

INFORMAL LEARNING AND ITS EFFECTS ON STUDENTS'
GRADED
AND SELF-ASSESSED PROFICIENCY IN FINLAND

Bachelor's thesis

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Tiivistelmä – Abstract <p>Englannin, kuten muidenkin kielten oppimisessa on tärkeää, että oppilaat altistuvat autenttiselle kielelle. Pelkästään oppikirjoihin ja luokassa tapahtuvaan keskusteluun tukeutuminen ei yksin riitä. Informaali oppiminen mahdollistaa tämän helpolla tavalla: oppilaat voivat valita haluamansa viihteen muodon, ja jopa huomaamattaan oppia englantia vapaa-ajallaan. Tämä tutkimus pyrkii kartoittamaan, minkälaisia informaalin oppimisen tapoja oppilaat eniten hyödyntävät, kuinka usein ja kuinka paljon he niitä hyödyntävät, sekä miten informaali oppiminen vaikuttaa heidän itsearvioituun ja virallisesti arvosteltuun kielitaitoonsa. Aineistona tutkimuksessa käytettiin kyselyä, joka jaettiin 40:lle erään Keski-Suomen lukion opiskelijalle. Tutkimus on suurimmaksi osaksi määrällinen, mutta kyselyssä esitettiin myös yksi avoin kysymys. Tulokset analysoitiin tilastoanalyysillä frekvenssien sekä korrelaatioiden mukaan. Tuloksista käy ilmi, että opiskelijat hyödynsivät informaalia oppimista usein viikon aikana, mutta melko pienissä ajanjaksoissa. Kaikista eniten opiskelijat hyödyntävät informaalin oppimisen tapoja, jotka käyttivät elektroniikkaa, mutta eivät vaadi heiltä suoraa kielen tuottamista. Tällaiset tavat olivat myös vahvimmin yhteydessä heidän itsearviointeihinsa ja kurssiarvosanoihinsa. Tuloksista käy ilmi, että informaalia oppimista voisi hyvinkin hyödyntää myös opetuksessa, ja etenkin edellä mainitut informaalin oppimisen tavat, jotka hyödyntävät elektroniikkaa mutta eivät vaadi kielen tuottoa, olisivat todennäköisesti siihen tarkoitukseen tehokkaita.</p>	
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1 INTRODUCTION

When learning English, or any other language for that matter, it is paramount that students are subjected to authentic input, instead of just relying on textbooks and classroom English. This is most easily achieved by students utilizing English at their own leisure in their daily lives, by for example watching movies, talking to foreigners, listening to music or traveling. Informal learning is an aspect often overlooked in teaching, and while I do not imply that it could replace formal learning, it could be extremely efficient in complementing it. Students can entertain themselves and learn English at the same time, without even realizing it themselves.

Informal learning is a field of study that has been researched a great deal. However, most studies concentrate on the effects of informal learning on formal learning, rather than on the effects on students themselves. The present, mainly quantitative study aims to explore the forms of informal learning and their frequencies and durations in students' lives, but also the effects of informal learning on the students' self-assessed and graded proficiency. Self-assessments are a newer element in research on informal learning, and the effects of informal learning regarding them have not been thoroughly researched before. In the present study, questionnaires were handed out to 40 high school students in a school in Central Finland, in order to find out what their preferred forms of informal English learning were, how often and for how long they were utilized, and finally, how they influenced the students' self-assessments and graded proficiency. The data were subjected to statistical analysis, analyzing patterns and correlations. Furthermore, the final, open-ended question was analyzed using content analysis.

In the second chapter, the theoretical background to the study is presented, starting from identifying the different forms of informal learning and then reviewing previous studies regarding informal learning. In the third chapter, the methodology of the study is discussed in more detail. Afterwards, in the fourth chapter, the major findings of the study are reported and scrutinized. In the fifth chapter, the results are discussed in more detail and the success of the study itself is also evaluated, concluding with speculation of possible ways to further continue research of this topic.

2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Informal learning, as defined by Livingstone (1999: 51), can be conceptualized as "any activity involving the pursuit of understanding, knowledge or skill which occurs outside the curricula of educational institutions, or the courses or workshops offered by educational or social agencies. " In other words, it is learning that happens outside the classroom context, that does not involve any educators, but rather occurs of the person's own free will to learn or understand. It is a subject that has been studied a great deal in the past few decades. New technology has allowed new forms of informal learning to emerge. Especially the internet has had an enormous impact on informal learning, as it has provided people with an almost limitless source of online entertainment, not to mention connections to virtually anywhere in the world. Below, I will be introducing different forms of informal learning, as well as summarize some previous research concerning informal learning and how it influences students' English as a Foreign Language (EFL) proficiency.

2.1 Defining informal learning

As Benson and Reinders (2011: 8) suggest, language learning beyond the classroom, encapsulating everything not concerned with classroom language learning, is a very broad topic. They also give multiple alternative terms that can be nigh synonymous with language learning beyond the classroom, which is their preferred term: 'informal', 'non-formal', 'extramural', 'extracurricular', 'self-instructed', 'non-instructed', 'self-directed', 'naturalistic', 'independent', 'out-of-class', 'out-of-school', 'after-school' and 'autonomous' language learning. Furthermore, Benson and Reinders (2011: 9) state that all of these terms can be categorized in the four dimensions of language learning beyond the classroom: location, formality, pedagogy and locus of control. Below, I will introduce each of the four dimensions and elaborate on them more extensively.

First, Benson and Reinders (2011: 9) establish the dimension of **location**. According to them, 'out-of-class', 'out-of-school' and 'after-school' are terms that usually refer to activities that students act out independently, whereas 'after-school', 'extracurricular' and 'extramural' usually mean activities that the school provides, such as clubs organized by students. They also go on to mention that, for example, actual private school lessons can sometimes fall into this category, even though they are not informal learning. This is due to the terms focusing on location only.

The second dimension Benson and Reinders (2011: 10) introduce is **formality**, which 'non-formal' and 'informal' learning fall into. 'Informal language learning' is the term that I will be using throughout this study myself. This is because as Benson and Reinders agree, another one of

Livingstone's definitions of informal learning (2006: 211): "anything people do to gain knowledge, skill, or understanding from learning about their health or hobbies, unpaid or paid work, or anything that interests them outside of organized courses" is quite befitting to their concept of language learning beyond the classroom. Non-formal language learning, then, generally means learning that happens in school-provided programs, whereas informal learning refers rather to non-institutional learning.

Benson and Reinders (2011: 11) go on to mention the third dimension of language learning beyond the classroom, **pedagogy**. 'Self-instructed', 'non-instructed' and 'naturalistic' language learning fall into this category. They suggest that the term 'instruction' refers to a certain type of pedagogy, which includes, for example, testing and precise explanations. Self-instruction entails that something other than a human-being takes the role of an instructor; it can be a television program, a book or a website, for instance. Naturalistic language learning, in contrast, does not include any kind of instruction, nor the intention to learn. However, Benson and Reinders go on to mention that this might only be a hypothetical way of learning, and it would in actuality be self-instructed learning where the focus has shifted to entertainment over learning.

The fourth and final dimension Benson and Reinders (2011: 11) establish is **locus of control**, which includes the terms 'independent', 'self-directed' and 'autonomous' language learning. They suggest that instead of learning without a teacher, these terms would refer to decision-making related to teaching and learning. However, they point out that the learner is often not completely capable of making those decisions himself or herself. For example, some languages are obligatory to learn for younger students, like Swedish is in Finland. Adult learners have more freedom in their choices. Benson and Reinders state that how locus of control and language learning beyond the classroom interact is the way learners have to make multiple decisions regarding language learning in non-classroom settings. Students can also choose to either shift the locus of control away from themselves by choosing materials that are particularly instructive or to keep it to themselves by learning in a more informal manner.

2.2 Forms of informal learning

Schugurensky (2000: 3-4) suggests that there are three different forms of informal learning: self-directed learning, incidental learning and socialization. **Self-directed learning** is a form of informal learning where an individual, or a group of individuals undertake a 'learning project', in which no educator (for example, a teacher or an instructor) is present. There may, however, be someone, whom Schugurensky calls a 'resource person', who does not think of himself or herself as an educator. The learner, in this case, is fully aware of trying to learn something, and also has the

intention of learning it. For example, after multiple attempts of trial-and-error, a kindergartener could learn to utter the phoneme /r/. An example of utilizing a 'resource person' would be a student trying to learn to cook a delicious stew, and asking his or her grandmother for advice.

The second form of informal learning Schugurensky introduces is **incidental learning**. This type of informal learning is still conscious, as the learner knows that he or she has learned something, but is not intentionally. This could be referred to as learning accidentally; for example, when an elementary school student who is switching channels while watching TV stumbles upon a historical documentary accidentally learns that Finland gained independence in 1917. The child is in this case aware of the learning experience, but did not intend to learn this knowledge beforehand.

The third and final form of informal learning that Schugurensky addresses is **socialization**. In this type of informal learning, the learner is neither conscious of learning nor intending to learn. As Schugurensky points out, it is internalizing of skills, values or attitudes, for instance, in daily life. An example of this would be a person born in a Christian family, who rejects every other religion and every other human being who is not Christian, and does not recognize that the mindset has been a product of socialization through his or her family environment, but instead perceives it as the only plausible way of thinking. However, Schugurensky goes on to mention that it is possible to later realize the effects of socialization through 'retrospective recognition'. For example, the Christian person could move to a different country where Christianity is a minor religion, and come to realize that he or she has in fact been affected by his or her previous environment.

2.3 Previous studies

A number of empirical studies have been conducted on informal language learning in the past, some of which I am going to review below. The studies I will elaborate on range from BA and MA theses to international articles, and I will be reviewing them in chronological order, concluding with the most recent studies. Afterwards, I will explain why my study is relevant in the field and what it is that my study addresses that the others do not.

The first study I will summarize is an MA thesis by Koivumäki (2012). The study concerns the way informal English used in the internet relates to EFL learning in Finland, and how motivating students find it.

Koivumäki's (2012: 42) data consisted of separate face-to-face interviews of two high-school girls living in Jyväskylä and Seinäjoki. The two girls, Mira and Tuuli, were similar in age and the fact that they both attended high school, but their backgrounds regarding English usage and the internet were very different. The interviews had a relaxed atmosphere, comparable to a regular

discussion, but the questions were still structured beforehand. The questions were about how the girls utilized English on the internet, how they experienced it, how they felt it affected their English learning and if internet motivated them in learning English (Koivumäki, 2012: 95-96).

The results of the Koivumäki's study (2012: 45-46) were organized into sections: past experiences, current use, their motivation and lastly, a comparison between the two girls. Firstly, the study showed that both of the participants started to use the internet at an early age to find out about their interests online. Koivumäki (2012: 49) reports that one of the most interesting finds was that despite their lacking proficiencies in English at such a young age, they did not rely on dictionaries. For younger learners, it did not seem to matter if they did not understand every single word of a text, but they rather simply enjoyed encountering the new language (Koivumäki 2012: 50). Furthermore, both girls reported their use of the internet having positive effects on their studies at school, despite the fact that the schools did not seem to utilize computers for learning to their full potential.

Koivumäki (2012: 62-63) found the girls' current usage of the internet to be very versatile regarding English; they both utilized Wikipedia and read news in English, watched series online and played games, for instance. Koivumäki reports that the girls spent most of their time in the internet on English websites. At school, the girls seemed to have gotten a surprisingly positive response for their informal use of the internet; they explained that such a way of learning was greatly encouraged by their teachers (Koivumäki 2012: 67). However, internet use was not very common during class, due to the hectic nature of high school course schedules. An interesting conflict between the school and internet values Koivumäki (2012: 70) reports is vocabulary. The girls had been absorbing some of the colloquial words from the internet and using them in formal contexts, which had evidently led to trouble with the teacher.

As to the two girls' motivation, Koivumäki (2012: 71) reports that the improvement of their proficiency by using the internet had motivated them to learn English further, not for a purpose such as living abroad, but rather just for themselves to use at their leisure. They had been motivated to learn English out of their own interest, and it had happened, as Koivumäki states, mostly unconsciously. Furthermore, the girls reported that their informal learning of English had helped them in the school environment as well.

In the final section of the results, Koivumäki (2012: 81-82) mostly compares the two girls' feelings about English as opposed to the ways of using the internet, which were in fact fairly similar between them. Tuuli seemed to have a more beneficial background for learning English than Mira; she had a sister to help her, went to a smaller school and was more motivated altogether. Consequently, she was also in the end more confident than Mira in her English proficiency.

The second study I will summarize is about EFL students' different ways of informal learning in Mexico by Sayer and Ban (2014). The target group for their study was Mexican fifth and sixth grade students who had from the first or second grade undertaken a new Program, according to which English was to be taught earlier in schools.

Sayer and Ban (2014: 323) interviewed 61 students from 15 different schools in Central Mexico from different socio-economic levels and areas. Their interviews were group interviews with four children each, 16 groups in total. The interviews consisted of questions about the children's English class and teacher and their conceptions about learning and utilizing English. Furthermore, they also interviewed the children's parents to find out what their thoughts were about the Program.

Sayer and Ban (2014: 323) report as their findings that whereas the teachers thought the students only learned English in the formal context, the parents explained that their children use and learn a great deal of English in their sparetime, and furthermore the students themselves reported that they actively used English for problem-solving, for example, in video games. According to Sayer and Ban (2014: 326), the most frequent uses of English among the students included movies, music, video games and Google translator. They report that not only was informal learning useful for their formal studies by motivating them to learn English for their own purposes, but also vice versa; their classes seemed to assist them with problem-solving in English, for example, in understanding movies more easily.

The third study I will review is a BA thesis specifically about music as an informal resource of learning English in Finland by Laukkanen (2015). The target group of the study (2015: 10) was a group of 28 ninth-graders of a Central Finland middle school. Laukkanen conducted a two-part Likert-scale questionnaire, which covered the genres and frequencies of the music listened, as well as the way the students processed language while listening to it. Somewhat similarly to my study, the students also had to evaluate how informal music listening had influenced their language learning, including pronunciation, grammar, listening comprehension and reading comprehension, for instance.

Laukkanen (2015: 12) found that most of the students had reported to listen either 15 minutes to one hour per day, or one hour to three hours per day. A total of 78.5% of the students fell into these categories, 32.1% in the first category and 46.4% in the second one. The more the students listened to music, the more of the different activities listed in the questionnaire they practiced. These alternatives included (Laukkanen, 2015: 14) singing along, reading lyrics, writing them down, paying attention to grammatical aspects, finding out something about culture and

commenting on YouTube in English. The most popular of the alternatives were singing along, reading lyrics and translating words, but even paying attention to grammar had a positive correlation with the amount of music listened daily. Furthermore, most of the students found listening to music motivating for studying English.

As to how listening to music influenced the different aspects of the students' language learning, Laukkanen (2015: 15) reports that vocabulary, pronunciation and speaking and discussion were the three most affected alternatives. However, all of the alternatives were somewhat affected in the answers of the group that reported to have listened over three hours per day. All in all, the more students listened to music, the more they reported it to influence their language learning in the different language skills.

The fourth and final study I will be reviewing is Calvo-Ferrer's (2015) study in a different context: Spain. In this study Calvo-Ferrer (2015: 4) examined whether or not video games can be stand-alone learning tools, how effective they are and how the motivation they bring influences learning gains.

The participants of Calvo-Ferrer's study (2015: 5-6) were 59 Spanish students, ranging from 19 to 20 years of age. The participants played a game called *The Conference Interpreter*, in which they had to interpret a conference while simultaneously attending it. They were also provided with a booklet replicating the game's content. The students were divided into two groups, Group A and Group B, and whereas Group A played the game, Group B read the booklet. Before and after the groups played the game or read the booklet, they had to answer several questionnaires; before playing or reading, they had to take a test on mobile operating systems vocabulary (this test was also used as post-test and delayed test), a questionnaire about motivation after the test and finally, a post-test on their learning outcomes.

Calvo-Ferrer (2015: 7-8) analyzed the data with one-way between-subjects analyses. The results were as follows. The game enabled students to learn L2 vocabulary without instructional support, more efficiently than the booklet did. However, six weeks after the treatment, their knowledge of mobile operating systems vocabulary seemed to have stabilized to similar levels. As to motivation, Calvo-Ferrer (2015: 9) found that external motivation, the motivation that originated from the will to learn, had a positive effect on learning gains, whereas internal motivation, meaning motivation originating from enjoying the game, did not.

As seen above, there has been a great deal of research on informal learning in the past. However, even though many of the studies above bear similarity to my study, there is a gap in the field that my study fills, which the others do not. My study focuses explicitly on the students' self-evaluations of their own proficiency relating to informal learning, whereas many other studies focus

strictly on how informal learning influences formal learning. This is why I believe that my study is relevant and adds new information to the field.

3 METHODOLOGY

3.1 Aims of the study

In this study, I examined the frequency, duration and forms of extracurricular English usage of Finnish high school students, and how they relate to the students' assessment of their own proficiency, how this compares with their graded proficiency at school, and what the factors influencing their proficiencies are.

My research questions are as follows:

1. How frequently and for how long does informal learning occur weekly and daily?
2. What forms of informal learning do the students typically utilize?
3. How does informal learning relate to the students' assessment of their own proficiency and their course grades?

I searched for answers to these questions by means of a questionnaire in a high school in Central Finland. In order to answer the research questions, I first analyzed some general trends in the results of my study regarding the forms, frequency and duration of informal learning. Afterwards, I compared and contrasted the grades and self-assessments with the ways of informal learning, in order to see what kind of effects informal learning had on the two respective proficiencies.

3.2 Data collection

3.2.1 Participants

High school students were chosen as the target group due to their sufficient maturity, yet differing proficiencies and backgrounds, which are exemplified in Tables 2 and 3 below. High school students are also commonly active consumers of forms of entertainment that contribute to informal learning, which makes their data very fruitful for analysis. University students who are English majors would most likely have had too similar amounts of informal learning weekly, not to mention similar proficiencies, as all of them have to be very proficient to even enter university. Naturally, middle school students, let alone elementary school students, would have most likely been unable to

meta-cognitively assess their learning to the extent that my questionnaire required.

The participants of my study were two classes of high school students, equaling 40 students in total, with a reasonably even distribution of 23 female and 17 male students, as shown in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Gender distribution of the students

	Frequency	Percent
female	23	57.5
male	17	42.5
Total	40	100.0

As an example of the students' differing backgrounds, the number of years the students had studied English varied quite a lot in my data (see Table 2 below); the years of studying English varied from six to thirteen, with most of the students having studied for eight or nine years.

Table 2. The number of years the students had studied English

	Frequency	Percent
6.0	1	2.5
7.0	5	12.5
8.0	14	35.0
8.5	1	2.5
9.0	12	30.0
9.5	2	5.0
10.0	1	2.5
11.0	2	5.0
12.0	1	2.5
13.0	1	2.5
Total	40	100.0

The grades of the students also varied greatly (see Table 3 below), from the lowest possible grade of four to the highest possible grade, ten. Most of the students had grades from six to nine, seven being the most common grade with 16 participants. Only one student had the lowest grade, and respectively, only one student had the highest grade.

Table 3. The course grades of the students

	Frequency	Percent
4	1	2.5
5	3	7.5
6	6	15.0
7	16	40.0
8	7	17.5
9	6	15.0
10	1	2.5
Total	40	100.0

The number of participants of this study was originally going to be larger than 40 students, but many of them were missing due to a recent flu pandemic. It is, nonetheless, a number that includes the marginal for error and takes into account that students may answer inaccurately. In addition, asking 40 students ensures that all the sought factors can be analyzed properly; for example, even if some students do answer untruthfully or do not answer at all.

3.2.2 The questionnaire

I chose to conduct a questionnaire primarily for the further inspection of possible correlations, which requires a large group of participants. As Alanen (2011:149) reports, questions regarding background information can be utilized to sub-categorize the participants, for example, according to their age or gender, to make comparisons. This allowed me to see the correlations between the sub-categories, which would have been quite difficult without a quantitative questionnaire. Alanen also (2011:148) mentions that it is profitable to analyze subjects that have been analyzed thoroughly in the past with a questionnaire. Informal language learning is one of those subjects; there have been a multitude of studies concerning it, some of which quite recently. However, my approach is slightly different. I decided to analyze how informal learning relates to students' self-assessment of their own proficiency, instead of just seeing if it has positive effects on language learning, which has already been proven by multiple previous studies (see section 2.2).

The questionnaire (see Appendix 1) mostly consisted of Likert-scale questions, but there were also a few open-ended questions and alternatives, which were analyzed separately from the quantitative data. The questionnaire was written in Finnish, in order for every student to comprehend and correctly answer the questions. In order to remain consistent with the self-assessment in the questionnaire, I decided to use the official CEFR grid (The Common European

Framework of Reference for Languages), which provided the students with detailed descriptions of the different grades (A1-C2) per each skill: listening comprehension, reading comprehension, spoken interaction, production of speech and writing. This also allowed me to compare and contrast the differences between the students' assessment of their own language proficiency by their school grades and the official CEFR grades.

The questionnaire I conducted included five main sections, along with background information such as the students' age and gender. The ideas for the questionnaire were adapted from Ala-Kyyny (2012) and Linnakylä (2010). This study is completely anonymous in that it does not provide any information, which would enable recognition of the participants. The five main sections of the questionnaire in addition to the background section, are as follows:

1. the method and quality of the informal learning the student took part in the previous week of his or her life
2. the amount of informal learning that occurred in the previous week of the student's life
3. why he or she was consuming the form of entertainment in question
4. an estimate of his or her own proficiency using the CEFR grid
5. whether or not his or her most recent English grade is comparable to his or her self-evaluation.

The methods of informal learning were selected from an extensive list of 27 items ranging from English manuals to conversations with native speakers, with the option of adding a new item(s) to the list, should it not be found in the list already. These questions effectively enabled me to look further into the factors of informal learning that influence the students' proficiency and their self-evaluations of it, and to analyze the correlations between them and the ways of informal learning.

The amount of informal learning was reported by the students on a Likert scale, the answer alternatives being: *very seldom or not at all*, 1-2, 3-4, 5-6 and 7 (days per week), and regarding daily usage: *barely at all*, 0.5-1, 2-4, 5-7 and 8 or more (hours per day).

In the third section, the students were asked whether they were seeking to learn English through using it in their informal activities, or just looking for entertainment. The point of this question was to see which mindset of informal learning was the most effective, alternatives being wanting to learn the language, the form of entertainment happening to be in English, being forced to use English in the form of informal learning, and the possibility of adding a new item(s) to the list.

In the fourth section, the students were asked to assess their own English proficiency with the help of the CEFR-grid which was provided in the questionnaire. In addition, they were also asked to fill in their most recent grade in English in the background section. This allowed me to analyze not only how the informal learning influences their graded proficiency, but their

conceptions of their proficiency as well, using guidelines that are widely recognized as reliable.

In the final section of the questionnaire the students were asked to compare their own self-evaluations with their most recent English grade in school. They were given alternatives for how well the grade described their own self-evaluations of their proficiency: *very poorly*, *poorly*, *fairly well*, *well* and *very well*. There was also some space available to give reasons why the grade was or was not fitting.

The questionnaire was conducted in a high school in Central Finland, in February 2017. I conducted the questionnaire by personally visiting the school and handing the questionnaire on paper to every student who was present in the lessons. I chose to hand out the questionnaire on paper, as it was much easier to ensure that every student filled out the questionnaire this way, as opposed to an online version. The students had the obligation to attend the lessons, so the probability of them being present and thus being able to answer the questionnaire was high. Also, my presence during the filling of the questionnaire motivated them more than just getting the questionnaire by e-mail would have. Moreover, handing it to the students during a lesson provided me with more authority in the situation, as their teacher was also present, and filling the questionnaire was a part of the lessons. All the participants whose questionnaire data I analyzed gave me permission to use the data in my study.

3.3 Data analysis

In my actual analysis, I decided not to report correlations between all the variables I examined, as it would most likely be too extensive for a BA study. Instead, I decided to focus on the topics in the research questions mentioned above: type, frequency and amount of learning through the informal learning methods, and the correlations between the methods, the self-assessed and the graded proficiencies. I also examined the students' answers to the open-ended questions regarding the self-assessment section of the questionnaire, in order to determine why the students thought their grades matched with their self-assessment or why they did not. The data were subjected to statistical analysis according to the variables of the type and frequency of informal learning methods, amounts of informal learning and proficiency, both self-assessed and graded, of the student.

4 FINDINGS

In this chapter, I will proceed to report the results of my study. I will do this by first exploring the general trends that emerged from the questionnaire data collected. Afterwards, I will introduce the factors into which all the 27 forms of informal learning in my questionnaire (see Appendix 1) have been categorized. Utilizing these factors, I will then be responding to each of my research questions: analyzing the correlations between the forms of informal learning and the frequency and duration of informal learning and also between the uses and the students' self-evaluations and grades. Finally, I will briefly consider the answers to the final, open-ended, question of my questionnaire.

4.1 General trends

In this section, I will be analyzing the general trends that emerged from the questionnaire data collected. First, I will present which of the forms of informal learning were the most popular, and afterwards, how frequently and for how long the students generally utilize informal learning.

4.1.1 Forms of informal learning

The first question of the questionnaire regarded the forms of learning. In total, there were 27 items on the list of informal forms of using English. The question the students had to answer was: "How have you learned/utilized English outside of school during the past week?" The answers were reported on the Likert scale, ranging from 1 (not at all) and 5 (very much). The number of answers, minimum and maximum scores, the mean and standard deviation of the answers are reported in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Informal forms of using English: general trends (1=not at all, 5=very much)

Informal forms of using English					
	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Q1.1 watching television programs	40	1	5	3.38	1.079
Q1.2 watching movies	40	1	5	3.35	1.145
Q1.3 listening to music	40	2	5	4.15	.975
Q1.4 singing	40	1	5	1.95	1.319
Q1.5 reading non-fiction books	39	1	4	1.46	.854
Q1.6 reading novels	40	1	4	1.48	.877
Q1.7 reading newspapers	40	1	5	1.88	1.265
Q1.8 reading magazines	40	1	5	1.43	.984
Q1.9 reading comics	40	1	5	1.38	.838
Q1.10 reading e-zines	40	1	5	2.10	1.277
Q1.11 playing PC or console games	40	1	5	2.38	1.564
Q1.12 playing online games	40	1	5	2.15	1.657
Q1.13 playing role-playing or board games	40	1	4	1.33	.764
Q1.14 discussing on the internet	40	1	5	2.07	1.269
Q1.15 in virtual environments	39	1	5	1.41	.966
Q1.16 discussing in social media	39	1	5	2.23	1.327
Q1.17 reading or writing blogs	40	1	5	2.07	1.228
Q1.18 browsing or writing in forums	40	1	5	2.30	1.488
Q1.19 browsing through video or humor websites	40	1	5	3.62	1.234
Q1.20 browsing through other websites	40	1	5	2.80	1.324
Q1.21 reading manuals	40	1	5	2.00	1.261
Q1.22 reading or typing text messages	40	1	5	2.13	1.285
Q1.23 reading or typing e-mails	40	1	4	1.55	.932
Q1.24 chatting with foreigners	40	1	5	2.33	1.309
Q1.25 traveling abroad	40	1	5	1.73	1.261
Q1.26 swapping letters with foreigners	40	1	4	1.25	.742
Q1.27 discussing with parents or relatives	40	1	5	1.50	.987

As can be seen from Table 1, the number of answers in each alternative is very high, only occasionally missing one answer. The most popular forms of informal learning included listening to music, browsing through video or humor websites, watching television programs and watching movies, all having a mean of over 3.3. Listening to music was by far the most popular one of the alternatives, having a mean of 4.15. On the other hand, the least popular alternatives were swapping letters with foreigners, playing role-playing or board games and reading comics, all having a mean of less than 1.4. The informal form of learning that had the widest distribution between the participants was playing online games, with standard deviation of 1.657.

4.1.2 Frequencies and durations of informal learning

The second question in the questionnaire regarded the frequency and duration of informal learning. The students were asked to choose an alternative most befitting of their behavior, first during the previous week, and then considering the amounts of informal learning per day. The alternatives ranged from 1 (7 days a week) to 5 (very seldom) in the section concerning last week, and from 1 (8 hours or more) to 5 (barely at all) in the section regarding daily behavior. The general trends that emerged are reported in Table 2 below.

Table 2. Frequencies and durations of informal learning: general trends
(Q2.1: 1=7 days a week, 5=very seldom Q2.2: 1=8h or more, 5=barely at all)

Frequencies of informal learning					
	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Q2.1 last week	40	1	5	2.35	1.424
Q2.2 per day	40	1	5	3.42	1.059

All of the students answered this question, as can be seen from Table 2. The frequency of their weekly informal learning was relatively high, having a mean of 2.35, between the alternatives of "5-6 days a week" and "3-4 days a week". The daily amount of informal learning, however, was somewhat low, having a mean of 3.42: between the alternatives of "0.5-1 hours per day" and "2-4 hours per day".

4.2 The factors

I subjected the informal forms of using English into factor analysis, and decided to divide the forms of informal learning into four different factors, in order to diminish the number of items to analyze separately. The reliability of the factor analysis was tested by Cronbach's alpha test, which yielded values presented in Table 3 below. The recommended number for an analysis to be acceptably reliable is at least 0.7 (Dörnyei (2009: 95), according to which my categorization of informal forms of learning English seems to be reliable.

Table 3. Factor analysis: reliability

Reliability Statistics		
Factor	N of Items	Cronbach's alpha
Practices with games or virtual environments that utilize instant-response discussion	5	0.813
Practices which require direct interaction or output	9	0.829
Practices which require no output, but utilize electronics	5	0.763
Practices that include reading or writing, but not direct interaction	8	0.833

The first factor, titled “Practices with games or virtual environments that utilize instant-response discussion”, includes five forms of informal learning: PC or console gaming, online gaming, conversations on the internet, virtual environments and conversations in social media (or items 11, 12, 14, 15, 16 in the questionnaire).

The second factor is titled “Practices which require direct interaction or output”, and it includes nine informal forms of learning English. These forms are singing, playing board or role-playing games, typing in or browsing through discussion forums, typing or reading text messages, typing or reading e-mails, chatting with foreigners, traveling abroad, swapping letters with foreigners and discussing with parents or other relatives (or items 4, 13, 18, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27 in the questionnaire).

The third factor is titled “Practices which require no output, but utilize electronics”. It consists of five items, which include watching television, watching movies, listening to music, browsing through video- or humor-based websites and browsing through other English websites (or items 1, 2, 3, 19, 20 in the questionnaire).

The fourth factor is titled “Practices that include reading or writing, but not direct interaction”. It consists of eight items, which are as follows: reading non-fiction books, reading novels, reading newspapers, reading magazines, reading comics, reading e-zines, reading or writing blogs and reading manuals (or items 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 17, 21 in the questionnaire).

4.3 Correlations

In this section, I will analyze the correlations between the previously introduced factors and frequencies and durations, self-assessments and grades. In the correlation tables, significant correlations are marked with a single asterisk (*) or a double asterisk (**).

4.3.1 Forms and the frequency and duration of informal learning

Testing by correlations, the results showed that most of the factors correlated significantly with the frequency and duration of informal learning. This means that the more time the students used on informal learning weekly and daily, the more they participated in activities that these factors included. The correlations between each factor and the frequency and duration of informal learning are presented in Table 4 below.

Table 4. Correlations between forms and frequencies and durations of informal learning

		Q2.1 last week	Q2.2 per day
Practices with games or virtual environments that utilize instant-response discussion	Pearson Correlation	-.321*	-.380*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.043	.015
	N	40	40
Practices which require direct interaction or output	Pearson Correlation	-.222	-.259
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.170	.107
	N	40	40
Practices which require no output, but utilize electronics	Pearson Correlation	-.530**	-.438**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.005
	N	40	40
Practices that include reading or writing, but not direct interaction	Pearson Correlation	-.294	-.334*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.066	.035
	N	40	40

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

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

As seen in Table 4, factor three (“Practices which require no output, but utilize electronics”) correlated the most strongly with both the frequency and duration of informal learning. This is not surprising, as listening to music and watching television programs and movies, for example, are very common pastimes. Factor one (“Practices with games or virtual environments that utilize instant-response discussion”) correlated with both significantly, and factor four (“Practices that

include reading or writing, but not direct interaction”) correlated with the daily duration of informal learning, but not the weekly frequency. In contrast, factor two (“Practices which require direct interaction or output”) had no significant correlation to either parameter.

4.3.2 Forms of informal learning and self-evaluations

In the correlation analysis between the forms of informal learning and self-evaluations, the results were quite interesting. Eight participants answered this question in an invalid manner, and consequently their answers were left out of this analysis. The correlations between the forms of informal learning and each of the skills in the self-evaluations by the students are shown in Table 5 below.

Table 5. Correlations between forms of informal learning and self-evaluations

		Correlations with self-evaluations				
		Q4.1 listening comprehension	Q4.2 reading comprehension	Q4.3 spoken interaction	Q4.4 production of speech	Q4.5 writing
Practices with games or virtual environments that utilize instant- response discussion	Pearson Correlation	-.353*	-.305	-.147	-.223	-.294
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.047	.090	.423	.221	.102
	N	32	32	32	32	32
Practices which require direct interaction or output	Pearson Correlation	-.138	-.128	-.060	-.106	-.022
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.452	.485	.743	.562	.903
	N	32	32	32	32	32
Practices which require no output, but utilize electronics	Pearson Correlation	-.598**	-.456**	-.427*	-.623**	-.419*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.009	.015	.000	.017
	N	32	32	32	32	32
Practices that include reading or writing, but not direct interaction	Pearson Correlation	-.393*	-.397*	-.361*	-.344	-.336
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.026	.025	.042	.054	.060
	N	32	32	32	32	32

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

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

As shown in Table 5 above, factor one only had a significant correlation with listening comprehension. Factor three correlated significantly with all the language skills, though the least strongly with spoken interaction. Factors two and four had the most interesting results. Factor two did not correlate significantly with any of the language skills, despite being the most directly interactive of the four. Factor four, however, correlated significantly, in addition to reading comprehension, also with listening comprehension and spoken interaction: two language skills that should not have direct connections to the informal forms of using English included in the factor, which mostly related to reading and writing.

4.3.3 Forms of informal learning and course grades

The analysis of the correlation test for the forms and the course grades of the students were also fairly interesting. Only one of the factors correlated significantly with the course grades, as Table 6 below presents.

Table 6. Correlations between forms of informal learning and course grades

		grade
Practices with games or virtual environments that utilize instant-response discussion	Pearson Correlation	.075
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.645
	N	40
Practices which require direct interaction or output	Pearson Correlation	-.007
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.966
	N	40
Practices which require no output, but utilize electronics	Pearson Correlation	.408**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.009
	N	40
Practices that include reading or writing, but not direct interaction	Pearson Correlation	.197
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.223
	N	40

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

Factor three was the only one that had a significant correlation with the course grades, with a correlation coefficient of .408. This, in contrast to the other factors, all of which had minimal correlations with the course grades, is quite a strong correlation. Despite factor three having the

most popular forms of informal learning, it is very intriguing that it was the only one to correlate with the course grades.

4.4 The qualitative data

In this section, I will briefly consider the answers to the final question of my questionnaire: “How well did your course grade describe your self-assessed proficiency and why?” The numeral results are as shown in Table 7 below.

Table 7. The correspondence of the students' course grades with their self-evaluations

Q5	Frequency	Percent
Very well	4	10.0
Well	12	30.0
Fairly well	17	42.5
Poorly	7	17.5
Total	40	100.0

As can be seen from Table 7 above, most of the students' answers (72.5%) were either “well” (30.0%) or “fairly well” (42.5%). Not all students answered why they had chosen a certain alternative, but the majority of the reasons that the students reported included, for example, tests not measuring their proficiency well enough, their proficiency being better outside of school contexts and classroom English being too technical:

Olen kehittynyt paljon. Kokeessa ei usein näy osaamiseni.

Koulussa englanti ei suju hirveän hyvin, mutta ulkopuolella osaan puhua englantia melko sujuvasti. Se ärsyttää koska tietenkin koulussa kielioppi on tärkeintä ja sen osaaminen.

Koulun ns. teoriaenkku ei suju kovin hyvin, mutta osaan mielestäni ulkopuolella soveltaa kielitaitoa paremmin.

5 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The present study examined informal learning in the Finnish context, exploring the forms, frequency and duration of informal learning in the students' lives. Moreover, it thrived to understand the correlations between informal learning and students' proficiency, both self-assessed and graded. The study was carried out using a Likert-scale questionnaire with five questions providing mainly quantitative data, along with one open-ended question regarding the correspondence of the students' course grades and self-assessments in their opinion.

The results regarding the forms of informal learning utilized and the frequency and duration of informal learning were fairly unsurprising. Listening to music, browsing through video or humor sites, watching television programs and watching movies were the most popular forms of informal learning, and as for frequency, the students reported to having utilized on average from 3-4 to 5-6 days per week. The average daily duration was between 0.5-1 and 2-4 hours per day, which is a fairly similar amount to Laukkanen's (2015: 12) findings, being between 15-60 minutes and 1-3 hours.

The results of the correlation analysis were highly surprising. Factor three, "Practices which require no output, but utilize electronics", held the strongest correlations with every parameter: frequency, self-evaluations and course grades. Even when tested by correlations with language skills, factor three maintained the strongest correlations with all of the language skills. Moreover, it was the only factor to have a significant correlation with the students' course grades. This is probably due to the popularity of the forms of informal learning in factor three, including for example watching TV and listening to music. Another very surprising result was that in the self-evaluation correlations, factor two, "Practices which require direct interaction or output", which was the most directly interactive of the four factors, did not correlate significantly with any language skill. This might be because factor two was the least popular of the factors; not many participants answered to engage in directly interactive forms of informal learning. Furthermore, factor four, "Practices that include reading or writing, but not direct interaction", correlated significantly with listening comprehension and spoken interaction, neither of which have direct connections to the informal forms of learning that were included in factor four. There is the possibility of students imagining read or written text in a spoken form in their mind, which could perhaps be the reason for this. However, it is safe to say that informal learning has positive effects in the school environment, as Koivumäki (2012:71) also found in his study.

As the results clearly imply, it would be extremely wise to consider informal learning as a

potent resource in a formal context, and encourage students to utilize it to its full extent. It is rather unfortunate how few teachers are aware of its potential, and many just ignore it as a possibility. I believe that by using informal learning as an extracurricular resource, teachers can both reduce their own workload and further enhance their students' proficiency very efficiently. This is due to the rather non-tiring nature of informal learning: students can enjoy themselves while learning English, without having to overexert or feeling bored. It is not necessary for informal learning to replace formal learning, but rather to complement it in an inspiring, motivating way. The results of this study suggest that utilizing informal forms of learning such as the ones included within factor three, the learning will be more efficient and diverse. Above all, factor three seems to encapsulate the most popular forms of informal learning, meaning that utilizing them would most likely make it possible to reach out to the largest number of students.

Naturally, there are a number of aspects to consider while critically examining the results of the present study. While the results were certainly very interesting and in many ways useful, the number of participants in the study was only 40, a number that by default prevents major generalization of the results. Furthermore, many of the students, despite my instructions describing the correct ways to answer, failed to make use of the CEFR grid, or left some questions unanswered altogether. In addition to this, some of the students might have answered untruthfully, or underestimated their own capability. As seen in the results of the open-ended question, many students stated that the school tests do not measure their competence adequately. Consequently, if the students receive poor grades from tests, they might feel discouraged about their proficiency and evaluate it lower than their actual proficiency is.

Due to the small size of a BA study, many aspects that could have been fruitful for analysis were left out. This includes the question of mindsets in my questionnaire (see Appendix 1), which would certainly have been interesting to analyze. The analysis of the questions that did get included could have also been much more scrutinizing, had this been a larger-scale study; the background variables could have been used for further correlation analysis, for example. Finally, in a larger study, the target group could have been more diverse, such as high school students from different schools or even different countries.

The questionnaire also has some room for improvement. The research questions for this study were rather complex, and the angle from which I approached informal learning was quite different from previous studies, resulting in the utter lack of a complete questionnaire to adapt from. Instead, it was necessary to find parts of existing questionnaires that fit my study, and then compile my own, which ended up being quite unwieldy in some ways. For example, the sheer number of alternatives in the forms of informal learning made the data very difficult to analyze. Furthermore,

my attempt at reducing the number of alternatives resulted in combining some of them, making them difficult to categorize, and perhaps even inaccurate when considering the results.

Regarding future studies, this topic could be further pursued in multiple ways. The focus could easily be switched to qualitative instead of quantitative for micro-level analysis. In the case of a quantitative study, the number and diversity of the participants could be much greater. For example, it could be carried out in another part of Finland, in another country, or even multiple. It is also possible to research different stages of school, such as middle school or even university. Moreover, the background variables of the participants could be elaborated on, not to mention the mindsets of the students learning informally. The language of informal learning could also be changed. The area of informal learning influencing students' self-evaluations of their own proficiency is still very fresh, and there is a great deal of research to be done regarding it.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1. The questionnaire

Kysely englannin kielen oppimisesta ja käytöstä koulun ulkopuolella

Hei! Nimeni on Jesse Takamaa ja opiskelen englantia Jyväskylän yliopistossa. Teen tutkimusta englantia opiskelevien lukiolaisten englannin käytöstä kouluajan ulkopuolella.

Tehtävänäsi tässä kyselyssä on vastata väittämiin mahdollisimman totuudenmukaisesti, ja joissain kysymyksissä valita itseäsi parhaiten kuvaava vaihtoehto.

Kysely on täysin anonyymi, eli sinun ei tarvitse kirjoittaa nimeäsi vastauslomakkeeseen, eikä tietojasi täten voida tunnistaa muista vastauksista. (Vaikka laittaisit nimesi paperiin, sitä ei julkaista eikä käytetä missään.)

Vastaamalla tähän kyselyyn annat suostumuksesi siihen, että saan hyödyntää vastauksiasi osana tutkimustani.

Kiitos jo etukäteen kyselyyn vastaamisesta!

Parhain terveisin,

Jesse Takamaa

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Jyväskylän yliopisto

Taustatiedot

1. Mikä on sukupuolesi? naispuolinen miespuolinen
2. Mikä on äidinkieleni? _____
3. Montako vuotta olet opiskellut englantia? _____
4. Mikä oli englannin numerosi viime todistuksessa? _____
5. Oletko asunut tai käynyt koulua toisessa maassa? Jos olet, missä ja kuinka kauan?

Kysymys 1. Arvioi englannin käyttöäsi mahdollisimman totuudenmukaisesti.

Miten olet oppinut/hyödyntänyt englantia koulun ulkopuolella viimeisen viikon aikana?

Arvioi kutakin kohtaa asteikolla (1-5)

5= erittäin paljon

4= paljon

3= jonkin verran

2= aika vähän

1= en lainkaan

Oma arviosi (1-5)

1. englanninkielisiä tv-ohjelmia katsellessa _____
 2. englanninkielisiä elokuvia katsellessa _____
 3. englanninkielellä laulettua musiikkia kuunnellessa _____
 4. laulaessa itse englannin kielellä (esim. karaoke tai laulupelit) _____
 5. englanninkielisiä tietokirjoja lukiessa _____
 6. englanninkielisiä romaaneja lukiessa (esim. Harry Potter) _____
 7. englanninkielisiä sanoma- ja aikakauslehtiä lukiessa (esim. Newsweek, Elle) _____
 8. englanninkielisiä harrastelehtiä lukiessa _____
 9. englanninkielisiä sarjakuvia lukiessa _____
 10. englanninkielisiä verkkolehtiä lukiessa _____
 11. englanninkielisiä tietokone- tai konsolipelejä pelatessa _____
 12. englanninkielisiä verkkopelejä pelatessa (esim. Counter Strike, World of Warcraft) _____
 13. englanninkielisiä lauta- tai roolipelejä pelatessa _____
 14. keskustellessa englanniksi Internetissä (esim. MSN, Skype, IRC, Chat) _____
 15. englanninkielisissä virtuaaliympäristöissä (esim. Habbo, IMVU) _____
 16. keskustelemalla englanniksi sosiaalisessa mediassa (esim. Facebook, Twitter) _____
 17. englanninkielisiä blogeja lukiessa tai kirjoittaessa _____
 18. englanninkielisillä foorumeilla/keskustelupalstoilla selaillessa/kirjoitellessa _____
 19. englanninkielisiä video- ja huumorisivuja selaillessa (esim. YouTube) _____
 20. muilta englanninkielisillä Internet-sivuilla selaillessa _____
 21. englanninkielisiä ohjeita tai manuaaleja lukiessa _____
 22. englanninkielisiä tekstiviestejä kirjoittaessa/lukiessa _____
 23. englanninkielisiä sähköpostiviestejä kirjoittaessa/lukiessa _____
 24. jutellessa ulkomaalaisten kanssa (Suomessa) _____
 25. ulkomaanmatkoilla / leireillä _____
 26. kirjeenvaihdossa ulkomaalaisten kanssa _____
 27. keskustellessa vanhempien tai sukulaisten kanssa _____
 28. muulla tavoin, miten? _____
-

Kysymys 2. Valitse käyttäytymistäsi parhaiten kuvaava vaihtoehto. (X)

Arvioi, kuinka usein, ja kuinka pitkäkestoisesti käytit/hyödynsit englantia koulun ulkopuolella viimeisen viikon aikana.

Viikossa:

- 7 päivänä viikossa
- 5-6 päivänä viikossa
- 3-4 päivänä viikossa
- 1-2 päivänä viikossa
- Hyvin harvoin tai en juuri lainkaan

Päivässä:

- Lähes koko valveillaoloajan, 8 tuntia tai enemmän
- 5-7 tuntia päivässä
- 2-4 tuntia päivässä
- Puolesta tunnista tuntiin päivässä
- En juuri lainkaan

Kysymys 3. Valitse käyttäytymistäsi parhaiten kuvaava vaihtoehto. (X)

Kun hyödynsit englantia vapaa-ajallasi, teitkö niin

- Opiskellaksesi englantia kouluajan ulkopuolella
 - Koska kuluttamasi viihteen muoto sattui olemaan englanniksi
 - Koska tilanne vaati sitä (esim. ulkomaalaisen henkilön opastaminen kadulla)
 - Jostain muusta syystä, mistä?
-

Kysymys 4. Tee mahdollisimman realistinen itsearvio monisteena annetun eurooppalaisen viitekehysten mukaisesti.

Minkä arvosanan olisit omasta mielestäsi ansainnut seuraavilta englannin osa-alueilta?

- a) Kuullun ymmärtämisestä ____
- b) Luetun ymmärtämisestä ____
- c) Suullisesta vuorovaikutuksesta ____
- d) Puheen tuottamisesta ____
- e) Kirjoittamisesta ____

Kysymys 5. Vertaa omaa viime todistuksessa saamaasi arvosanaa omaan arvioituun kielitaitoosi.

Kuinka hyvin viime todistuksessaasi saamaasi arvosana vastaa englannin kielen taitoasi?

- Erittäin hyvin
- Hyvin
- Melko hyvin
- Heikosti
- Hyvin heikosti

Perustele.






KIITOS! :)



http://www.adrianbruce.com/homework/language/comic_strip/cartoon3.gif

Appendix 2. The CEFR grid

Common European Framework of Reference for Languages - Self-assessment grid

		A1 Basic User	A2 Basic User	B1 Independent user	B2 Independent user	C1 Proficient user	C2 Proficient user
Understanding	 Listening	I can understand familiar words and very basic phrases concerning myself, my family and immediate concrete surroundings when people speak slowly and clearly.	I can understand phrases and the highest frequency vocabulary related to areas of most immediate personal relevance (e.g. very basic personal and family information, shopping, local area, employment). I can catch the main point in short, clear, simple messages and announcements.	I can understand the main points of clear standard speech on familiar matters regularly encountered in work, school, leisure, etc. I can understand the main point of news reports or TV programmes on current affairs or topics of personal or professional interest when the delivery is relatively slow and clear.	I can understand extended speech and lectures and follow even complex lines of argument provided the topic is reasonably familiar. I can understand most TV news and current affairs programmes. I can understand the majority of films in standard dialect.	I can understand extended speech even when it is not clearly structured and when relationships are only implied and not signalled explicitly. I can understand television programmes and films without too much effort.	I have no difficulty in understanding any kind of spoken language, whether live or broadcast, even when delivered at fast native speed, provided I have some time to get familiar with the accent.
	 Reading	I can understand familiar names, words and very simple sentences, for example on notices and posters or in catalogues.	I can read very short, simple texts. I can find specific, predictable information in simple everyday material such as advertisements, prospectuses, menus and timetables and I can understand short simple personal letters.	I can understand texts that consist mainly of high frequency everyday or job-related language. I can understand the description of events, feelings and wishes in personal letters.	I can read articles and reports concerned with contemporary issues in which the writers adopt particular attitudes or viewpoints. I can understand contemporary literary prose.	I can understand long and complex factual and literary texts, appreciating distinctions of style. I can understand specialised articles and longer technical instructions, even when they do not relate to my field.	I can read with ease virtually all forms of the written language, including abstract, structurally or linguistically complex texts such as manuals, specialised articles and literary works.
Speaking	 Spoken interaction	I can interact in a simple way provided the other person is prepared to repeat or rephrase things at a slower rate of speech and help me formulate what I'm trying to say. I can ask and answer simple questions in areas of immediate need or on very familiar topics.	I can communicate in simple and routine tasks requiring a simple and direct exchange of information on familiar topics and activities. I can handle very short social exchanges, even though I can't usually understand enough to keep the conversation going myself.	I can deal with most situations likely to arise whilst travelling in an area where the language is spoken. I can enter unprepared into conversation on topics that are familiar, of personal interest or pertinent to everyday life (e.g. family, hobbies, work, travel and current events).	I can interact with a degree of fluency and spontaneity that makes regular interaction with native speakers quite possible. I can take an active part in discussion in familiar contexts, accounting for and sustaining my views.	I can express myself fluently and spontaneously without much obvious searching for expressions. I can use language flexibly and effectively for social and professional purposes. I can formulate ideas and opinions with precision and relate my contribution skilfully to those of other speakers.	I can take part effortlessly in any conversation or discussion and have a good familiarity with idiomatic expressions and colloquialisms. I can express myself fluently and convey finer shades of meaning precisely. If I do have a problem I can backtrack and restructure around the difficulty so smoothly that other people are hardly aware of it.
	 Spoken production	I can use simple phrases and sentences to describe where I live and people I know.	I can use a series of phrases and sentences to describe in simple terms my family and other people, living conditions, my educational background and my present or most recent job.	I can connect phrases in a simple way in order to describe experiences and events, my dreams, hopes and ambitions. I can briefly give reasons and explanations for opinions and plans. I can narrate a story or relate the plot of a book or film and describe my reactions.	I can present clear, detailed descriptions on a wide range of subjects related to my field of interest. I can explain a viewpoint on a topical issue giving the advantages and disadvantages of various options.	I can present clear, detailed descriptions of complex subjects integrating sub-themes, developing particular points and rounding off with an appropriate conclusion.	I can present a clear, smoothly-flowing description or argument in a style appropriate to the context and with an effective logical structure which helps the recipient to notice and remember significant points.
Writing	 Writing	I can write a short, simple postcard, for example sending holiday greetings. I can fill in forms with personal details, for example entering my name, nationality and address on a hotel registration form.	I can write short, simple notes and messages. I can write a very simple personal letter, for example thanking someone for something.	I can write simple connected text on topics which are familiar or of personal interest. I can write personal letters describing experiences and impressions.	I can write clear, detailed text on a wide range of subjects related to my interests. I can write an essay or report, passing on information or giving reasons in support of or against a particular point of view. I can write letters highlighting the personal significance of events and experiences.	I can express myself in clear, well-structured text, expressing points of view at some length. I can write about complex subjects in a letter, an essay or a report, underlining what I consider to be the salient issues. I can select a style appropriate to the reader in mind.	I can write clear, smoothly-flowing text in an appropriate style. I can write complex letters, reports or articles which present a case with an effective logical structure which helps the recipient to notice and remember significant points. I can write summaries and reviews of professional or literary works.

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