

“I think it is important to learn to speak English,  
for the future”:  
Finnish upper secondary school students’ opinions  
about teaching the speaking skill in English

Bachelor’s thesis  
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<p>Tiivistelmä – Abstract</p> <p>Tämä tutkielma tarkastelee lukion opiskelijoiden mielipiteitä englannin kielen puhumisen opetuksesta. Tarkoituksena oli kartoittaa, pitävätkö opiskelijat puhumista tärkeänä taitona ja opetetaanko sitä heidän mielestään tarpeeksi.</p> <p>Tutkielmassa käsitellään puhumista teorian, opettamisen ja valtakunnallisen lukion opetussuunnitelman perusteiden näkökulmasta, sekä aiempien tutkimusten valossa. Puhetaidon opetuksesta on suomalaisessa kontekstissa tehty vähäisesti tutkimusta, vaikka ääntämisen osa-alueesta on paljonkin tutkimusta. Tämä tutkimus nojaa kuitenkin enemmän ulkomailla EFL-opetuskonteksteissa tehtyihin tutkimuksiin. Mielenkiinnon kohteena on myös, mitä opetussuunnitelma sanoo suullisen kielitaidon opetuksesta, sillä Suomessa kansalliset opetussuunnitelman perusteet määräävät pitkälti, mihin suuntaan opetus kouluissa kehittyy. Lukion kohdalla toinen opetukseen vaikuttaja on myös ylioppilastutkinto.</p> <p>Aineisto kerättiin kyselylomakkeella keskisuomalaisesta lukiosta keväällä 2017. 48 opiskelijaa vastasi kyselyyn. Heistä suurin osa piti puhetaitoa kielitaidon osa-alueista tärkeimpänä, sillä heidän mielestään suullinen kielitaito on tärkein esimerkiksi matkustettaessa. Opetuksen määrä jakoi enemmän mielipiteitä, mutta suuri osa oli kuitenkin sitä mieltä, että opetusta tulisi olla enemmän, vaikka nykyinen määräkin on tyydyttävä.</p> <p>Aineiston perusteella vaikuttaa siltä, että nuoret ovat ymmärtäneet vieraan kielen osaamisen merkityksen nyky maailmassa, sillä monet perustelut vastauksille sisälsivät mainintoja monikulttuurisista kohtaamisista. Monikulttuurinen kanssakäymisen ymmärtäminen on tavoitteena lukion opetussuunnitelmassa, joten kehityssuunta näyttää hyvältä.</p>	
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## Table of contents

1.	INTRODUCTION.....	3
2.	SPEAKING .....	5
2.1	What is speaking?.....	5
2.2	Teaching speaking in a foreign language.....	6
2.2.1	Methods of teaching speaking.....	6
2.2.2	Teaching speaking of English in the Finnish National Core Curriculum for Upper Secondary Schools .....	7
2.2.3	Importance in the globalising world.....	8
2.2.4	Current practise .....	9
3.	THE PRESENT STUDY .....	11
3.1	The aim and the research questions.....	11
3.2	The data.....	11
3.3	Methods of analysis.....	12
4.	STUDENTS' VIEWS ON TEACHING THE SPEAKING SKILL OF ENGLISH ...	13
4.1	Students' opinions about the importance of different skills.....	13
4.2	Students' opinions of different teaching methods, their usefulness and usage.....	15
4.2.1	Encountering different teaching methods .....	15
4.2.2	Usefulness and likeability of different teaching methods .....	16
4.2.3	The amount of time devoted to teaching the speaking skill.....	18
4.3	Enjoyability of learning to speak English .....	21
5.	CONCLUSION .....	22
	BIBLIOGRAPHY .....	24
	APPENDICES.....	26
	Appendix 1: Original questionnaire form in Finnish.....	26
	Appendix 2: The questionnaire form in English .....	29

# 1. INTRODUCTION

This study is a bachelor's thesis that aims to look into students' opinions on the teaching of the speaking skill of English in English as a foreign language (EFL) or English as a second language (ESL) context in Finnish upper secondary schools (grades 10-12). In this study, the speaking skill refers to one of the four basic language skills described by Johnson (2001). Instead of asking the teachers, I was interested in the students' opinions, because they are the ones who benefit from the teaching, in positive and negative ways, depending on how they are taught. In other words, students are the ones that use the language they have been taught, which makes it important to listen to their views on teaching. The aim is to find out whether the students value the skill of speaking, and whether they find the amount of instruction on speaking to be sufficient in English classrooms. It is interesting and important to study this, especially from the student's point of view, because the situation regarding language teaching in Finnish Upper Secondary schools is fascinating. On one hand, teaching is guided by and relies on the Finnish National Core Curriculum for General Upper Secondary Schools (LOPS 2015), but on the other hand, teaching is much affected by the matriculation examination, as also the Finnish Minister of Education, Sanni Grahn-Laasonen, has stated (Nurmi 2017).

One of the reasons for the study then, is the contradiction between these two factors. The effect of the two different aspects may be visible in the results of this study, for example in the time devoted to teaching the different language skills. Another reason for the study comes from real life, in and outside of school, where it is visible that Finnish students often struggle with the speaking aspect of the English language, despite how talented they may be in the written part of language. It creates an interest of whether there is a problem in the methods of teaching, which is what this study aims to find out. One of the major sources of the study is the Finnish National Core Curriculum for General Upper Secondary Schools (LOPS 2015), which provides the guidelines based on which Finnish schools then design their teaching. Unfortunately, the subject has not been studied very comprehensively in the Finnish context, even though some Bachelor's and Master's theses on associated topics are available online. Tergujeff (2012), for example, studied the teaching of pronunciation in Finnish schools, but as pronunciation is only one aspect of speaking, the study is not comparable with the current one. Luckily, however, Aljumah (2011) conducted a similar study in Saudi-Arabia and Plo et al. (2013) in a Spain, which means that some comparative studies do exist.

In this study, I aim to find out how students feel about the amount of time devoted to teaching speaking of English, the methods for teaching it, and whether they find speaking an important skill. The goal is to find out whether the students are satisfied with the teaching they are receiving, and do they find it relevant in their lives. After all, it has been stated by Worth (2004:3; in Palmer 2014:5) that of the time that we spend daily on communication, 30% is spent speaking. This being the case, it seems essential for a person to be able to use language by speaking, and in the realms of this study, the English language.

The first part of the study, that is Chapter 2, will introduce theory regarding what speaking is along with former studies on teaching speaking. The different methods provided by different researchers are also introduced briefly in the chapter. The aims for teaching English in Finnish Upper Secondary schools are also discussed. The third chapter will describe the details of the current study, including the research questions, the specific aims and the methods of analysis. These will be followed by the actual analysis of the data in Chapter 4. Finally, the paper will end on a conclusion of the study in Chapter 5 which will show the results, followed by with possible follow up questions and ideas how to develop the study further. The study also has an Appendices section in the end, where the versions of the data collection forms can be found.

## **2. SPEAKING**

### **2.1 What is speaking?**

By basic definition, speaking is using your voice to utter words, aloud, producing spoken language. Speaking, in more detailed terms, could be defined as linguistic activity (Aljumah 2011:1). According to Thornbury (2005:1), speaking in our first language becomes so naturally and automatically to us that we rarely stop to think about the processes or knowledge involved, until we start learning other languages. Knowledge behind the ability to speak is divided into two categories by Thornbury (2005:11-24;31-37), who names those categories linguistic and extralinguistic knowledge. Linguistic knowledge means being aware of different genres and discourses, pragmatics, grammar, vocabulary, and phonology. Of these, especially phonology is important regarding speaking (Thornbury 2005:11-24). Without knowledge of phonology right pronunciation is impossible, and according to Luoma (2004:9-11) pronunciation, or sound of speech, is a crucial part of speech. The second category, extralinguistic knowledge, includes for example sociocultural knowledge, which means being aware of the cultural norms and values of the society in which the language in question is spoken (Thornbury 2005:31-37). Learning sociocultural knowledge needed for speaking could, for example, mean learning about the small talk culture of USA.

Based on the short descriptions above, it could already be stated that speaking is a complex process. However, Luoma (2004:20) makes it even more complex by describing speaking as a means for communication and interaction. Therefore, speaking is not only a mechanic ability, but a socially constructed way to communicate, which makes it more complicated than the sum of its parts. In speaking, it is not enough to say something correctly, it must fit the situation as well. All the aspects of knowledge mentioned earlier are needed, because there are various kinds of speaking, for example formal and informal speaking. Speaking has genres and different categorisations. Burns (2006:243-244) divides speaking into categories of interactional and transactional speech. According to her, transactional speech is speech which occurs to complete a transaction, for example the short exchange of words that occurs at a shop counter. Interactional speech, on the other hand, means that the goal of the speech act is speaking itself. An example of this is a conversation between friends. Dalton-Puffer (2006) also brings forth the complexity of spoken discourses. She discusses the hardships that foreign language users

face while speaking in a foreign language, the greatest of which is trying to stay in the conversation while at the same time trying to remember all the knowledge they have of the language in question.

As well as being an action that requires a great deal of background knowledge discussed above, speaking is also a skill. According to Johnson (2001:269) speaking is one of the four language skills, the others being reading, writing, and listening. The skill-nature of speaking has also been noted by Dalton-Puffer (2006:188) who claims that speaking, as well as other skills, needs repetition. Most importantly, speaking is described by Celce-Murcia (2001, as cited in Aljumah 2001:1) as the most important of the four language skills. She claims this to be the case at least in contexts in which language is used as a foreign or second language. In other words, situations that require knowledge of a second or foreign language, usually require the ability to be able to speak that language, making the speaking skill most important of skills.

## **2.2 Teaching speaking in a foreign language**

### **2.2.1 Methods of teaching speaking**

Above it was mentioned that speaking as an action, and as a skill, requires background knowledge (Thornbury 2005). It was also mentioned that foreign language speakers sometimes struggle in finding this knowledge in the pace of a conversation (Dalton-Puffer 2006). This view is shared by Nation and Newton (2009:115-116), who claim that some researchers believe that in case of second-language-learners, the linguistic knowledge is not so easily reachable, and learners need to be “pushed” to reach the knowledge from their brain and use it. Nation and Newton (2009) call this “pushed-output”, and they claim it to be a useful way of teaching speaking, because it ensures that learners use the language productively. In classroom, “pushed-output” means creating language use situations in which learners need to use language also in domains they are not so familiar with.

Nation and Newton’s (2006) book is a real-life example based handbook for teachers of English as a second or foreign language. Thornbury (2005) gives many examples of classroom adaptations as well, in addition to theory. He provides not only methods and techniques but a broad range of activities as well. He, surprisingly, suggests using writing to teach speaking, for example in a form of dictation. He also discusses that for example reading aloud is useful,

because it acts as a bridge between writing and speaking. From these activities and methods, he moves on to discussions and more communicative tasks in which more own production of speech is needed. Thornbury's (2005) main idea seems to be that learning basics of speech should be made easily approachable, before moving to more demanding exercises.

Some more current and innovative trends for English as a foreign (EFL) or second language (ESL) teaching are provided by Burns (2006), Bygate (2006) and Dalton-Puffer (2006). Burns (2006) discusses the complexity of teaching speaking in EFL, and the difficulties a teacher may face due to the situational nature of speech. Dalton-Puffer (2006) records that learners face a similar problem when taking part in conversations. The same problems are noted by Bygate (2006) who states that whereas with written texts one can return to reading or writing again, in speaking situations it is usually impossible, which makes written texts easier to learn from. As it was described earlier, Burns (2006) has two categories for speech, interactional and transactional speech. In interactional speech, speech is the purpose, and in transactional speech, some other purpose is filled through speech. According to Burns (2006), transactional speech follows patterns, which makes it easier to teach. In real-life, this is visible as pair exercises that have a purpose of, for example, buying groceries.

Burns (2006) also discusses the method of the text-based syllabus approach, which, in a way, integrates language and content by teaching language in a context. For ESL and EFL, this means for example text book stories, and learning for example grammar in a context that is provided in the text book. Being a broad method, it has implications in teaching speaking as well. The text-based syllabus approach is closely related to CLIL, or Content-and-Language-Integrated-Learning. Dalton-Puffer (2006) discusses the possibilities CLIL provides in the context of ESL teaching, and states that it provides meaning for learning. She also reports that CLIL uses asking questions frequently as a method of teaching speaking, and claims that this creates repetition of words which enhances learning.

### **2.2.2 Teaching speaking of English in the Finnish National Core Curriculum for Upper Secondary Schools**

The Finnish National Core Curriculum for Upper Secondary Schools (Lukion opetussuunnitelman perusteet), or as abbreviated, LOPS, was renewed in 2015, the former Curriculum being from the year 2003. The Curriculum states (LOPS 2015:107) that the teaching of all foreign languages is based on "a broad concept of text where text includes both written



and spoken forms”, but other than that speaking as a term is barely mentioned. Regarding the teaching of English, it states (LOPS 2015:109) as a goal that the students should “understand the meaning and role of the English language as a means for international communication” and “develop as an English language user in local, national, European and global communities”. Naturally, the speaking skill is an important part of these statements, but it is not emphasized in any way. Of other skills, reading is mentioned as its own goal of the Curriculum (LOPS 2015:110). That is interesting because the teaching given in schools relies strongly on the recommendations of the Curriculum, and yet the Curriculum is quite vague about what should be learned.

In addition to the goals of foreign language teaching in general and of English language teaching, some minor goals are stated in the English course descriptions as well (LOPS 2015:110-111). One English course description mentions (LOPS 2015:110) a goal of “deepening the skill of acting as an active conversationalist”, but other than that the compulsory courses do not have any specific mentions about the speaking skill. There is, however, an English course that focuses only on the speaking skill, but even though each school is mandated to offer it, it is optional for students to study. The Curriculum does not give any advice on methods either. It is, however, stated in the Curriculum (LOPS:14) that schools should provide multiple, and diverse learning environments for students. This could be implemented to include some environments that require using the speaking skill.

### **2.2.3 Importance in the globalising world**

As mentioned, the importance of teaching speaking of English is visible in the core Curriculum, even though it is not clearly stated. It is also visible that the Curriculum has been affected by globalisation. The globalising world brings challenges with it, and language skills are more important than ever before. The Finnish Minister of Education, Sanni Grahn-Laasonen, has also stated that “in the future, social and interactional skills will only grow in meaning” (Jantunen 2017) and that “in the global world language skills in any language can be valuable for a small country” (Sebany 2017). And as Celce-Murcia (2001, as cited in Aljumah 2011:1) put it, speaking is probably the most important language skill in EFL contexts. It seems that this growing importance has been understood in the Curriculum making as well, as it mentions global communities, working and communicating in an international context as well as English as the language of international science and technology (LOPS 2015:109-111). In addition,

such as mentioned above, the upper secondary schools in Finland must offer a specific course for speaking that is meant to “*deepen the skill of producing language orally*” (LOPS 2015:111).

The teaching of foreign languages in Finland is based on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CFL 2001), which the foreign language text books and the Curriculum itself use as a guideline for assessing students’ skills. It is stated in CFL (2001:3) that one of its aims is “*to meet the needs of a multilingual and multicultural Europe by appreciably developing the ability of Europeans to communicate with each other across linguistic and cultural boundaries*”. In the Curriculum, one of the goals in English language teaching is that the students should be able to assess their skills referencing to the B2.1 stage of CFL (LOPS 2015:110), which is also the goal stage of upper secondary school (LOPS 2015:108). This stage is described in the framework as follows:

Spoken interaction: I can interact with a degree fluency and spontaneity that makes regular interaction with speakers quite possible. I can take active part in discussion in familiar contexts, accounting for sustaining my views. Spoken production: 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. (CFL 2001:27).

Based on the framework and the Curriculum, it can be stated that both of these institution-made guidelines value speaking skill at least as important as other language skills, but after all, it is the teachers who apply these guidelines into reality. One problem in real life is the matriculation examination, which also affects what is taught in upper secondary schools (Sanni Grahn-Laasonen as quoted by Nurmi 2017), because as it was mentioned, it is the final exam and it does not have a speaking part.

#### **2.2.4 Current practise**

Teaching speaking skill of English in Finland has been studied only a little, but fortunately some recent studies on the topic can be found elsewhere in the world. Al-Wossabi (2011) and Aljumah (2011) have conducted studies on Saudi-Arabian students. There has as well been a relevant study made in Spain by Plo, Hornero and Mur-Duenas (2013). The last mentioned provides similar information that I hope to find but from Spain, and the study in question was aimed at secondary school English teachers instead of students. The study by Plo et al. (2013:60) found that 58.1% of these secondary school English teachers felt that teaching

speaking was given “quite a lot of time”. However, it is also stated that of the four skills, speaking was practised the least. It was also discovered that most frequent method of teaching oral skills, is to ask questions and have the students answer individually.

Aljumah (2011) studied Saudi students’ willingness to speak English, and ways to encourage them to speak more, stating in the beginning that Saudi students are often very shy in their foreign language use. This was found to be the case in Spain as well, as Plo et al. (2013:71) reported that secondary school students tend to have a negative attitude towards speaking English in class. Aljumah (2011), however, concluded that students are more likely to take part in conversation in small groups, rather than in front of the whole class. Al-Wossabi’s (2011) study had similar interest, but in comparison to Aljumah, he also provides ideas to make the teaching more enhancing for students.

Al-Wossabi (2011) states that it would be easier to teach oral skills if the class sizes were smaller. Even though his study is from Saudi-context, this notion is visible in Finland as well. In large classes, it is probably easier to give out written exercises than oral ones. In addition to raising class sizes, one another aspect in Finnish practise is also problematic. Finnish upper secondary school ends in matriculation examination, and the foreign languages, not even English, do not have a speaking test in it. The examination tests listening, reading, and writing, but not the fourth skill of speaking. Of the European countries for example Hungary has a similar system of testing students in the end of upper secondary school. In the Hungarian state test, as it is called, students are mandated to complete a test on a foreign language and this test includes both written and oral sections (Csemoch and Korponayné Nagy 2005). In Hungary, as the spoken skill is widely tested, the teachers must feel obligated to teach it properly as well, but in Finland, excluding speaking skill from the matriculation examination may cause a lack of interest in teaching speaking. This concern has also been shared by the Finnish Minister of Education, Sanni Grahn-Laasonen, who thinks that “testing of spoken language skills would guide upper secondary schools to substantiate students’ practical language skills” (Jantunen 2017). The Finnish board of education is thinking of including a test for oral skills in the matriculation examination in the near future (Nurmi 2017), because “The matriculation examination has an effect on what is emphasized in upper secondary school” (Sanni Grahn-Laasonen). These concerns provide a good starting point to my own study about the students’ view on the importance of the spoken language skills.

### **3. THE PRESENT STUDY**

#### **3.1 The aim and the research questions**

The present study focuses on the students' opinions of teaching the speaking skill of English. The aim of the study is to explore Finnish upper secondary school students' feelings towards different aspects of the speaking skill, for example whether they enjoy learning to speak or not. The emphasis of the study is on students' opinions, because in addition to the core Curriculum, another guide to teaching is to listen to the students. Another reason is that speaking is a very important skill, because as Worth (2004:3; as cited in Palmer 2014:5) shows, we spend 30% of our daily communication time speaking. Even though all that time is not spent on speaking a foreign language, speaking is still very important in foreign languages as well, as it is described by Celce-Murcia (2001, as cited in Aljumah 2011:1), who claimed that most of the foreign language involving interaction happens through speech.

The research questions are as follows:

1. Do Finnish high school students find the speaking skill (of English) important and meaningful, and do they enjoy learning it?
2. Do Finnish school students think that enough time is devoted to the teaching of the (English) speaking skill?

#### **3.2 The data**

The data for this study was collected in mid-May 2017, in an upper secondary school in Central Finland. The process for the collection started in late March by contacting a teacher in the chosen upper secondary school and setting the date for the collection. Data was collected through a questionnaire, which was compiled, with the help from my tutor, in April 2017. The target group for my study was second year high school students, because I wanted the students to have experience from several high school English courses to base their opinions on, and I managed to arrange to have two teaching groups from two different teachers in the same school to answer the questionnaire. In total, 48 students answered. Some of the students were underage, which is why a permission to attend was needed from their parents. This was done in Wilma, which is an internal, online messaging system for schools.

The questionnaire was in Finnish, because it was important to make sure that the students understood the questions and the options. The questionnaire had nine questions, five of which were multiple-choice questions and the remaining four open questions. The questionnaire was structured to follow three themes: students' opinions about the importance of different language skills, enjoyability of learning to speak English, and different teaching methods. Open questions were designed to give the students the opportunity to express their opinions and their thoughts more elaboratively.

The questionnaire was chosen to be the means for the data collection because, as Dörnyei (2009:6) points out, it is a very time- and trouble-saving method to gather large amount of data. The broadness of opinions was the critical point for the data to be successful, and questionnaire provided it well. An interview could have been an option, because it would have allowed more elaborated answers, but on the other hand, as many respondents would not have been reached as easily by the interview as it was done by the questionnaire. Dörnyei (2009) also claims that interviews take much more time, and given that this study was done with a scope and time frame of a Bachelor's thesis, it would have been impossible to gather as inclusive data with interviews. Another reason that questionnaire was chosen over interview was that the total anonymity of a questionnaire form may have given more honest answers to the questions. Dörnyei (2009:6-7) states, however, that questionnaires can a validity problem, if the questions are not well enough thought out.

### **3.3 Methods of analysis**

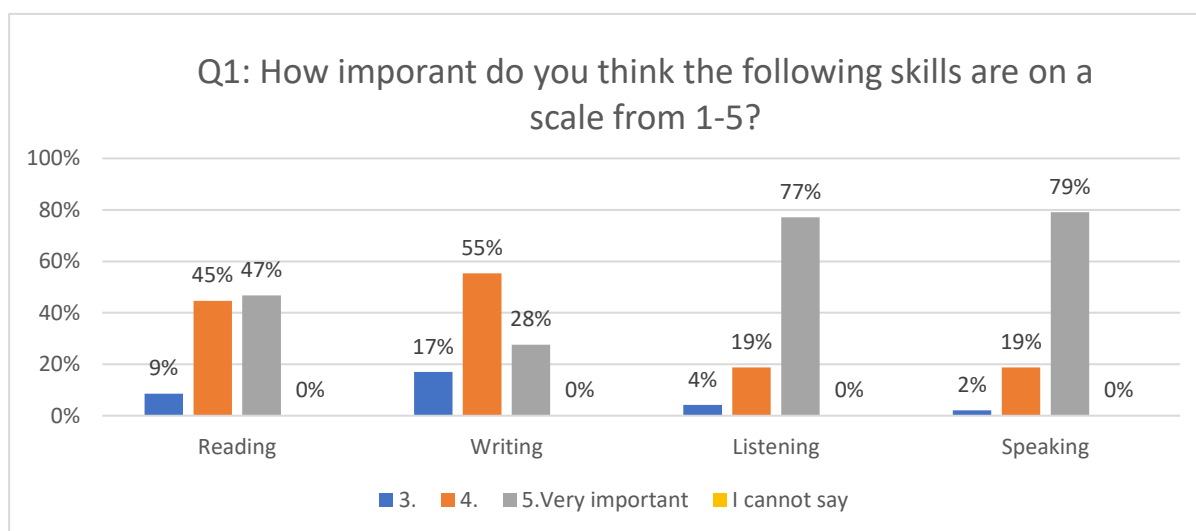
As it was mentioned, the questionnaire was a mixture of open and multiple-choice questions. Thus, it provided both qualitative and quantitative data. Quantitative data from the multiple-choice questions was analysed naturally quantitatively, by forming tables and graphs from the percentages of different answers and finding common threads, themes, and curiosities in the graphs. Qualitative analysis was done by the means of content analysis. First, the main themes were found and sorted. After this some examples of these themes were picked out and then analysed in more detail.

## 4. STUDENTS' VIEWS ON TEACHING THE SPEAKING SKILL OF ENGLISH

As previously mentioned, the study set out to find out whether upper second school students are satisfied with the English teaching they are receiving; what they find important and whether the line of teaching meets their preference. The main interest of the study was on the speaking skill, but the other three language skills defined by Johnson (2001:269), were briefly discussed as well. This chapter consists of three subsections that cover different themes of the questionnaire. The thematic structure of the questionnaire was explained above, but a brief revision is in order. The questionnaire was structured in a way, that it had three carrying themes: importance of different skills, teaching methods of English and the enjoyability of learning to speak English. The full questionnaire form can be found in the Appendices.

### 4.1 Students' opinions about the importance of different skills

As it was mentioned earlier, the questionnaire's first two questions were aimed at finding out which skills were thought to be the most important ones, and why so. In the first question, students were asked to rank language skills' importance on a scale from 1-5, 1 being not important at all and 5 being very important. The answers given for the first question can be seen below in Graph 1.



Graph 1: Answers to Q1 by percentage (n=48)

It seems based on Graph 1 that speaking and listening are considered to be the most important skills. 79% of all the students marked speaking to be a "Very important" skill, with listening following closely with 77%. Reading was marked as "very important" by only 47%, and

writing by even less, only 28% of students. However, regarding writing and reading, most of the students who did not claim them to be 5 or “very important”, claimed them 4, or “important”. All students rated all skills at least at level 3, which indicates that all skills were considered to be at least somewhat important. However, the passive and comprehensive listening and active, productive speaking are held in more prominent position as their written counterparts.

The second question, which was an open question, aimed to extend the theme of first question into the students’ own lives. It stated:” Which of the before-mentioned skills (reading, writing, listening, speaking) YOU find the most important in YOUR life, now or in the future? Why?”. A common reply was speaking, and some mentioned listening and speaking. Many of the students gave traveling, working life or intercultural communication as a motif to the importance of speaking (see the examples below). The examples have been translated from their original Finnish into English.

Example 1. *Listening and speaking so that you can interact with other people and understand them.*

Example 2. *Speaking because I want to travel.*

Example 3. *Speaking and listening are very important skills for the future because they are needed especially in the working life.*

All of these arguments have the underlining theme of globalisation, since all show a reference to intercultural communication. The students’ answers go in line, not only with their previous answers in Question 1, but also with the themes of language as a means for intercultural communication from the Curriculum (LOPS 2015:109-110). Speaking and listening being regarded as the most important skills is not surprising, since, as it was mentioned, we use most of our communication time using these skills (Worth 2004:3 as cited in Palmer 2014:5). Additionally, the answers show that the students understand the need for speaking in EFL contexts that Celce-Murcia (2001, as cited in Aljumah 2011:1) emphasized. Having established that students find speaking and listening most important for mainly communicational reasons, it is reasonable to move on to discuss the different teaching methods for the speaking skill.

## 4.2 Students' opinions of different teaching methods, their usefulness and usage

### 4.2.1 Encountering different teaching methods

To determine students' opinions about different teaching methods for the speaking of English, it was first necessary to ask which methods the particular students had encountered. This was essential, because it made the answers to the later questions more reliable, as the answers could be compared to this. The fourth question stated: "What kind of methods have your upper secondary school teachers used to teach oral skills?". The question was followed by a list of methods and blank space for some other method in case they had seen some others. The results are visible in Table 1.

Table 1: Answers to Q4 "What kind of methods have your upper secondary school teachers used to teach oral skills?"

Method	N=48 (100%)
Listen and repeat	90%
reading aloud	90%
pair discussions	100%
group discussions	94%
presentations	85%
plays/roleplays	6%
debates	33%
answering to teachers' questions aloud in English	96%

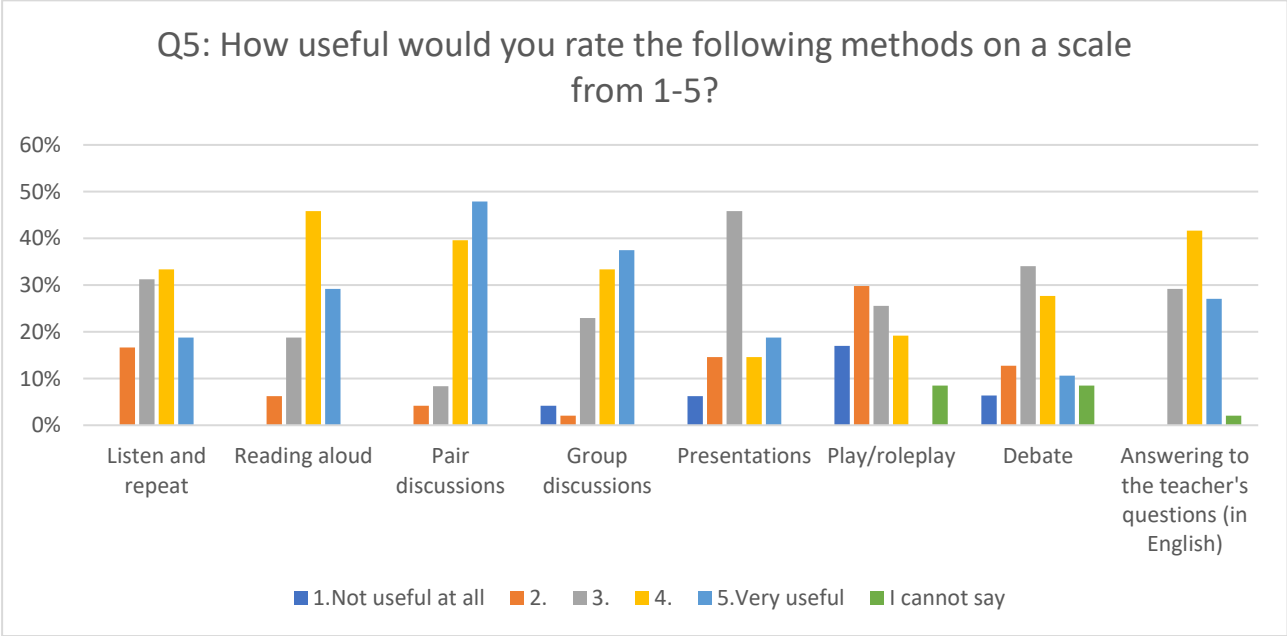
In addition to the options visible in the table above, 19% of the students added an additional method. Interestingly, in a vast majority of cases, the extra method was the same, a video. The video, in this case, was an assignment which the students were required to produce at home on their own as a part of their course assessment. The video had to be about a theme they had familiarised themselves with during the course. The more traditional methods shown in Table 1 were given answers in varying trend, but most methods were reported by majority of students.



It is interesting to notice that even though drama and roleplay are often seen as handbook examples in teaching speaking, they seem to be out of actual use. Another interesting feature is that despite attending the same language classes and courses and having the same teachers, the students' answers vary quite considerably. A total of only 16% of the students mentioned the video, even though the teacher claimed that every student had produced one. Additionally, 15 % of the students claim never to have seen or made a presentation in a language classroom. It is difficult to see where the variation comes from, but one possible reason could be that some students may not think for example reading aloud as a speaking exercise, or possibly they forgot for a moment that they had seen the particular method in action. The later sections will provide more discussion about possible reasons, when different aspects of the methods are discussed.

**4.2.2 Usefulness and likeability of different teaching methods**

This section aims to provide information on those methods of teaching speaking that were considered the most useful and the most liked by the respondents. Question 5 was aimed at finding the most useful method. It included a multiple-choice table of different methods, and the students were asked to rank the usefulness of the methods on a scale from 1-5, one being not useful at all and five being very useful. The results are shown in Graph 2:



Graph 2: Answers to Q5 by percentage (n=48)

As it can be seen in Graph 2, the students find pair and group discussion to be the most useful methods for teaching speaking, while roleplay is considered to be least useful. This is not

surprising remembering that only a few students had encountered roleplay as a method, but also that students found speaking important for communication reasons, which makes it quite clear that communicational methods should be found useful, as they are. Listen and repeat along with reading aloud and answering to teacher's questions were also considered quite useful, even though, apart from answering to questions, these are less productive methods. Answering to questions is a productive method such as discussions, but it was found less useful than the two others.

This question (Q5) was followed by an open question (Q6), which was aimed to finding out about preferences amongst methods. It stated: "Is there a method of teaching (speaking) you have found particularly useful of good? Which one and why?". Main themes in the answers followed the same lines with the usefulness questions. Listen and repeat was liked because it showed the right pronunciation, while pair and group discussions were preferred as they felt freer (see the examples below).

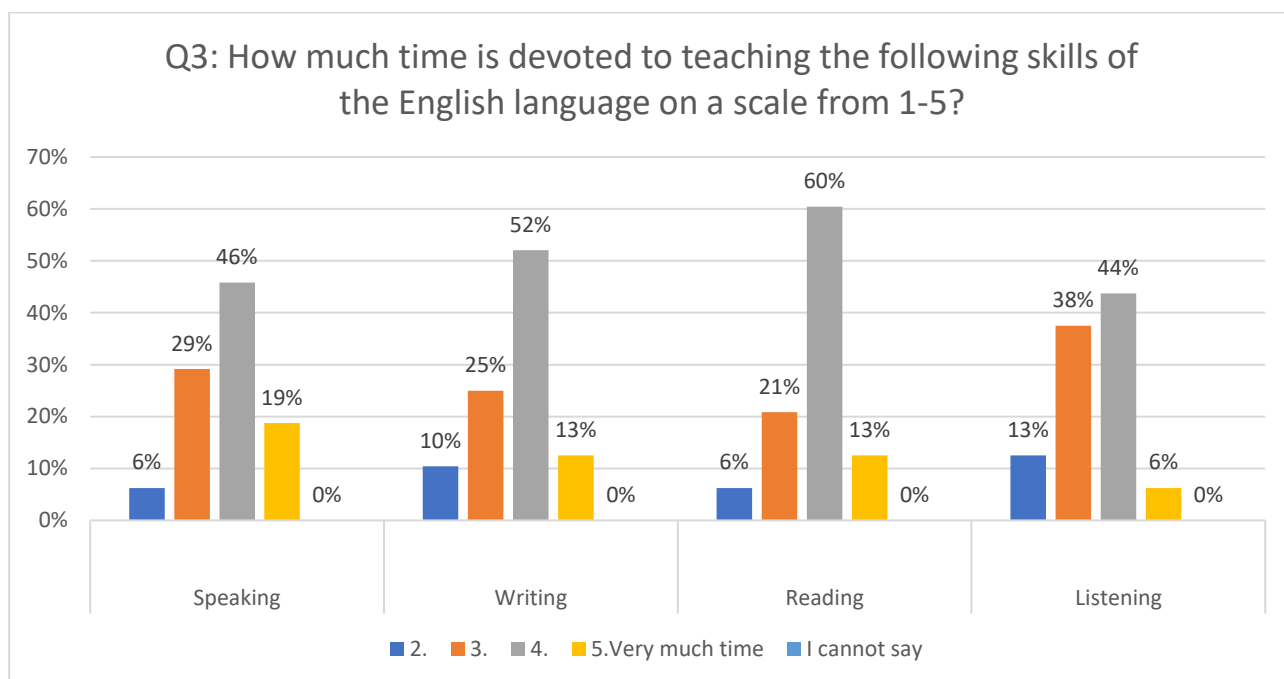
*Example 4. Pair discussions are nice because you don't have so much pressure as you would have while for example answering to teacher's questions.*

*Example 5. Listen and repeat as well as reading aloud, because you really learn from them. Also, pair discussion encourages to speak.*

The dominance of discussions as the most liked method is visible in the examples. The most common reasons in support of pair discussion were the students' fear or anxiousness to speak in front of the whole class. Some students even mentioned feeling pressure when speaking. These answers provide a possible reason for the gap between the usefulness of discussions and teachers' questions, since it seems unlikely for a person to be at the same time intimidated by something and find it useful. In other words, how could one benefit from something one is anxious and scared of. It seems that the whole group listening to one speak brings pressure, which is not there in small groups or pair discussions. This was found to be the case in Saudi-Arabia (Aljumah 2011) and Spain (Plo et al. 2013) as well. One possibility is that having the teacher hear one speak is what makes one feel like an open target for criticism, and therefore peer discussions are preferred and thus found more useful. The other frequently mentioned method is listen and repeat, which is justified with pronunciation reasons. This suggests that even though communication is the most important, the students understand the meaning of correct pronunciation in making oneself understood.

### 4.2.3 The amount of time devoted to teaching the speaking skill

The section in hand will tackle three questions discussing the amount of time devoted to teaching the speaking skill. First of the questions to be discussed, question three, was a more general question. It measured the amount of time devoted to teaching each of the four language skills: speaking, writing, listening, and reading. Again, the students were asked to scale their answers from 1-5, with one meaning that no time was devoted to teaching that skill and 5 meant that a great deal of time was devoted to that skill. The results can be seen in Graph 3:

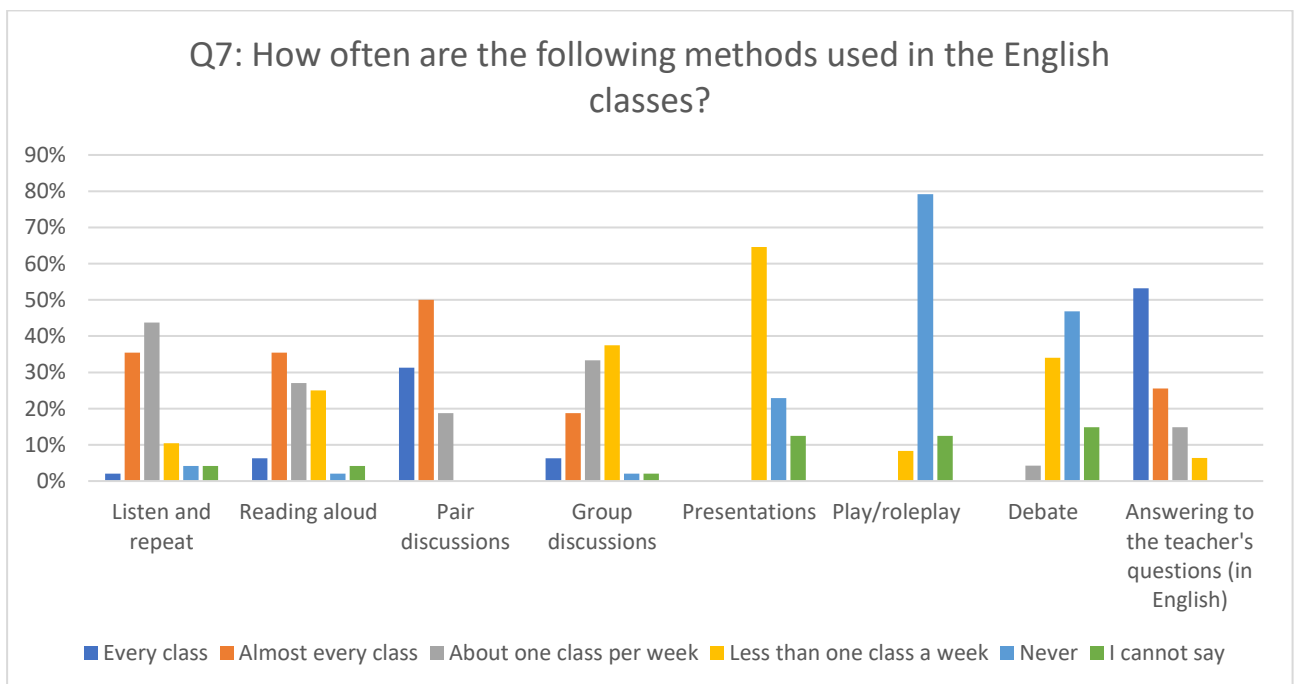


Graph 3: Answers to Q3 by percentage (n=48)

Based on Graph 3, it seems that time is divided quite equally amongst teaching the different skills. However, most time is devoted to reading, with majority of students claiming it is given either much time or very much time. Writing and speaking share the place of the second most taught skill. Listening is taught less than writing and speaking, but not by a lot. It still is interesting that listening is taught least because based on these answers, it seems that literate skills are taught a little bit more than the others, even though speaking is basically taught the same amount as writing. The answers also show that most time is devoted to teaching the opposite skills of what students find as the most important, because as it was mentioned, students find speaking and listening more significant than reading and writing. Another interesting feature of these results is that most time is devoted to a comprehensive skill of reading, then follow the two active skills, writing and speaking, and the last place is held by the other comprehensive skill, listening. This seems somewhat surprising because listening

comprehension is a substantial part of the matriculation examination, whereas speaking is not, which makes it odd that speaking is taught more than listening. There may, however, be various reasons for this. For example, listening is something that is often, perhaps unconsciously, done by students at home, when they watch TV and such, which may result in teachers thinking that it does not need to be taught as much. The results show resemblance to those found by Plo et al. (2013:60) in their study in a Spanish EFL classroom context. They discovered that even though teachers thought speaking was taught “quite a lot”, it was still the least practised skill.

Question 7 was more focused on the methods of teaching speaking, aiming to find out how often different methods are used. The students had options from never to every class, and they were asked to choose according to their experience. The actual question was: “How often are the following methods used in the English classes?”, and it produced the following answers visible in Graph 4:



Graph 4: Answers to Q7 by percentage (n=48)

Unsurprisingly based on Graph 4, roleplay seemed to be the least frequent teaching method, with the majority of students (80%) claiming it was never used in class, and a little bit over 10% being unable to say. Only 8% mentioned it was being used, and those answers were all “less than one hour a week”. It is odd though, that earlier in Question 4 (Table 1), only 6% percent of students mentioned to have seen it in use. Similar odd case happens with debate, which earlier in Question 4 (Table 1), only 33% mentioned to have seen, but this question suggested 38%. This might be explained by the fact that there might be differences in how

students understand or interpret “roleplay” or “debate” as teaching methods. Most frequently used methods, however, are the ones that could have been suspected based on the answers on the previous questions. Answering the teacher’s questions proves to be the most commonly used, followed by pair and group discussions, reading aloud and listen and repeat. Most of the methods seem to be in use weekly, based on the graph. Presentations are used, but rarely. The frequency of different methods shows some similarity to the study conducted by Plo et al. (2013:60). They uncovered that asking questions was the most often used method in Spanish EFL classroom context.

Question 8 was an additional question to question 7, aimed at finding out if the total amount of teaching speaking is enough in the students’ opinions. It was an open question that stated: “Do you think there is enough teaching of speaking in English classes?”. Many seemed to think that there is enough, but there could also be more. Some students also stated that they thought it has been given more emphasis in the recent years, in comparison to the earlier policy of teaching merely the writing. For example, the following answers were given:

Example 6. *I think there is enough of it in upper secondary school, but not in elementary and lower secondary school.*

Example 7. *I think now more attention is paid to it. But still I think too much attention is given to whether something is grammatically correct, shouldn't communication be more important?*

Example 6 provides a good point about differences between school levels. Regarding this, however, it should be taken into account that there have been recent changes to the National Core Curriculum for Comprehensive schools as well, and the emphasis on the speaking skill has grown since the previous one, which was still in action while today’s upper secondary school students were in comprehensive school. It is left uncertain here, whether the student in question is already familiar with the changes made and still believes the emphasis should be greater, or is she basing her argument on her own experiences. The question raised in Example 7 is backed by the students’ willingness to learn to communicate, and also the Curriculum (LOPS 2015:109), which states as its aim to teach the students to communicate. It seems that this aim of the Curriculum is not filled according to students’ opinions.

All in all, it seems that speaking is taught quite substantially, but in the students’ opinion it is not enough. Speaking is practised mostly through peer discussion, answering to teachers’

questions, reading aloud and listen and repeat, which are also liked and found useful by the students.

### **4.3 Enjoyability of learning to speak English**

The last question of the questionnaire was an open question on whether students liked, or enjoyed learning to speak English. It read: “Do you LIKE learning to speak English? Why?”. The majority seemed to be on the positive side, but there were some students with mixed feelings. The major themes in positive answers were the importance and usefulness in life. In the mixed, or negative answers the recurring theme was anxiousness of one’s abilities to speak. The following extracts are from students’ answers:

Example 8. *I don’t like it so much, because I feel anxious to speak in front of the whole class. This though, could be a result of not having the courage due to practising it so little.*

Example 9. *Mainly yes. It is not always easy, but I know that I am learning useful things.*

Example 10. *Yes, because it is important to learn English, for the future.*

It seems that even though the students like learning to speak, and they find it important, some of them find it very intimidating to use the language in real life situations. This was partially established earlier as well, when the different methods and their usefulness and likeability were discussed, but these answers confirmed the thoughts that were raised through the earlier answers. Some students seem to like it because it is important, but for some even this does not change their opinion to positive.

Overall, the students seem to think that skill-wise, speaking and listening are the most important ones, and practising speaking is easiest and most comfortable in a small group. The amount of teaching speaking is sufficient, in their opinion, but there could be some more, since it is the skill most students will use the most. Learning speaking is liked among students, even though some students feel uncomfortable or anxious to speak in front of people. They feel, however, that it is important to learn, for the future.

## 5. CONCLUSION

This study aimed at finding out upper secondary school students' opinions, views, and thoughts about teaching the speaking skill in English classes. The study was done out of curiosity towards teaching speaking, and most importantly, a curiosity towards the students' views. The data collection was done in the form of a questionnaire, which was answered by 48 second year upper secondary school students in the spring of 2017. The two research questions were aimed at finding out whether there is enough teaching in the field of speaking, whether the learners enjoy and value learning speaking. The data provided answers for both of the research questions.

The students were asked about all of the four language skills, (writing, reading, listening, and speaking), but special attention was paid to the speaking skill. The study found that Finnish students value the skill of speaking, at least in English. They seem to feel that it is essential in intercultural communication. They expressed the need to understand by listening and to be understood by speaking. Some even referred to the importance of the speaking skill in the context of international working life. Even though speaking was considered an essential skill, the students' answers suggest that this skill is not given enough emphasis in teaching. It was revealed that reading is taught the most and listening the least, whilst the two other skills, speaking and writing are in the middle, taught equal amount. Differences are, however, not very substantial. The results share a resemblance to the results of Plo et al. (2013), who found that in a similar EFL classroom context in Spain, speaking is practised the least. In their study as well, the differences between skills were almost non-existent.

Of the different methods proposed to them, the students found pair and group discussions the most useful, and they also preferred these methods when asked which they liked most. Amongst the most useful were also reading aloud and answering to teacher's questions. Discussion in smaller groups was preferred, because many students feel a lack of confidence when speaking in a foreign language. This was very visible in the results. Aljumah (2011) had related results with Saudi students, as well did Plo et al. (2013:71) with Spanish students. The present study also revealed that Finnish classrooms seem to be based on the teacher's questions as the most frequent method of teaching speaking, followed by pair and group discussions. The time paid to the methods follows the preferred methods quite nicely. Interestingly, also in Spanish context, questions are the most frequent method (Plo et al. 2013).

Overall, the Finnish students seem to think that the teaching they receive in terms of speaking practice is somewhat sufficient in amount. Some would like to have more, because they find it the most important skill, in line with the findings of Celce-Murcia (2001 in Aljumah 2011:1). Most of the students have either positive or mixed attitudes towards learning to speak English. Many students who have mixed feelings claimed that they know it is important, but they are ashamed of their poor language skills, which makes practising difficult.

As it can be seen above, the aims of this study were successfully met. There is, however, room for improvement. The results could have been, for example, analysed with the help of a statistical software to check out the potential correlations between the answers or some background variables (such as gender) could have been added to see whether there are any differences between the answers given by boys and girls. In addition, in the Analysis chapter, it was described how some of the answers were not coherent internally, but this may have been just a result of a poorly designed questions. However, minor irregularities like this in the answers do not, in this case, compromise the reliability of the study as they can be classified as marginal errors.

This research provides a good ground for further studies. A similar study could be conducted to find out the teachers' views, which could then be followed by a comparative study of the two. Another possibility is to make a more detailed study on the students' opinions. The changing matriculation examination system gives grounds to a possibility of a comparative study as well, for one that would compare, for example, if and how methods and amount of teaching change between this study and a one after the change in the matriculation examination.



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# APPENDICES

## Appendix 1: Original questionnaire form in Finnish

Hei! Tämä kysely koskee englannin, erityisesti suullisten taitojen, opetusta. Vastauksia tulen hyödyntämään kandidaatintutkielmassani. Toisin sanoen, vastaamalla kyselyyn parhaasi mukaan autat minua tekemään tiedettä, ja valmistumaan. Vain minulla tulee olemaan pääsy vastauksiin, ja niitä käytetään vain tätä tutkimusta varten. Vastaukset eivät ole yksilöitävissä lopullisesta työstä. Kiitos vastaamisesta!

Ikä:

1. Kuinka tärkeänä pidät seuraavia vieraan kielen taitoja asteikolla 1-5?

	1.Ei lainkaan tärkeä	2.	3.	4.	5.Hyvin tärkeä	En osaa sanoa
Lukeminen						
Kirjoittaminen						
Kuunteleminen						
Puhuminen						

2. Mitä edellä mainitusta taidoista (lukeminen, kirjoittaminen, kuunteleminen ja puhuminen) SINÄ pidät tärkeimpänä OMASSA elämässäsi, nyt tai tulevaisuudessa? Miksi?

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3. Kuinka paljon aikaa seuraavien englannin kielen taitojen opetukseen käytetään (asteikolla 1-5):

	1.Ei lainkaan aikaa	2.	3.	4.	5. Hyvin paljon aikaa	En osaa sanoa
Puhuminen						
Kirjoittaminen						
Lukeminen						
Kuunteleminen						

4. Millaisia tapoja lukioaikaiset opettajasi ovat käyttäneet suullisen kielitaidon opettamiseen? (Merkitse taulukkoon metodit, joita olet nähnyt käytettävän).

Kuuntele ja toista	
Ääneen lukeminen	
Parikeskustelut	
Ryhmäkeskustelut	
Esitelmät	
Näytelmä/roolileikki	
Väittely	
Opettajan esittämiin kysymyksiin vastaaminen (englanniksi)	

Muita? Mitä?

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5. Kuinka hyödyllisenä pidät seuraavia metodeja asteikolla 1-5?

	1.Ei lainkaan hyödyllinen	2.	3.	4.	5. Todella hyödyllinen	En osaa sanoa
Kuuntele ja toista						
Ääneen lukeminen						
Parikeskustelut						
Ryhmäkeskustelut						
Esitelmät						
Näytelmä/roolileikki						
Väittely						
Opettajan esittämiin kysymyksiin vastaaminen (englanniksi)						

6. Onko jokin edellä mainituista, tai jokin muu, metodeista sellainen, jota olet pitänyt erittäin miellyttävänä tai jopa hauskana? Jos on, mikä?

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7. Kuinka usein seuraavia metodeja käytetään englannin tunneilla?

	Joka tunti	Melkein joka tunti	Noin yhdellä tunnilla viikossa	Harvemmin kuin yhdellä tunnilla viikossa	Ei koskaan	En osaa sanoa
Kuuntele ja toista						
Ääneen lukeminen						
Parikeskustelut						
Ryhmäkeskustelut						
Esitelmät						
Näytelmä/roolileikki						
Väittely						
Opettajan esittämiin kysymyksiin vastaaminen (englanniksi)						

8. Onko ENGLANNIN puhumisen opetusta mielestäsi sopiva määrä?

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9. Pidätkö ENGLANNIN puhumisen opettelusta? Miksi?

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Kiitos vastauksista! 😊

## Appendix 2: The questionnaire form in English

Hi! This is a questionnaire considering teaching of English, particularly the teaching of speaking skill. I will be using to answers in my BA thesis. By answering in your best way, you will be helping me complete my thesis. Only I will be seeing the answer sheets, and the answers will be used only for this study. You or your answers won't be identifiable from the final work. Thank you!

Age:

1. How important do you think the following foreign language skills are on a scale from 1 to 5? (tick the box that fits best)

	1. Not at all important	2.	3.	4.	5. Very important	I don't know
Reading						
Writing						
Listening						
Speaking						

2. Which of the beforementioned skills (reading, writing, listening and speaking) would you consider to be the most important or relevant for YOU, either now or later in your life? Why?

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3. How much time (in English classes) is devoted to teaching the following language skills on a scale from 1 to 5:

	1. No time at all	2.	3.	4.	5. Very much time	I don't know
Speaking						
Writing						
Reading						
Listening						

4. What kind of ways or methods have your teachers, in high school, used in teaching the speaking skill of English? (tick the boxes for methods you have encountered)

Listen and repeat	
Reading aloud	
Dialogues in English	
Group discussion in English	
Presentation	
Drama/role-play	
Debate in English	
Answering to teacher's questions (in English)	

Other? What?

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5. How would you rate the usefulness of these methods on a scale from 1 to 5? (tick the box that fits best)

	1. Not at all useful	2.	3.	4.	5. Very useful	I don't know
Listen and repeat						
Reading aloud						
Dialogues						
Group discussion in English						
Presentation						
Drama/roleplay						
Debate in English						
Answering teacher's questions (in English)						

6. Have you found one or some of the beforementioned methods to be not only useful but also enjoyable, or fun? If so, which?

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7. How often are following methods used in English classes? (tick the box that fits best)

	Every class	Almost every class	Approx. one class a week	Less often than one class a week	Never	I don't know
Listen and repeat						
Reading aloud						
Dialogues						
Group discussion in English						
Presentation						
Drama/roleplay						
Debate in English						
Answering teacher's questions (in English)						

8. Do you think that amount of time devoted to teaching speaking in English is sufficient, or do you think there should be more or less of it?

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9. Do you like learning speaking in English? Why? Why not?

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Thank you for your answers! 😊