease it.

## **5 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION**

This study has examined the phenomenon of English enjoyment in the Finnish classroom context, aiming at providing an overview of the situation in a context where the topic has yet to be studied further. The mainly quantitative study focused on finding out the amount and type of enjoyment experienced by the students depending on their background, including genders, school levels, English mastery levels and the

number of languages studied. The additional qualitative part of this study aimed at improving the data collection instrument which based on these findings could be modified to provide deeper knowledge on the topic. The research instrument in this study was a questionnaire consisting of 20 standard 5-point Likert scale items and two open-ended questions about the factors that the students had experienced to increase or decrease enjoyment in the English class.

The study was adapted from Dewaele and MacIntyre's (2014) worldwide study on the topic of FLE and thus largely follows its structure, but the two had some differences (for details, see sections 2.3 and 4.1). Firstly, my study focused on only one foreign language and only enjoyment whereas Dewaele and MacIntyre (2014) compared and contrasted it with anxiety and they studied a wider variety of foreign languages. Although Dewaele and MacIntyre (2014: 242) note that it would be better to compare and contrast positive and negative emotions in one and the same study instead of an emotion and its absence, as its interpretation can be ambiguous, I chose to exclude this comparison from my study due to limitations in length. Also, I chose to exclude some of the participant variables as I did not see all of them relevant in a country-specific context. Moreover, using Dewaele and MacIntyre's (2016) division of the Likert scale items in the categories *Social* and *Private* clarified the description of the type of enjoyment experienced by the students.

Even though not all the points of focus of this study coincided exactly with the only previous study on the topic by Dewaele and MacIntyre (2014), I will now examine some similarities and differences between their and my findings. This study's quantitative analysis resulted in similar findings as in Dewaele and MacIntyre's study (2014): enjoyment was experienced to a significant extent among students. As for the differences between the participants, there were slight differences between the findings, which might also be explained by the relatively small sample of participants in this study. First, in this study statistically significant differences between genders were not found, whereas Dewaele and MacIntyre (2014) found women to have experienced more enjoyment. Comparing the school levels, I focused more on the type

of enjoyment instead of the extent of it, and while Dewaele and MacIntyre (2014) found that more advanced level students had experienced more enjoyment, this study revealed that the enjoyment experienced on secondary school level comes from more *Social* factors than on upper secondary school level. Both studies found that higher mastery of the language in question brings more enjoyment but my study did not find statistically significant differences in the extent of enjoyment experienced by the students that had studied more languages than others.

As for the findings of the qualitative analysis, almost all the factors found in this study coincided with the main themes in the descriptions of enjoyable episodes found by Dewaele and MacIntyre (2014). Firstly, specific classroom activities received a significant number of mentions in both studies, and in this study, especially as possibly decreasing the enjoyment experienced in class. Secondly, teacher recognition and authentic use of the language from the category *Social* factors came up in both studies and thirdly, learning and realizing one's own progress were found to increase enjoyment in both studies. This indicates that these factors are significant contributors to the extent of enjoyment experienced by language learners, and thus they could be incorporated more explicitly in future studies on the topic.

Explanations for these findings are various and several interpretations could be made based on them. Firstly, enjoyment being experienced in schools is a very positive finding supporting the strong position and appreciation of the Finnish education system. It could also indicate the perceived high status of English in the country, compared to Swedish, for instance, which despite its official status might not be as highly valued as a tool for communication. Secondly, the lack of difference between genders could be a sign of equal attention to the needs of both male and female students. Thirdly, the fact that upper secondary school students experience less *Social* enjoyment than secondary school students could derive from the course-based nature of upper secondary school, where the peers change with each course every two months or so, and so students do not necessarily have time to form tight group bonds. In secondary school, however, students know each other better and mostly study with

the same group for three years, which could explain the increased enjoyment in *Social* factors. Fourthly, increased enjoyment with better success in the language could be associated with the ideals of the society, where hard work and accomplishments are praised. Also, it could mean that students value knowledge or are driven by achievement. Finally, the possibilities brought by advanced technology and globalization could affect the motives behind learning the language: the demand for versatile classroom activities and communication could indicate that students are aware of the universal possibilities and uses of English, recognizing its status in Finland and the benefits of knowing it.

Due to the small scale of this study and the relatively small number of participants, the findings do not compare exactly to the ones in the study by Dewaele and MacIntyre (2014). Also, they cannot be generalized to the whole of Finland, but rather provide a suggestive overview on the situation in the Finnish context. However, even on a small scale, this study brings the topic into the Finnish context where it had not been studied before, and it raises the issue of positive emotions in the school environment up for discussion, which is a very important factor considering its implications for students' well-being. If this study was to be replicated, the translation of the questionnaire could be done with more precision and the issue of well-being could be addressed more profoundly in the theoretical review. Also, the paper-and-pencil questionnaire could be substituted with an electronic one, as it could facilitate the data collection process. As for the successes, the basic statistical analysis in this study was detailed and informative, but still concise and provided new information that could be applied in future studies.

The findings of this study could be applied to practice, for instance, in planning classroom activities. Students seem to have strong opinions on the type of tasks they find enjoyable, and the teacher could help the students find enjoyment in tasks that they might dislike (see section 4.2.1.3). A special focus could be put on communication and self-expression, as they were brought up rather frequently (see sections 4.2.1.1 and 4.2.1.2). Also, the teacher could support and encourage the students more with positive

feedback, considering that the feeling of accomplishment increases enjoyment significantly (see section 4.1.2.3). Moreover, upper secondary school English lessons could include more activities that improve the group spirit or help the students get to know each other, as the social bond between classmates was found to be a significant source of enjoyment for secondary school students (see section 4.1.2.2).

In the future, this topic could be studied more widely in the context of Finland, and developing the data collection instrument could facilitate applying the research method and the instrument to other foreign languages, for example, as well as other school subjects. Perhaps even a longitudinal study on the effects of enjoyment on students' well-being could be conducted. Moreover, the methods in future studies could be also more qualitative: the nature of the topic as a personal experience could result in deeper insights, for instance, in a study interviewing the participants.

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## APPENDICES

### Appendix 1. The questionnaire.

Hei!

Opiskelen englanninopettajaksi Jyväskylän yliopistossa ja teen parhaillaan pienimuotoista tutkimusta. Sen aiheena on ilo englannintunneilla Suomessa, ja haluan selvittää, kokevatko oppilaat tätä iloa.

Kyselyssä on kolme osiota. Ensimmäisessä on väittämiä englannintunteihin liittyen, ja sinun tehtävänäsi olisi valita mielestäsi sopivin vastausvaihtoehto. Seuraavaksi kysyn sinulta omista kokemuksistasi, ja lopuksi muutamia taustatietoja. Vastaathan huolellisesti ja ajatuksen kanssa jokaiseen osuuteen!

Vastaaminen tapahtuu nimettömästi, eli tutkimuksen tulosten raportoinnista ei selviä mitään henkilökohtaisia asioita sinusta.

Täyttämällä tämän kyselylomakkeen annat suostumuksesi siihen, että vastauksiasi käytetään osana tutkimusta.

Kiitos jo etukäteen vaivannäöstäsi! 😊

#### 1. Mielenpitoja englannintunneista

Mieti **englannin** oppituntejasi tämän syksyn osalta. Ympyröi väittämään mielestäsi sopivin vaihtoehto oman kokemuksesi perusteella.

	Täysin eri mieltä	Eri mieltä	Ei samaa eikä eri mieltä	Samaa mieltä	Täysin samaa mieltä
<b>k1 Onko oppitunneilla mahdollisuuksia käyttää luovuutta?</b>	1	2	3	4	5
<b>k2 Voin nauraa noloille virheille, joita teen englannin kielessä</b>	1	2	3	4	5
<b>k3 En tylsisty</b>	1	2	3	4	5
<b>k4 Opettaja on ystävällinen</b>	1	2	3	4	5



<b>k5 Tunnen olevani ihan eri ihminen englannintunnilla kuin muiden aineiden tunneilla</b>	1	2	3	4	5
<b>k6 Koen, että minua ja osallistumistani arvostetaan englannintunnilla</b>	1	2	3	4	5
<b>k7 Olen oppinut mielenkiintoisia asioita</b>	1	2	3	4	5
<b>k8 Olen ylpeä saavutuksistani oppitunnilla</b>	1	2	3	4	5
<b>k9 Luokassamme on positiivinen ilmapiiri</b>	1	2	3	4	5
<b>k10 Englannin osaaminen on kivaa</b>	1	2	3	4	5
<b>k11 Tunnit ovat hauskoja</b>	1	2	3	4	5
<b>k12 Luokkakaverit ovat kivoja</b>	1	2	3	4	5
<b>k13 Virheiden tekeminen on osa englannin kielen oppimista</b>	1	2	3	4	5
<b>k14 Opettaja on kannustava</b>	1	2	3	4	5
<b>k15 Nautin englannintunneista</b>	1	2	3	4	5
<b>k16 Nauramme paljon</b>	1	2	3	4	5
<b>k17 Oppitunnilla on hyvä ilmapiiri</b>	1	2	3	4	5
<b>k18 Meillä on hyvä ryhmähenki englannintunnilla</b>	1	2	3	4	5
<b>k19 Meillä on yhteisiä juttuja luokan kesken, kuten sisäpiirivitsejä</b>	1	2	3	4	5

<b>k20 Opettaja tukee minua</b>	1	2	3	4	5
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## 2. Omia kokemuksiasi englannintunneilta

Mitkä asiat tuottavat sinulle iloa englannintunnilla?

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Millaiset asiat eivät tee sinua iloiseksi englannintunnilla?

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## 3. Taustatiedot

t1 Käyn yläkoulua \_\_\_\_\_ lukiota \_\_\_\_\_

t2 Olen \_\_\_\_\_ luokalla

t3 Olen tyttö \_\_\_\_\_ poika \_\_\_\_\_

t4 Olen \_\_\_\_\_ vuotta vanha

t5 Viimeksi saamasi englannin arvosana (viimeisimmältä kurssilta) \_\_\_\_\_

t6 Mitä muita vieraita kieliä opiskelet englannin lisäksi? -

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## Appendix 2. Group statistics: gender

Group Statistics					
	t3	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
k1	1	44	3,43	,900	,138
	2	35	3,66	,838	,142
k2	1	44	3,66	1,055	,159
	2	34	4,03	,797	,137
k3	1	44	3,30	,904	,136
	2	35	3,23	,877	,148
k4	1	44	4,39	,618	,093
	2	35	4,17	,707	,119
k5	1	44	2,45	,975	,147
	2	35	2,46	1,010	,171
k6	1	44	3,75	,751	,113
	2	35	3,54	,741	,125
k7	1	44	4,02	,927	,140
	2	35	3,94	,765	,129
k8	1	43	3,72	,882	,134
	2	35	3,74	1,039	,176
k9	1	44	4,02	,762	,115
	2	34	4,21	,641	,110
k10	1	44	4,61	,579	,087
	2	35	4,40	,914	,154
k11	1	44	3,43	,759	,114
	2	35	3,23	,843	,143
k12	1	43	4,05	,722	,110
	2	35	4,09	,702	,119
k13	1	44	4,23	,677	,102
	2	35	4,31	,583	,098
k14	1	43	4,14	,675	,103
	2	35	4,11	,676	,114
k15	1	44	3,64	,892	,134
	2	35	3,43	1,008	,170
k16	1	42	3,26	,912	,141
	2	35	3,49	,919	,155
k17	1	44	3,98	,590	,089
	2	35	3,94	,639	,108
k18	1	44	3,77	,677	,102
	2	35	3,94	,639	,108
k19	1	44	2,93	1,228	,185
	2	35	3,00	1,111	,188
k20	1	42	3,90	,617	,095
	2	34	3,91	,570	,098

### Appendix 3. Correlations: number of other languages studied

Correlations			
	Spearman's rho		
	t6		
	Correlation Coefficient	Sig. (2-tailed)	N
k1	-,198	,082	78
k2	-,035	,761	77
k3	-,082	,475	78
k4	,091	,426	78
k5	-,118	,302	78
k6	,156	,172	78
k7	-,061	,598	78
k8	,120	,300	77
k9	-,106	,358	77
k10	,131	,254	78
k11	,075	,514	78
k12	,168	,145	77
k13	,063	,584	78
k14	,056	,627	77
k15	,086	,456	78
k16	,071	,541	76
k17	,062	,593	78
k18	,041	,720	78
k19	,145	,207	78
k20	-,044	,709	75