STUDENTS' CONCEPTIONS OF ASSESSMENT IN FINNISH EFL CLASSROOMS

Bachelor's Thesis
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Humanistinen tiedekunta	Kieli- ja viestintätieteiden laitos

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Työn nimi – Title
Students' Conceptions of Assessment in Finnish EFL classrooms

Oppiaine – Subject	Työn laji – Level
Englanti	Kandidaatintutkielma

Aika – Month and year	Sivumäärä – Number of pages
Huhtikuu 2017	28 + 2 liitettä

Tiivistelmä – Abstract

Kielitaidon arviointia on tutkittu paljon, mutta oppilaiden mielipiteitä arvioinnista on tutkittu huomattavasti vähemmän. Koska opettajien tekemä arviointi kuitenkin vaikuttaa eniten oppilaisiin, on tärkeä huomioida myös heidän mielipiteensä sekä kielten opetuksessa että kielitaidon arviointia tutkittaessa.

Tämän tutkielman tarkoituksena oli selvittää, minkälaisia mielipiteitä lukiolaisilla on englannin kurssien arvioinnista. Tutkimuskysymykset koskivat muun muassa sitä, pitävätkö opiskelijat arviointia oppimista ja opetusta edistävänä vai turhana, arvioidaanko heitä heidän mielestään tarpeeksi ja keskittyykö arviointi liikaa ylioppilaskokeisiin. Tutkielman aineisto kerättiin kyselylomakkeella, joka jaettiin 30 abiturientille. Aineisto analysoitiin osin tilastollisin menetelmin ja osin sisällönanalyysilla.

Tutkielma paljasti, että useimmat opiskelijat ajattelivat arvioinnin parantavan heidän englannin oppimistaan ja englannin opettajien opetusta. Aineistosta myös paljastui, että mitä turhempana opiskelijat näkivät arvioinnin, sitä huonompi englannin arvosana heillä oli. Lisäksi suurin osa opiskelijoista koki saavansa tarpeeksi arviointia ja oli sitä mieltä, että arviointi ei keskity liikaa ylioppilaskokeisiin.

Vaikka tutkielman tulokset eivät ole yleistettävissä pienen otoksen vuoksi, viittaavat ne kuitenkin siihen, että opiskelijoilla on runsaasti mielipiteitä arvioinnista. Englannin opettajien olisi hyvä ottaa tämä huomioon suunnitellessaan englannin kurssien arviointimenetelmiä ja arvioidessaan opiskelijoita.

Asiasanat – Keywords English, teaching, assessment, conceptions

Säilytyspaikka – Depository JYX

Muita tietoja – Additional information

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1 INTRODUCTION

The assessment of foreign language learning is an important issue to study because assessment has a significant impact on language teaching and learning (Norris 2008: 2). Assessment tells students what they are good at, what their weaker language skills are and how they can improve their skills. Although assessment is constantly present when language teaching and learning are discussed, some uses of assessment, such as national testing or entrance examinations, have been studied more widely than some other uses (Norris 2008: 5). One of those uses is students' perceptions of assessment (SCoA) and how they affect language teaching and learning. An extensive series of studies on SCoA was conducted in New Zealand (Hirschfield and Brown 2009: 30) but the studies did not focus on language assessment but on mathematics and reading comprehension (Weekers, Brown and Veldkamp 2009: 136). In addition, students' conceptions of assessment have not been studied in Finland before. That is why, in the present study, I will study SCoA and how it occurs in English as a foreign language (EFL) Finnish classrooms.

The purpose of the present study was to find out what Finnish upper secondary school students thought about assessment in their EFL courses, if they felt they were assessed enough and whether the assessment in their courses was too focused on the matriculation examination. In the present study a questionnaire was adapted from the SCoA inventory in the New Zealand studies (for more information, see section 3.2.1). The questionnaire was then distributed to 30 Finnish upper secondary school students in their EFL classes.

Chapter 2 defines language assessment and discusses different types of assessment and the New Zealand studies more in depth. Chapter 3 demonstrates the aims of the present study, discusses how the data was collected and analyzed and reports on the findings of the present study. Finally, chapter 4 discusses the results of the study, compares them to previous studies, evaluates the present study and suggests new research topics based on the present study.

2 BACKGROUND

In this chapter I will define what language assessment is, what kind of assessment tools teachers have at their disposal and what types of assessment there is. In addition, I will discuss previous studies on language assessment as perceived by students and demonstrate how and why I will utilize those studies in the present study.

2.1 Defining language assessment

Assessment is an ambiguous term since its definition has developed over the years (Norris 2008:1). Over 20 years ago Bachman (1990: 18) remarked that 'assessment', 'measurement' and 'test' are terms which can be used interchangeably. In more recent years, however, these terms are not usually used synonymously. As Douglas (2010: 73) reports, teachers can evaluate their students without measurement or tests. The same point can be made about assessment as conferences, portfolios and self- and peer assessment can all be used in assessing language learning instead of or in addition to tests (Douglas 2010: 74-75). This raises the question of how assessment then is defined. When defining language assessment, it is important to consider the context and purpose of language assessment and define what good language assessment is.

Purpura (2016: 191) defines *language learning assessment* or *language assessment* (the two terms are used interchangeably in the present study) as data collection from tests and/or other activities which show language learners' language skills. These activities can entail, for example, class observation, homework, tasks done in class and portfolios. Brown (2008: 13) outlines assessment in a similar way by saying that assessment measures students' abilities, but he adds that assessment also evaluates the validity of teaching and the curriculum. I would argue that this is evident in assessment, especially when there are discrepancies in teaching or curriculum. If all students get poor learning results, there must be some external factors that contribute to those results.

It is important to consider what the purpose of language assessment is when defining language assessment. One of the simplest definitions of the purpose of language assessment is to keep a record of learners' language performance and to make decisions based on those records (Purpura 2016: 191). Assessment helps, for example, to determine whether students have learned enough or if they need to redo the course or year level. It also helps teachers to determine which students need more support for language learning and which students might

benefit from more challenging tasks and assignments. Furthermore, assessment makes students accountable for their learning because it shows how they have performed in class and gives them and their parents concrete information on how they have progressed (Brown 2008: 153). Additionally, language learning assessment shows society whether students are capable of using a language in professional contexts (Purpura 2016: 190). Workplaces, for example, want to know if their future employees have the necessary skills to interact with customers. Thus language assessment may have a significant impact on students' lives.

Language learning assessment, however, has also some conflicting purposes. Assessment is often used both to improve students' learning and to categorize students (Brown 2008: 13). The issue of which of these matters is emphasized is highly dependent on the context. On the one hand, teachers' aim is usually to promote the learning and language skills of their students, but on the other hand, for universities and workplaces it is more important to receive information about students' language skills for enrollment and employment purposes. The purpose of assessment for improvement can also be debated; whether it is meant to measure students' growth and learning or to measure how well they have learned the curriculum (Brown, McInerney and Liem 2009: 2). Furthermore, the challenge of teachers is to find a balance between the needs of the curriculum and the needs of the students when the curriculum is reformed (Norris 2008: 238). Because the Finnish national core curriculum for upper secondary schools (Lukion opetussuunnitelman perusteet or LOPS 2015 for short) has been recently revised, teachers may struggle to find assessment methods that support the new curriculum in a way that benefits their students the most.

Good language learning assessment consists of many different factors. Good assessment has a positive impact on students and their future instead of discouraging and disregarding students (Norris 2008: 2). Moreover, good language assessment encourages students to aspire for better language skills. Assessment tasks should also motivate students to participate in the assessment process (Brown et al. 2009: 3). Consequently, it might benefit students more to use assessment methods that interest them, such as doing essays or videos about their hobbies, instead of using traditional tests that ask them to circle the right choice or to translate words and phrases. Norris (2008: 226) adds that validity evaluation is something that is tailored to the particular educational context to meet the contextual purposes of assessment. Therefore, if it is important for English courses in Finnish upper secondary schools to prepare students for the matriculation examination, the course assessment should reflect that by, for example,

using some of the same methods of assessment as the English matriculation examination uses. Of course the students' skill level has to be adjusted to the purposes of the assessment, as well; first year students cannot be expected to have the knowledge and skills to be graded by using tasks taken from the matriculation examination but rather by using something more suitable for their skill level. All in all, good assessment inspires students to learn and takes into consideration their skill level and interests.

Good language learning assessment also promotes language learning. Keurulainen (2013: 38) argues that assessment should be done "for learning" instead of "of learning". In other words, language teachers should not only concentrate on the outcomes of language learning but also give students feedback on their learning process and how to improve it. This is also mentioned in LOPS (2015: 228) where it is stated that the purpose of student evaluation is to promote the learning of students. In fact, Brown (2008: 155) reports that students and teachers who use assessment to improve their learning and teaching have better learning results than those who do not. Thus, in addition to measuring language skills, assessment should be used to improve language learning.

Assessment can also cause students anxiety. As Norris (2008: 2) states, assessment can either have a positive impact on students and their future or it can discourage and disregard them. Furthermore, as Brown et al. (2009: 2) report, because assessment affects how students are seen by themselves, their peers, their teachers and parents, teachers assume that it is in students' self-interest to aspire for good grades. Brown et al. further argue that the anxiety this notion causes for students is often ignored as something constructive in small portions. However, teachers need to also consider how the role of assessment changes during students' school career. As Brown et al. (2009: 8) point out, in primary school assessment has usually only a small impact on pupils' lives and its main purpose is to show parents that their children have been to school and learned something. However, when pupils go to lower secondary school and upper secondary school, the meaning of assessment rapidly grows. The assessment they receive from their courses prepare them for different national tests, for example, in the Finnish context for the matriculation examination and it can and will affect their future. This is likely to cause negative views on assessment in students. (Brown et al. 2009: 8) Thus, teachers should be careful that their assessment does not cause their students anxiety.

2.1.1 Assessment tools

As already mentioned in section 2.1, conferences, portfolios and self- and peer assessment can all be used when assessing language learning (Douglas 2010:74-75). However, as Keurulainen (2013: 38) argues, in many Finnish classrooms the teacher is still the main or even the only source of assessment. This is why I focus on teacher assessment in the present study and I do not consider self- and peer assessment in it. Next I am going to discuss the different aspects of using standardized testing and the different assessment methods teachers have at their disposal.

The use of standardized language tests in assessment is a divided topic in the field of language assessment. Norris (2008: 2) argues that instead of using standardized tests which often measure the ability to do well in tests language assessment should be measured based on authentic samples of student work. Nevertheless, in Finland students still have to take matriculation examinations at the end of upper secondary school. It can, therefore, be argued that the use of language tests is necessary in Finnish upper secondary schools where another important part of the assessment in English courses is to prepare students for the English matriculation examination. However, LOPS (2015: 108) does specify that feedback should be given on student's progress in different language skills and regarding such goals as language learning skills and preparedness to act in different environments using the target language. The issue is whether or not teachers put these guidelines into practice. Norris (2008:219), in fact, highlights that educators should take responsibility for their assessment instead of relying on standard testing. In contrast, Douglas (2010: 1) argues that language tests are used to make assessment fair to students, to give them equal opportunities to prove their knowledge and to get an "outside" view of the students. Thus standardized language tests can have either a positive or a negative effect on language assessment according to different researchers.

Douglas (2010: 69-79) reviews different ways of assessing language skills. Firstly, he discusses how in dynamic assessment a teacher does not focus on what a learner has learned up until the present moment but instead tries to evaluate what he or she can learn in the future with the help of the teacher. Thus dynamic assessment blurs the line between assessment and teaching. Secondly, he defines task-based assessment as an assessment type that can range from essays to group discussions. Thirdly, he adds communicative language tests as an alternative to traditional language tests. Communicative language tests measure students'

"ability to use language for communication in specific contexts" (p. 69). Finally, Douglas (2010: 69-79) also specifies that these different ways of assessing language learners can vary whether language courses and tests have a general or specific purpose. For example, in Finnish upper secondary schools there is often an English course that is meant to develop and measure speaking skills. Courses like this, in turn, use assessment methods suitable for testing oral language skills such as oral tests and discussions. Therefore, there are many ways of assessing language learners besides language testing.

2.1.2 Formative and summative assessment

When language assessment is studied, it is important to consider whether the focus of the study is on formative or summative assessment. Douglas (2010: 72) defines *formative assessment* as something that either informs students of their progress or helps teachers develop their lessons and courses. He also adds that the results in formative assessment are usually given to the students in the form of a list showing their weaknesses and strengths. He then defines *summative assessment*, in contrast, as something that measures achievement and is usually given in the form of scores from tests and grades at the end of the course although corrective feedback may be also given. Next I will explain why I choose to focus the present study on summative assessment.

The reason why I focus the present study on summative assessment is because summative assessment plays a vital role in Finnish language education. As LOPS (2015: 108) remarks, in Finnish upper secondary schools most courses are evaluated with grades on a scale from four to ten, which is why teachers need to use summative assessment in their teaching. Although Keurulainen (2013: 37-38) argues that in the past decades assessment has moved more from summative assessment to formative assessment, he also observers that many Finnish teachers still think of assessment as only giving grades. Even though LOPS (2015: 108) states that in every foreign language course students should be given assessment about their progress in different stages of the learning process, it is still uncertain whether teachers have yet included this in their assessment. Thus the aim of the present study is to find out what students think of summative assessment in their English courses.

2.2 Previous studies with the Student Conceptions' of Assessment (SCoA) inventory

The Students' Conceptions of Assessment (SCoA) inventory has been used in a series of studies conducted in New Zealand (Hirschfield and Brown 2009: 30). These studies used the

SCoA inventory which includes a number of statements concerning assessment (the first version SCoA inventory has 50 statements and the fifth version has 33 statements) that students can either agree or disagree with on a given scale (Brown 2008: 120; Weekers et al. 2009: 144). The first and the second version of SCoA inventory (SCoA-I and SCoA-II) were used in empirical studies in 2003 and 2004, respectively (Weekers et al. 2009: 140). The SCoA-I study had 1,234 participants who were students from year levels 9 to 12, approximately 13-16-year-olds (Brown 2008: 123), whereas the SCoA-II study had 3,504 participants of the same age (Brown 2008: 127). Both studies compare students' perceptions of assessment to their academic success in math and reading (Brown 2008: 137). Studies using versions three and four of SCoA, in contrast, had a smaller number of participants (Brown 2008: 120). The fifth version of SCoA inventory (SCoA-V) was used in a study in 2006 (Weekers et al. 2009: 140). In the following paragraphs I will report on the results from the New Zealand studies, explain the different perceptions of assessment and explain why I will use SCoA-V in the present study.

A meta-analysis of the previous studies conducted on assessment revealed four major categories of how students perceive assessment (Weekers et al. 2009: 135). The first category is labeled as *Improvement* where students perceive assessment as something that enhances their learning and teachers' teaching (Weekers et al. 2009: 135). Weekers et al. (2009:136) report on the findings concerning this category with different SCoA inventories. Firstly, the SCoA-I study showed that students who perceived assessment as useful feedback and a means of motivating had better learning results in mathematics. Secondly, the SCoA-II study showed that when students thought of assessment as something that makes them accountable for their learning, they had better results on reading comprehension. Finally, studies with the SCoA inventory seem to show that students are aware of that assessment is used to improve their learning and teachers' teaching.

The second category that was found among students' perceptions of assessment is labeled as *Affect*. In this category students think that assessment has a positive impact on their relationships with other students and their emotional health (Weekers et al. 2009: 135). Previous studies with the SCoA inventory seem to reveal that the more positive feelings students have on assessment process, the weaker academic learning results they have (Weekers et al. 2009: 138).

The third category of perceived assessment is labeled as *Irrelevant*. In this category students believe that assessment can have a negative or irrelevant impact on students or that assessment is unfair to students (Weekers et al. 2009: 135). Previous studies with the SCoA inventory indicate that negative or irrelevant attitudes towards assessment do not have a direct correlation with learning results (Weekers et al. 2009: 139).

The fourth category of how assessment is perceived is labeled as *External factors*. In this category students believe that assessment is used to measure external factors such as the quality of schools and their intellect (Weekers et al. 2009: 135). Results from the first five SCoA studies indicate that the more students associate assessment with external factors that they cannot control, the worse their learning results are (Weekers et al. 2009: 137).

I have a number of reasons for using the SCoA inventory in the present study. Firstly, the validity of the SCoA inventory has been studied. As Weekers et al. (2009: 152) find in their study on the SCoA inventory, "the SCoA items consist of four correlated but distinct dimensions". Secondly, previous studies done with the SCoA inventory have only compared students' perceptions of assessment in relation to performance in mathematics and reading comprehension (Weekers et al. 2009: 136). Thus, the inventory has not before been used in a study where students' perceptions of assessment are compared in relation to their language skills. Finally, the SCoA inventory has not been used in the Finnish context before. That is why the SCoA inventory is well suited to the purpose of the present study.

3 THE PRESENT STUDY

In this chapter I will outline what the aims of the present study were, how the data was collected and analyzed and what the key findings were.

3.1 Aims of the present study and research questions

The aim of the present study is to find out what Finnish third year upper secondary school students think about assessment in their English courses. More specifically, the first aim is to discover whether students think that assessment promotes their learning, assessment is used to compare schools and students, assessment has an impact on their emotional health and relationships with other students or assessment is irrelevant or unfair to students (Brown et al. 2009: 135). The second and third aim is to investigate whether students' gender and grade from their last English course have any connection to their views on assessment. The fourth aim is to investigate whether students feel they receive enough assessment in the English courses. Finally, the fifth aim of the study is to discover whether students feel that the assessment in their English courses is too focused on the matriculation examination. In short, the research questions are as follows:

1. Do students agree or disagree with the four different conceptions of assessment (Brown et al. 2009: 135)?
2. How does the gender of students relate to how they perceive assessment?
3. How does students' grade from their last English course relate to how they perceive assessment?
4. In students' opinion, do they receive enough assessment in their English courses?
5. In students' opinion, is assessment in their English courses too focused on preparing them for the matriculation examination?

In order to answer these questions, I will distribute a questionnaire to 30 upper secondary school students. Furthermore, I will subject the data collected to statistical and data-driven content analysis.

3.2 Data collection

The study combines features of both quantitative and qualitative studies. Questionnaires with closed questions are usually used for quantitative studies because they offer a way to collect

data from large groups of people (Kalaja, Alanen and Dufva 2011:19). However, since this study serves as my BA thesis, I chose to limit the amount of participants to a smaller group. The participants are from two upper secondary schools that are all relatively small (around 100 students). Thus, the choice of the participants aims to reveal attitudes towards the assessment in these smaller schools and not to generalize the study's findings to all Finnish students and their opinions about assessment. The study also uses open-ended questions in the questionnaire, which offers a more quantitative approach to the study.

Next I will explain who the participants of the present study were and what kind of a questionnaire I used.

3.2.2 Participants

The participants of the present study consisted of 30 final year upper secondary school students, aged between 18 and 19. Out of the respondents, 23 were female (76.7%) and 7 were male (23.3%). The participants were from western Finland from two upper secondary schools. I chose final year upper secondary school students as participants for the present study because they are old enough to do a questionnaire containing multiple questions that need concentration. In addition, I think that final year students have had enough EFL courses in upper secondary school to have opinions about the assessment in EFL teaching.

3.2.1 Questionnaire

The questionnaire (see Appendix 1) used in the present study consists of background information, 33 closed questions and three open-ended questions. First, the background section asks the respondents to tell their gender, age and grade from their last English course. Second, the closed questions are adapted from the SCoA-V inventory from Weekers et al. (2009: 153-154) and translated into Finnish. The respondents answered them on a five-point Likert scale. Finally, the open-ended questions are different from the original SCoA-V study; I invented open-ended questions that were suitable for the context of the present study. The first open-ended question asks the students whether they feel they are assessed too much or too little in their English courses and why/why not; the second question asks whether the assessment in English courses is too focused on preparing students for the matriculation examination and why/why not; and the third question asks for the participants to give feedback on the questionnaire.

In order to test that participants would understand the wording of the questions, I piloted the study. I asked an acquaintance of mine who is in the first year of upper secondary school to fill in the questionnaire while I was next to her. She gave me feedback on the wording of some questions which I modified accordingly.

I conducted the questionnaire in December 2016. I visited both of the upper secondary schools and distributed the questionnaire to the students in printed format at the beginning of their English class. All of them studied EFL and they had attended an English course earlier that year in addition to the course they were currently taking. The head masters of the schools and the teachers of the English classes gave permission to conduct the study and the participants' answers were all given anonymously.

3.3 Data analysis

The reliability of the answers to the closed questions (aka items) was determined by calculating Cronbach's Alphas for each of the four categories (*Improvement*, *Affect*, *Irrelevant* and *External factors*) and their items. Cronbach's Alpha was 0.864 for the items in the category *Improvement*, 0.630 for the items in *Affect* and 0.744 for the items in *Irrelevant*, making them reliable. The corrected item-total correlation of statement 33 was 0.136, making it unreliable, which is why it was left out from the category *External factors*. After that Cronbach's Alpha for *External factors* was 0.714. (For more detailed figures, see Appendix 2)

The closed questions were subjected to statistical analysis to find correlations between the different statements and background variables of the participants. First, the means and deviations of the items in all four categories (*Improvement*, *Affect*, *Irrelevant* and *External factors*) were calculated to find out the distribution of the answers and which answers were most popular. Second, Mann-Whitney U Test and T-Test were run on the data to find out if and how gender was connected to the students' conceptions of assessment. Finally, Spearman's rank correlation was studied using a two-tailed test to find out if and how students' grades were related to their conceptions of assessment.

In the data values were calculated by converting the five-point Likert scale into numbers between 1 and 5. In these numbers 1 is *Completely disagree*, 2 *Partly disagree*, 3 *Partly agree and Partly disagree*, 4 *Partly agree* and 5 *Completely agree*. In the questionnaire there was also an option *Cannot say,* which was marked as blank in the data for statistical reasons.

The open-ended questions were analyzed using data-driven content analysis. In other words, the answers were divided into different types based on their similar qualities (Tuomi and Sarajärvi 2009: 95). This method was chosen for the clear distribution of the answers into different types, such as *No, I am not assessed enough* or *Yes, I am assessed enough*.

3.4 Findings

In the following sections I will report the main findings of the present study. I will discuss how the students perceived assessment, how gender and grade affected their views on assessment, if they thought they received enough assessment and whether assessment was too focused on the matriculation examination.

3.4.1 Types of assessment

In this section I will illustrate the means and standard deviations for each item in the four categories of perceived assessment (*Improvement*, *Affect*, *Irrelevant* and *External factors*). In addition, the following tables show the smallest and biggest values and the number of answers to each item. The answer alternatives for each item are on the Likert scale. In the following tables answers are marked with numbers from 1 to 5 with 1 being *Completely disagree* and 5 being *Completely agree*.

The number of answers, minimum and maximum values, means and standard deviations in the category *Improvement* can be seen in table 1.

Table 1. Category Improvement: the number of answers, minimum and maximum values, means and standard deviations per item

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
I pay attention to my assessment results in order to focus on what I could do better next time.	30	2	5	3.93	.980
Assessment is a way to determine how much I have learned from teaching.	30	2	5	3.90	.845
Assessment is checking off my progress against achievement objectives or standards.	28	1	5	4.04	1.232
I make use of the feedback I get to improve my learning.	30	2	5	3.70	.988
I look at what I got wrong or did poorly on to guide what I should learn next.	30	1	5	3.73	1.202
I use assessments to take responsibility for my next learning steps.	28	2	5	3.43	.959
I use assessment to identify what I need to study next.	29	2	5	3.48	.986
My teachers use assessment to help me improve.	28	2	5	4.04	.793
Teachers use my assessment results to see what they need to teach me next.	26	1	5	3.19	1.059
Assessment shows whether I can analyze and think critically about a topic.	27	2	5	3.26	.903

All the means for the items in *Improvement* had values between 3.1 and 4.1. All the items had also standard deviation around 1 and the answers were quite divided with some items having every value between 1 and 5. In other words, most students were positive that assessment improved learning and teaching but there were also some students who were of the opposite opinion. Most of the items in this category also had almost 30 valid answers, which means that most students had opinions about assessment improving learning.

The number of answers, minimum and maximum values, means and standard deviations in category *Affect* can be seen in table 2, similarly to the previous table.

Table 2. Category Affect: the number of answers, minimum and maximum values, means and standard deviations per item

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Assessment encourages my class to work together and help each other.	26	1	5	2.65	.936
Assessment is an engaging and enjoyable experience for me.	29	1	5	3.00	.964
Assessment motivates me and my classmates to help each other.	29	1	4	2.55	.783
Our class becomes more supportive when we are assessed.	24	1	4	2.08	.717
When we do assessments, there is good atmosphere in our class.	22	2	5	3.14	.889
Assessment makes our class cooperate more with each other.	25	1	3	2.04	.611
When we are assessed, our class becomes more motivated to learn.	24	1	5	2.79	.884
I find myself really enjoying learning when I am assessed.	26	1	5	3.12	1.177

The means of the items in *Affect* were distributed between values 2.0 and 3.2. The standard deviations were around 1also in this category, which means that there were more disagreeing opinions about assessment affecting students' emotional health and relationships with other students. The number of answers was also the lowest of the four categories, which seems to indicate that the students were unsure about the items in this category or had trouble understanding the items.

The number of answers, minimum and maximum values, means and standard deviations in category *Irrelevant* can be seen in table 3, similarly to the previous tables.

Table 3. Category Irrelevant: the number of answers, minimum and maximum values, means and standard deviations per item

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Assessment is unfair to students.	29	1	5	1.66	1.010
I ignore assessment information.	30	1	4	1.67	.661
Assessment interferes with my learning.	30	1	3	1.67	.711
Teachers are over-assessing.	30	1	4	1.73	.740
Assessment results are not very accurate.	30	1	4	1.80	.805
Assessment is value-less.	30	1	5	1.53	.860
I ignore or throw away my assessment results.	30	1	3	1.67	.758
Assessment has little impact on my learning.	29	1	5	2.41	.983

The means of the items in category *Irrelevant* varied from 1.5 to 2.5 and their standard deviations were around 1. It is also important to note that the items were reversed. Thus the students thought that assessment was relevant to them.

The number of answers, minimum and maximum values, means and standard deviations in category *External factors* can be seen in table 4, similarly to the previous tables.

Table 4. Category External factors: the number of answers, minimum and maximum values, means and standard deviations per item

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Assessment results show how intelligent I am.	30	1	4	2.77	.898
Assessment provides information on how well schools are doing.	28	2	5	3.32	.905
Assessment results predict my future performance.	29	2	5	3.28	.882
Assessment is important for my future career or job.	28	2	5	3.11	.737
Assessment measures the worth or quality of schools.	26	1	4	2.81	.801

The means of the items in the category of *External factors* were between 2.7 and 3.4 with the standard deviations being around 1. Thus the students had quite different opinions about whether assessment reflected the quality of schools or their intellect.

3.4.2 Assessment and gender

In this section I will discuss how gender affected the students' views on assessment. The connection between gender and SCoA can be seen in table 5.

Table 5. Significance of gender's relation to each four group

Test Statistics[a]

	Improvement	Affect	Irrelevant	External
Mann-Whitney U	63.500	58.000	76.500	61.000
Wilcoxon W	91.500	86.000	352.500	89.000
Z	-.834	-1.106	-.197	-.965
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.404	.269	.844	.334
Exact Sig. [2*(1-tailed Sig.)]	.413[b]	.288[b]	.848[b]	.360[b]

a. Grouping Variable: Gender

b. Not corrected for ties.

As can be seen from table 5, running the Mann-Whitney U test on the data revealed no statistically significant differences between females and males and their views on assessment.

3.4.3 Assessment and course grades

In this section I will illustrate how the students' grade and their views on assessment were connected. The correlation between grade and the four categories of perceived assessment can be seen in table 6.

Table 6. Correlations between grade and the four categories

			Grade from the last English course
Spearman's rho	Improvement	Correlation Coefficient	.166
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.389
		N	29
	Affect	Correlation Coefficient	-.142
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.462
		N	29
	Irrelevant	Correlation Coefficient	-.362
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.054
		N	29
	External	Correlation Coefficient	.069
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.721
		N	29

As is evident from table 6, there were no clear correlations between the students' grade from their last English course and the categories *Improvement*, *Affect* and *External factors* since their Spearman's correlations were close to zero. However, there seemed to be a weak correlation between grade and the category *Irrelevant* because its Spearman's correlation was -0.362. Thus the students who had higher grades from their last English course seemed to have more positive views on assessment.

3.4.4 The amount of assessment

In this section I will discuss whether the students felt that they had been assessed too little or too much in their English classes. The results of this open-ended question in the questionnaire

were studied using data-driven content analysis. Of the participants 96.7% (29 students) gave an answer to this open-ended question.

Of the participants 70% (21 answers) felt that they received the right amount of assessment. Seven of them gave justification for their answer. One participant said that scores and grades from tests and exams gave her a great deal of information and if she had wanted more, she could have asked the teacher. Another student said that she had received enough assessment considering the amount and quality of the work she had done. Two students commented on the assessment they received from their essays. One of them said that the most detailed assessment came from essays, which was good, while the other one said that she liked how they had gone through all the errors explaining the problematic areas when they had corrected their essays. In addition, one student said that too much assessment would take away the will to learn while another one said that she received enough assessment to know where her studies were headed but she also did not receive too much assessment. Lastly, one student said that she received enough assessment and feedback on listening exercises, essays and final exams.

Of the participants 16.7 % (five answers) felt that they received enough assessment but they would have wanted more assessment in some areas. Three students said that they would have wanted more oral assessment. One of them said that assessment should also be focused on other things besides grammar and that speech production should be assessed more. Another one of the students commented that she would have wanted more feedback on her oral skills since the assessment she had received had focused mostly on grades. The third student stated that assessment focused mostly on essays and such and that their oral skills were not really assessed. In addition, one student would have wanted oral feedback, for example, on the good and bad sides of their essays to know what to do differently next time. Finally, one student felt that assessment meant really just grades from exams and courses.

Of the students 1% (three answers) felt they received too little assessment. Two students said that they would have wanted to know in what areas they should invest more in the future. One student did not feel assessed in class. She, however, felt she received enough assessment on her essays and exams but she would have wanted more feedback on what she succeeded in.

3.4.5 Assessment and the matriculation examination

In this section I will discuss whether the students felt that assessment in their English courses focused too much on the matriculation examination. The results of this open-ended question in the questionnaire were studied using data-driven content analysis. Of the participants 96.7% (29 students) gave an answer to the open-ended question.

The majority of the students with 56.7% (17 answers) said that they did not feel that assessment was too focused on preparing students for the matriculation examination. Six students commented that their English classes taught them also a great deal of what was needed in everyday life such as vocabulary and that their studies and preparing for the matriculation examination also prepared them for later life. Four students thought that the purpose of English courses in upper secondary school was to prepare them for the matriculation examination. Four students felt that the focus on the matriculation examination only began in the last English courses and one of them would have wanted that they would have focused on the matriculation examination already on earlier courses. Finally, one student thought that assessment was meant to improve every student's personal performance.

Of the participants 33.3% (10 students) felt that assessment in their English courses was focused on the matriculation examination. Three students said that the majority of the tasks they did in class focused on preparing them for the matriculation examination and one of them would have wanted to do more oral exercises. Two students stated that all they talked about in their English courses was the matriculation examination and what it would entail. Two students commented that although the assessment in their courses focused on preparing students for the matriculation examination, it was not necessarily a bad thing because their assessment also prepared them for the future. Finally, two students felt that teachers emphasized the matriculation examination in their courses because teachers felt they were important and teachers wanted good results from the matriculation examination.

In addition to the other answers, two students (6.7% of the participants) said that they did not know whether the assessment in their English courses was too focused on the matriculation examination.

4 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

In this chapter I will summarize the main findings of the present study, compare them to the findings of some previous studies, evaluate the present study and discuss the implications of the present study to EFL teaching.

The means for all four categories of perceived assessment can be seen in figure 1. The categories are *Improvement* (assessment improves learning and teaching), *Affect* (assessment affects students' emotional health and relationships), *Irrelevant* (assessment is irrelevant to students) and *External factors* (assessment shows the quality of schools and teaching). In figure 1 value one signifies *Completely disagree* and value five signifies *Completely agree*.
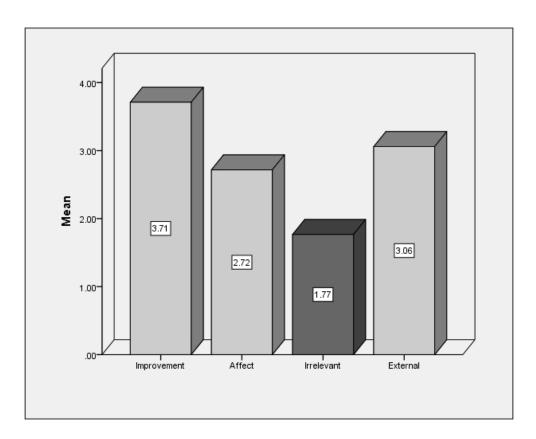

Figure 1. The means of the four categories (Improvement, Affect, Irrelevant and External factors)

As is evident from figure 1, *Improvement* had the highest mean of all four categories. This means that students generally at least partly agreed that assessment improved learning and teaching. Considering that the values of *Irrelevant* are inverted, its true mean was 3.23. Thus *Irrelevant*, *Affect* and *External factors* all had means close to 3. Therefore, students partly

agreed and partly disagreed that assessment was not irrelevant, that assessment affected their emotional health and that assessment showed the quality of schools.

Since categories *Affect* and *External factors* had both the most divided answers around value 3 and *Affect* had the most *Cannot say* answers (for more detailed numbers, see section 3.4.1), it would imply that either the students had differing opinions about the items in these categories or they had trouble understanding the items. I would argue that the latter might be true because the items *Affect* and *External factors* may involve issues that students have not considered before. Furthermore, these items might handle issues that are not relevant to students. For example, items in *Affect*, such as *When we are assessed, our class becomes more motivated to learn*, might be irrelevant to these upper secondary schools because they are so called "classless" schools so the groups in different courses might vary greatly. In addition, if the students mainly receive summative assessment from tests and exams, assessment is something that they receive individually. In that case assessment does not affect the relationships between students greatly. Items in *External factors* might also be irrelevant to Finnish students since the items in this category asked the students whether assessment affected the quality of schools and in Finland upper secondary schools are not ranked for official purposes (for admittance and distinguishing purposes).

According to the present study, there seemed to be a weak correlation between students' grades and the category *Irrelevant*. If the students had received lower grades from their last English course, they generally had more negative opinions about assessment and the students who had received better grades had more positive opinions. However, there were no clear correlations between other categories and students' grades. This finding is surprising since earlier studies (Weekers et al. 2009: 137-139) showed the opposite results where the category *Irrelevant* had no correlation with learning results whereas the other categories had some kind of correlations with learning results (for more details, see section 2.2.1). One can only speculate whether the difference in the findings are caused by the difference in learning environments (different country, small schools) or something else since a more extensive sample would be needed to study this phenomenon more closely.

Perhaps the most positive finding of the present study was that most of the students (70%) felt that they received enough assessment. The students liked especially the feedback that had been given on the errors in their essays. However, some of the students (20.7%) would have wanted more oral feedback from the teacher and more feedback on their speech production. In

addition, it was clear from the students' answers that they received mostly summative assessment since they commented mainly on the assessment and feedback they had received from their essays and exams.

The students had much more divided opinions about whether assessment in their English courses was too focused on preparing them for the matriculation examination. The majority of the students with 56.7% thought that assessment was not too focused on the examination. Some of them felt that the matters they had to study for the examination were also useful in their future everyday life. However, 33.3% of the respondents felt that assessment was too focused on the matriculation examination. On the one hand, some students felt that all they discussed in their classes was the matriculation examination. On the other hand, some students said that the focus on the matriculation examination came only in later courses and they would have wanted to focus more on it already on earlier courses. Thus, the students had very mixed views on this subject.

Although the present study had quite a small number of participants, I would argue that this study is valuable to the research field of language assessment. Students' perceptions of language assessment, especially in Finland, have been studied very little and they need to be studied more. However, the questionnaire used in the present study should be revised for any future research. The definition of assessment that was used in the questionnaire was mostly based on summative assessment (for the justification behind this, see section 2.1.2) and this would need to be considered closely whether the definition is clear and accurate enough for any future studies. In addition, the open-ended questions at the end of the questionnaire might not be clear enough and too leading for students and would need to be considered more closely in future research.

A great deal of research remains to be done on students' perceptions of language assessment. Studies with a larger number of participants are needed to confirm the findings of the present study. In addition, the present study could be replicated with a different age group of participants. Although the questionnaire of this study might not be suitable for very young language learners, it could be used with lower secondary school students or adult language learners. Furthermore, students' perceptions of assessment could be studied more closely by triangulating. In addition to conducting the questionnaire, methods such as interviews and observations could be used. Finally, if the present study was replicated, the questionnaire could be distributed as an electronic version to students.

The present study revealed that assessment was something that the students had opinions on and were interested in. The answers to the closed questions were quite divided among the students, showing that the students had all sorts of opinions on assessment. In addition, a few of the students commented on the last open-ended question that they liked the questionnaire. This might stem from the students' wish to affect more the assessment EFL teachers do in their classes. Therefore, EFL teachers should consider also students' opinions when deciding which assessment methods to use and assessing students.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: The questionnaire

Kysely englannin kurssien arvioinnista

Opiskelen Jyväskylän yliopistossa ja teen tutkimusta, jossa tutkin lukiolaisten mielipiteitä englannin kurssien arvioinnista.

Ole hyvä ja lue väittämät seuraavalla sivulla huolellisesti ennen kuin vastaat niihin. Kyselyyn vastataan nimettömästi; yksittäisiä vastaajia ei voi tunnistaa vastauksista.

Kiitos kyselyyn osallistumisesta!

Ystävällisin terveisin

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Jyväskylän yliopisto

A) Taustatiedot

1. Sukupuoli: Nainen □   Mies □
2. Ikä: _____vuotta
3. Viimeisestä englannin kurssista saatu arvosana: 4 □ 5 □ 6 □ 7 □ 8 □ 9 □ 10 □

                              En saanut viime englannin kurssista □ numeroarvosanaa

B) Mielipiteitä englannin kurssien arvioinnista

Kun seuraavissa väittämissä käytetään sanaa ”arviointi”, sillä tarkoitetaan englannin kursseilla kaikenlaista **opettajalta** saatua palautetta. Tämä arviointi tarkoittaa siis

- todistukseen tulevia **kurssiarvosanoja** tai hyväksytty-merkintää
- **sanakokeista tai muista testeistä saatua pistemäärää tai arvosanaa**
- esseistä, suullisista esitelmistä, ryhmätöistä ja muista kursseilla arvostelluista **tehtävistä saatua pistemäärää/arvosanaa, punakynällä tms. tehtyjä korjauksia ja opettajan suullisesti tai kirjallisesti antamaa palautetta**

Vastatessasi seuraaviin väitteisiin mieti arviointia, jota olet saanut **tämän syksyn aikana englannin kursseilta**. Väittämiin ei ole oikeaa tai väärää vaihtoehtoa vaan vastaukset perustuvat mielipiteisiin. Rastita vaihtoehdoista sinua eniten kuvaava vaihtoehto.

	Olen täysin eri mieltä	Olen osittain eri mieltä	Olen osittain samaa mieltä, osittain eri mieltä	Olen osittain samaa mieltä	Olen täysin samaa mieltä	En osaa sanoa
1. Kiinnitän huomiota arvosanoihini. Näin voin keskittyä siihen, miten voin pärjätä paremmin seuraavalla kerralla.						
2. Arviointi innostaa luokkaani työskentelemään yhdessä ja auttamaan toisiamme.						
3. Arviointi on epäreilua opiskelijoille.						
4. Arvosanat kertovat älykkyydestäni.						
5. Arviointi auttaa opettajia seuraamaan kehittymistäni.						
6. Arviointi on minulle kiehtova ja nautittava kokemus.						
7. Arvioinnista saatu tieto ei ole hyödyllistä minulle.						
8. Arviointi on tapa mitata, kuinka paljon olen oppinut englannin opetuksesta.						

	Olen täysin eri mieltä	Olen osittain eri mieltä	Olen osittain samaa mieltä, osittain eri mieltä	Olen osittain samaa mieltä	Olen täysin samaa mieltä	En osaa sanoa
9. Arvioinnissa kehitystäni vertaillaan kurssin tavoitteisiin ja taitotasoihin.						
10. Käytän saamaani arviointia parantaakseni oppimistani.						
11. Arviointi tarjoaa tietoa siitä, kuinka hyvin koulut pärjäävät.						
12. Arviointi motivoi minua ja kurssikavereitani auttamaan toisiamme.						
13. Arviointi haittaa oppimistani.						
14. Katson saamastani arvioinnista, mitkä vastauksistani oli väärin tai missä pärjäsin huonosti, jotta näen, mitä minun pitäisi opetella seuraavaksi.						
15. Käytän arviointia ottaakseni jatkossa vastuuta oppimisestani.						
16. Arvosanat ennustavat, millaisia arvosanoja saan jatkossa.						
17. Luokastamme tulee kannustavampi, kun meitä arvioidaan.						
18. Englannin opettajani arvioi minua liikaa.						
19. Käytän arviointia tunnistaakseni, mitä minun pitäisi opiskella seuraavaksi.						
20. Arviointi on tärkeää tulevan urani tai ammattini kannalta.						
21. Kun oppimistamme arvioidaan, luokassamme on hyvä ilmapiiri.						
22. Kurssiarvosanat sekä kokeiden ja testien arvosanat eivät pidä paikkansa.						
23. Englannin opettajani käyttää arviointia auttaakseen minua kehittymään.						
24. Arviointi mittaa koulujen laatua.						
25. Arviointi saa luokkamme tekemään yhteistyötä enemmän.						
26. Arvioinnilla ei ole mitään merkitystä.						

	Olen täysin eri mieltä	Olen osittain eri mieltä	Olen osittain samaa mieltä, osittain eri mieltä	Olen osittain samaa mieltä	Olen täysin samaa mieltä	En osaa sanoa
27. Arvosanojen perusteella englannin opettajani suunnittelee, mitä hänen tulisi opettaa minulle seuraavaksi.						
28. Kun meitä arvioidaan, se motivoi meidän luokkaamme.						
29. En piittaa saamastani arvioinnista tai heitän pois korjatut kirjoitelmat, kokeet ja testit.						
30. Arviointi näyttää, osaanko minä analysoida ja ajatella kriittisesti kurssilla käsiteltyjä asioita.						
31. Huomaan nauttivani oppimisesta, kun minua arvioidaan.						
32. Arviointi ei vaikuta paljoakaan oppimiseeni.						
33. Arviointi kertoo vanhemmilleni, kuinka paljon olen oppinut.						

C) Englannin oppimisen arvioinnin hyödyllisyys

Ole hyvä ja vastaa seuraaviin kysymyksiin omien kokemustesi ja mielipiteidesi mukaisesti.

Arvioidaanko sinua englannin tunneilla liikaa tai liian vähän? Miksi?

_____

_____

_____

_____

Keskittyykö englannin kurssien arviointi mielestäsi liikaa opiskelijoiden valmentamiseen ylioppilaskokeisiin? Miksi/Miksei?

_____

_____

_____

_____

Voit jättää tähän palautetta kyselystä:

_____

_____

_____

_____

Ole hyvä ja tarkista vielä, että vastasit kyselyn kaikkiin kohtiin. Kiitos vastauksistasi!

Appendix 2: Reliability figures

Reliability of the statements in *Improvement*

Item-Total Statistics			
	Scale Mean if Item Deleted	Scale Variance if Item Deleted	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
I pay attention to my assessment results in order to focus on what I could do better next time.	37.21	45.953	.623	.849
Assessment helps teachers track my progress.	37.32	41.117	.780	.834
Assessment is a way to determine how much I have learned from teaching.	37.37	47.135	.438	.860
Assessment is checking off my progress against achievement objectives or standards.	37.37	46.246	.347	.872
I make use of the feedback I get to improve my learning.	37.63	46.912	.427	.861
I look at what I got wrong or did poorly on to guide what I should learn next.	37.47	41.152	.723	.839
I use assessments to take responsibility for my next learning steps.	37.84	42.029	.858	.831
I use assessment to identify what I need to study next.	37.79	43.509	.730	.840
My teachers use assessment to help me improve.	37.47	43.596	.807	.837
Teachers use my assessment results to see what they need to teach me next.	38.11	46.211	.449	.860
Assessment shows whether I can analyze and think critically about a topic.	38.11	50.877	.129	.881

Reliability Statistics	
Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.864	11

Reliability of the statements in *Affect*

Item-Total Statistics				
	Scale Mean if Item Deleted	Scale Variance if Item Deleted	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
Assessment encourages my class to work together and help each other.	18.82	12.279	.283	.613
Assessment is an engaging and enjoyable experience for me.	18.47	10.640	.518	.533
Assessment motivates me and my classmates to help each other.	19.06	12.809	.381	.586
Our class becomes more supportive when we are assessed.	19.47	13.515	.262	.614
When we do assessments, there is good atmosphere in our class.	18.59	13.382	.281	.610
Assessment makes our class cooperate more with each other.	19.41	14.882	.115	.639
When we are assessed, our class becomes more motivated to learn.	18.94	11.809	.462	.559
I find myself really enjoying learning when I am assessed.	18.35	11.493	.303	.614

Reliability Statistics	
Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.630	8

Reliability of the statements in *Irrelevant*

	Scale Mean if Item Deleted	Scale Variance if Item Deleted	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
Item-Total Statistics				
Assessment is unfair to students.	12.29	11.915	.448	.718
I ignore assessment information.	12.32	13.708	.387	.727
Assessment interferes with my learning.	12.32	12.819	.527	.704
Teachers are over-assessing.	12.25	13.157	.428	.720
Assessment results are not very accurate.	12.18	12.967	.409	.723
Assessment is value-less.	12.46	11.962	.552	.694
I ignore or throw away my assessment results.	12.36	12.608	.565	.697
Assessment has little impact on my learning.	11.57	13.143	.275	.755

Reliability Statistics	
Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.744	8

Reliability of the statements in *External factors*

	Scale Mean if Item Deleted	Scale Variance if Item Deleted	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
Item-Total Statistics				
Assessment results show how intelligent I am.	15.79	7.389	.460	.593
Assessment provides information on how well schools are doing.	15.29	6.216	.639	.512
Assessment results predict my future performance.	15.25	7.065	.509	.573
Assessment is important for my future career or job.	15.46	7.998	.340	.634

Assessment measures the worth or quality of schools.	15.79	8.172	.312	.642
Assessment tells my parents how much I've learned.	15.33	8.406	.136	.714

Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.714	5