

**TASK-BASED LANGUAGE TEACHING AND  
STUDENT WELL-BEING DURING DISTANCE  
LEARNING**

**Master's Thesis (English as a minor subject)  
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<b>Tiivistelmä – Abstract</b> <p>Keväällä 2020 suomalaiset koulut olivat uuden haasteen edessä: covid-19-pandemian takia kaikki kouluasteet siirtyivät etäopetukseen nopealla aikataululla kahdeksi kuukaudeksi. Tilanne vaati niin oppilailta kuin opettajilta uusien työtapojen opettelua, ja mediassa huomio kiinnittyi oppilaiden jaksamiseen. Kasvanut työ määrä ja jatkuva tietokoneen ääressä istuminen nousi esiin muun muassa lukiolaisten puheessa. Tästä syystä tavoitteenani lukion kieltenopettajana oli suunnitella kiinnostavia, oppilaiden työtaakkaa keventäviä sekä istumista vähentäviä oppitunteja toiminnallisen kielenopetuksen menetelmillä (<i>Task-Based Language Teaching</i>).</p> <p>Tämä tutkielma pyrkii kartoittamaan, kuinka erään lukion opiskelijat kokivat etäopetuksen keväällä 2020, ja kuinka he reagoivat toiminnalliseen kielenopetukseen sen aikana. Lisäksi tutkielman tavoitteena on selvittää, kuinka opiskelijat kokivat etäopetuksen vaikuttaneen englannin oppimistuloksiin. Aineisto kerättiin verkkokyselylomakkeella, joka toimi samalla kurssipalautteena englannin kurssien päätyttyä huhtikuussa 2020, jolloin etäopetus oli jatkunut kolme viikkoa. Kyselyyn osallistui 66 opiskelijaa kolmelta eri englannin kurssilta.</p> <p>Tutkielman tulosten perusteella voidaan todeta, että myös tutkitun lukion opiskelijat kokivat etäopiskelun raskaaksi. Toiminnalliseen kielenopetukseen suhtauduttiin kuitenkin positiivisesti, ja opiskelijat kokivat sen lisänsä jaksamista ja motivaatiota etäopiskelun aikana. Opiskelijat oppivat mielestään englantia pääsääntöisesti yhtä hyvin kuin kontaktiopetuksessa, mihin vaikuttivat toiminnallisten menetelmien lisäksi muut seikat, kuten opettajan tavoitettavuus ja joustavuus.</p>	
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# 1 INTRODUCTION

In spring 2020 the Finnish school system faced a challenge it had never faced before: due to the coronavirus disease 2019 (covid-19) pandemic, all schools in all educational levels switched to distance learning in a matter of days. The distance learning period continued for two months in basic education, and 2.5 months in other educational institutes.

Student feedback and several reports in the media turned the attention to students' well-being: many experienced emotional stress from the situation, and students also expressed that their workload had increased. Additionally, many complained that they have to sit in front of the computer all day. As a teacher, this naturally caught my attention, and I started to plan how I could decrease the students' screen time and workload while still meeting the requirements of the curriculum. As a solution, I drafted lesson plans with the task-based approach to provide fun and engaging lessons which supported the students' motivation.

In this study, I wish to find out 1) How students experienced distance learning in our school in general, 2) How students reacted to task-based English lessons during distance learning, and 3) How students think that distance learning affected their learning outcomes in English. The method of the study is a survey with multiple-choice and open questions conducted on the students of three English as a Foreign Language courses in a Finnish Upper Secondary School.

In Chapter 2, I will discuss what task-based language learning is, and how it is used in education. In Chapter 3, I will offer a definition for distance learning and further discuss its effects on Finnish upper secondary school students in spring 2020. In chapter 4, I will introduce the methods of the study as well as the informants and settings of the study. I will also briefly describe the type of task-based learning activities used in the courses that are subject to this study during distance learning. In chapter 5, I will consider the results of the survey.

## 2 TASK-BASED LANGUAGE LEARNING

The reason why I am interested in the use of task-based activities during distance learning is that it is the very foundation of my lesson planning also during contact teaching. Therefore, in this chapter I will explain what task-based learning is, and how it is used in a classroom. Further, I will discuss its advantages.

Action-based approaches to language learning first emerged in the 1980s with the introduction of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). According to Shabani and Ghasemi (2014), CLT was the first approach to language learning that aimed to develop the learners' communicative competence in all four skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing), diverging from the many previous methods such as audiolingualism that concentrated on specific skills. Consequently, CLT generated language teaching methods such as Content-Based Language Teaching (CBLT) and Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) (Shabani & Ghasemi, 2014). For the purpose of the study, I will concentrate on Task-Based Language Teaching.

First, we need to define what 'tasks' are in the context of language learning. As Long (2015: 3-14) describes, tasks are actions that learners need to be able to do in the target language. They can vary from very mundane tasks like watching a YouTube video or telling someone about your day, to complicated ones that require many skills such as writing an official e-mail or participating in a study programme conducted in a foreign language. Thus, the tasks in TBLT education should relate to these real-world tasks.

Nunan (2004: 1-18) discusses the main principles of TBLT. First of all, the content of the language courses is selected upon the needs of the students. It is more motivating to complete a language task in a classroom if you know that you will most likely need the skills you have learned in the real world as well. Second, the tasks should encourage students to learn communication through interaction in

the target language. Third, TBLT uses authentic texts in learning. This way, students get a better idea of how the language is actually used in various contexts, in contrast to many textbook texts designed to introduce a specific grammatical feature. Fourth, the method offers students possibilities to reflect their learning progress. Finally, Nunan adds that TBLT takes into account students' personal experiences and language learning that happens outside the classroom.

Long (2015: 3-14) seems to agree with Nunan's description of the key principles of TBLT: learner-centeredness, functionality, and relevance are necessary in language teaching, and TBLT aims to meet these requirements. Further, Long argues that TBLT is successful because students see it as enjoyable and intellectually stimulating, and because it helps them to learn, which is also supported by second language acquisition theories. Therefore, TBLT was selected as the main approach for this study.

I will briefly introduce the type of task-based activities that I use in contact teaching when I establish the background of the study in Chapter 4. Additionally, I will give examples of the task-based activities used during distance learning, but before that I will discuss distance learning in detail in the following chapter.

## **3 DISTANCE LEARNING**

In this chapter I will define what is understood by distance learning, and which modes it takes. Further, I will discuss why Finnish schools switched to distance learning in spring 2020, and how it affected students in Finnish upper secondary schools.

### **3.1 Distance learning: definition, uses and modes**

In short, distance learning means the delivery of educational content while educator and learner are not in each other's physical presence. Mehrotra et al. (2001: 1-6) describe that while distance learning can take many forms, including mailing assignments and student work, in the present day it mainly happens digitally. It is therefore no wonder that distance learning has become very accessible and has increased its popularity each year.

According to Mehrotra (2001: 6-9), there are many reasons why distance learning has become so popular. To mention just a few, it offers students flexibility. Furthermore, in many professions the employees are required to take additional coursework to renew a license or to acquire needed competence, and distance learning allows them to study without any breaks from the working life. Most importantly, it allows students to participate in courses even when they are geographically separated from the teacher.

Online distance learning can be both synchronous or asynchronous (Oxbridge Academy, 2020). In synchronous learning, students participate in webinars and virtual classes at the same time with their teacher and peers. While it provides less flexibility, it gives students a chance to interact with teachers and peers in real time. This can be done via video-meeting services such as Google Meet,

which is also used in the Upper Secondary School where the study was conducted. Asynchronous learning, on the other hand, allows students to work at their own pace, but offers fewer opportunities to interact with other students, although this can be done on chat rooms and discussion boards. For example, the Open University of Jyväskylä describes on their website that they use written assignments, online discussions, concept maps and e-examinations (University of Jyväskylä, 2020). Therefore, it can be concluded that distance learning can take multiple forms to suit the needs of both educators and students.

### **3.2 Covid-19 and distance learning in Finland**

The covid-19 pandemic forced schools around the world to switch to distance learning to decelerate the spreading of the virus in spring 2020. According to the Trade Union of Education in Finland (2020b), all educational institutions in Finland switched to remote teaching on 18 March 2020. While basic education returned to contact teaching on 13 May, all higher education, including upper secondary education, continued as distance learning for the remaining semester (until 30 May).

Overall, the switch to distance learning seemed successful. In the survey by the Trade Union of Education in Finland (2020a), 70% of the over 5,500 teacher-respondents from all educational levels in Finland believed that the special arrangements for spring 2020 functioned well. However, another 70% of the respondents had experienced that they were not able to reach individual students, or that they reached them only irregularly. Furthermore, less than half of the respondents experienced that they could manage work-related stress and cope with their workload well. Especially teachers in basic education and upper secondary schools found that their workload had increased due to distance learning, as it required them to use more time on planning, learning the use of new applications, and giving written feedback to individual students, as well as

communicating with students and their parents. (The Trade Union of Education in Finland, 2020a.) If the special teaching arrangements of spring 2020 increased teachers' work-related stress and jobs strain, how did they affect students?

The Union of Upper Secondary School Students of Finland (2020) conducted a survey on the effects of distance learning on students. All in all 1,500 students participated in the survey from all grades and regions of Finland. The results were alarming: 60% of the respondents experienced distance learning as emotionally burdening. Additionally, over half of them felt anxious over the corona pandemic.

The main reasons for the emotional burden of upper secondary school students, according to the survey, was a result of several factors. First of all, the amount of school work increased, and every second student felt like they had too much work. Second, almost half of the respondents found that the quality of education decreased, partially due to increased amount of individual work and the lack of diverse teaching methods. Third, as all education happened at home, the lack of stress-free spaces as well as tension in the family increased stress. Finally, it is worth mentioning that due to covid-19 pandemic, over 80% of the respondents experienced difficulties in participating in their hobbies, and over half of the respondents were in contact with their friends less than usual, which also affected students' well-being.

In comparison, in spring 2019, 40% of upper secondary school students experienced their studies causing emotional burden. Because the result in spring 2020 had risen to 60%, it can be concluded that distance learning clearly affected students' well-being in Finland.

## 4 METHODS, DATA AND RESEARCH PROBLEMS

### 4.1 The research problems

This study aims to understand how students experienced distance learning in spring 2020 in general, and how, if at all, action-based learning tasks affected their experiences and learning outcomes in the English class in a mid-sized rural Upper Secondary School. To be exact, the research questions are as follows:

- 1) How did the students experience distance learning in the Upper Secondary School in general?
- 2) How did the students react to task-based English teaching during distance learning?
- 3) How did the students feel that distance learning affected their learning outcomes in English?

With the first question, I wish to find out the general experiences of students participating in distance learning, and also compare those with the survey results by The Union of Upper Secondary School Students in Finland (2020). My goal is to learn whether students in this school also experienced distance-learning as emotionally burdening.

The second question focuses on the task-based nature of the English classes and how students reacted to task-based tasks. I am also interested in finding out whether students felt the English classes were any different from their general experience during distance learning.

Finally, the third question concentrates on how students experienced that distance learning affected their learning outcomes in English. I will also compare the students' views on their grades before and after distance learning.

## 4.2 Data and methods of analysis

The data were gathered in April 2020 at the end of the English courses, the participants of which are the subject of this study. Mixed methods approach was used to combine both quantitative and qualitative aspects in the research. Puusa et al (2020: 308-317) describe that this method should be used when the goal of the study is to both describe and explain a phenomenon. To achieve this, the data were collected with a survey, which included multiple-choice and open-ended questions. Therefore, the data is both quantitative and qualitative to acquire a broad in-depth understanding of the effects of distance learning and action-based tasks.

The subjects of this study were students of three English courses, including two courses for first-graders (ENA3, the 3rd compulsory English course in the national upper secondary school curriculum), and one course for second-graders (ENA6, the 6th and last compulsory English course in the national upper secondary school curriculum). The courses had started as contact teaching on 17 February and switched to distance learning on 17 March. The courses ended between 8-9 April, hence the distance learning lasted a period of three weeks on these courses. Altogether there were 66 respondents, of whom 54% were female, 43% were male and 3% did not want to answer. The responses divided evenly across the courses, with 36% being second-grade students and the rest first grade students.

The questionnaire consisted of 15 questions, of which 9 were multiple-choice questions and 6 open-ended questions. The questionnaire was simultaneously used as course feedback for the teacher to find points of improvement for future courses. Therefore, some questions might have slightly, but not significantly, lead the students to think about the questions in a certain way (i.e. "Did going outside affect your mood in any way?"), but generally the answers included students' own views.

The quantitative questions in the survey resulted in clear numbers (i.e. "On a scale from 1 to 5, how clear were the instructions during the English course in distance learning?"). The quantitative questions gave a comprehensible idea of how students had participated in the course, and how they had experienced it affected their overall learning process. While the quantitative questions gave an understanding to several questions that were of interest to the study, they gave no insight into why the students answered the way they did. Therefore, several open questions were used in the survey to gather qualitative answers (i.e. "How would you describe distance learning overall in all subjects with a few words?"). According to Puusa et al. (2020: 101-102), people are actors who alter their social reality. Therefore, it is especially challenging to try to understand how and why actors' social reality and their actions vary from context to context. Puusa et al. (2020: 75-78) further argue that qualitative approach emphasizes the reality and the subjective nature of the gathered information. Therefore, the informants' experiences are the centre of attention in qualitative research. Due to the large number of respondents, I will nonetheless aim to draw quantitative results from the open-ended questions to better categorize the respondents' experiences, while still drawing attention to individual answers.

The data were further analysed by categorizing the answers to positive, neutral, and negative feedback and by topics. The answers were viewed as positive when they involved adjectives that would be considered as positive, such as "fun", "pleasant", and "interesting". In the same manner, adjectives such as "stressful", and "difficult" were considered negative. If the answer had both positive and negative adjectives, or it was difficult to define whether it was more positive or negative, it was considered as neutral. Additionally, the answers were divided by topics that recurred in the answers, such as concentration at home, motivation, and different types of tasks. Further, the answers related to distance learning in general were compared to the answers related to English classes to discover similarities or differences between the two. Additionally, students' own

experiences on their performances in English class were compared with their new course grades in contrast to their grades in earlier English courses.

### **4.3 TBLT in the studied English courses**

As TBLT is the starting point of all my course plans, in this section I will discuss how I have implemented Task-Based Language Teaching in my classroom. I will also introduce the type of tasks I utilized during the distance learning period in spring 2020 to give an idea of how students were expected to use English from their homes.

#### **4.2.1 A task-based English course: English classes in the Upper Secondary School**

The core idea of course plans comes from the curriculum. In other words, the curriculum describes what students should be able to do with the language after the course. This includes vocabulary on specific topics like environment or high culture, ability to speak and write about these topics, different writing styles and grammar knowledge. The ultimate goal of the six compulsory courses in upper secondary school is to prepare students for the test of English in the Matriculation Examination, which is a national examination taken at the end of upper secondary school (The Matriculation Examination Board, 2020). While the curriculum gives an outline of what should be learned, there is still much room for students to voice their needs; students for example get to decide which texts are studied in the course, how they work (individually, in pairs or small groups, digitally, orally, etc.) and which topics or grammar items they need more time on.

In TBLT, language learning happens partly implicitly (Long 2015), thus I strive to create tasks that are engaging and induce language use. Therefore, I often use various types of games from board to card games, which inspire problem solving skills in the foreign language. As another example, I have used QR code task courses where students have to find their way around the school from one task to another based on hints in English, and mystery solving exercises. Additionally, debates and discussions that have a connection to students' real life, like deciding a field trip destination, induce spontaneous language use because students want to express their opinions on these topics. In short, the courses usually involve a lot of communication among students.

#### **4.2.2 Task-based distance learning: English classes in the Upper Secondary School**

The first challenge of distance learning is that students and the teacher are not physically in the same location, which automatically excludes many games and other communication inspiring tasks. Another challenge is the lack of interaction between students. To further understand the lack of pair and group work during distance learning in English classes in the Upper Secondary School, it is worth pointing out that the video-meeting service that was used, Google Meet, did not enable dividing students into smaller groups for group work, and therefore oral pair work was impossible to monitor. Even in group video calls, only two students out of over 70 students used microphone during the meetings, and none of them had their video on, which decreased the amount of communication even further. I will next introduce some of the task-based lessons used during distance learning to illustrate how TBLT was put into practice during the special circumstances of Spring 2020.

First of all, as Nunan (2004: 1-18) described, the contents of a language course should be selected upon the needs of the students. As the course plan had been

established before, it already met the curricular needs as well as had texts selected by the students. However, distance learning gave rise to other types of needs: after the first week of distance learning, students reported that they were exhausted, had too much work, and had to sit in front of their computers eight hours a day. Therefore, the English course aimed to cater to these needs with less burdening tasks, more freedom to choose when to complete tasks, and tasks that required the students to go outside or move indoors so they would not need to sit all day.

Secondly, to further meet the needs of the students, the tasks required real communication in the target language. For instance, students in the 6th course had to write a CV and a job application, where not only the language and its style, but also the content and organisation and how likely the student would be invited to an interview, were evaluated. Thus, students did not only learn to write official letters in English, but also learned valuable skills for life during a time when they also had to apply for summer jobs. Secondly, the students had to do exercises where they videotaped or otherwise recorded instructions, and during some lessons they had to record what they had learned in English to show the teacher that they had indeed done the required exercises.

TBLT also uses authentic texts, and distance learning offers encompassing opportunities to use various types of digital resources. For example, the students were required to come up with their own versions of a meme that was going around on Twitter and other social media platforms. This required them to adapt to the style of the original text, but also to be creative yet focus on the most important parts of their message to keep it short enough for social media platforms. Students were also asked to analyse ads, translate lyrics (or even write their own versions of the lyrics), and learn vocabulary with LyricsTraining website, where you have to fill in words of a song while you are listening to it.

The fourth principle of TBLT according to Nunan (2004) is giving students possibilities to reflect on what they have learned. As students did not feel comfortable asking for help during distance learning, they were sometimes asked to write their own thoughts on how well they had mastered a grammatical feature, or what they had learned during the lesson. Additionally, first grade students wrote essays which they had to correct themselves. After writing the first draft, the teacher marked problematic points with colour codes (blue for grammatical errors, green for wrong word choices, pink for structure...), and returned them to students to be corrected. The students could also get help from the teacher through a video call while correcting them. The teacher had also marked the grade the students would get from the first draft, and then updated the grade after corrections so students could see how much they had been able to improve their texts.

Finally, the education should reflect students' personal experiences and the language they learn outside the classroom (Nunan 2004). Therefore, some lessons allowed them to explore for example tutorials related to their hobbies or other interests from practicing yoga to playing a video game called CounterStrike on their personal computers, and they also had to come up with their own tutorials about anything they are interested in and would be able to teach to someone else. The tutorials included, among many other topics, sports, playing musical instruments and cooking.

In conclusion, while it is more difficult to induce spontaneous communication in distance learning, it is still possible to follow the principles of TBLT. Although it requires the teacher to spend more time on monitoring the completion of tasks, it aims to meet the requirements of the curriculum while offering engaging lessons.

## 5 RESULTS

In this chapter, I will discuss the findings of the study. First of all, I will briefly explain the students' overall experience of distance learning in all subjects and compare them with the survey results of the Union of Upper Secondary School Students of Finland to see if there are similarities. Second, I will move on to the English courses and how students experienced the use of TBLT during distance learning. Finally, I will inspect how students thought distance learning affected their learning outcomes. Furthermore, I will try to find out whether TBLT had an effect in their opinion. To support my findings, I will provide quotations from the informants' answers, which are referred to with numbers in the text.

### 5.1 Overall experience of distance learning

In the study, students were asked to describe their experiences of distance learning in a few words. A majority of the answers were only negative (47%) or both positive and negative (41%). Solely positive feedback was given by 7 students out of the 66 informants (12%). Altogether, over half of the students (53%) mentioned that they felt distance learning was stressful and there was more work to do than during contact teaching.

As we remember from the survey by The Union of Upper Secondary School Students, 60% of respondents experienced distance learning as emotionally burdening. While the number is not as high in the Upper Secondary School of this study, I still found that over half of the students felt that the workload was greater than during contact teaching. While the students did not use the words "emotionally burdening", comments such as "more difficult", "challenging", "hectic", "arduous" and "too much work" were categorized under the same

category, as these are all factors that increase emotional load and stress. Below are some examples from the students' answers:

(1) *"Enemmän työtä, vastuuta [opiskelijalla] ja intensiivisempää opiskelua kuin koulussa."*

There's more work, the [student] has to take more responsibility, and studying is more intensive.

(2) *"Hyöin hämmentävää, ahdistavaa, stressaavaa, sekä erittäin järkyttävä koeviikko."*

It's been very confusing, distressing, stressful, and the exam week was extremely shocking.

(3) *"Välillä tuntuu et ois kolussa koko ajan, koska päivää ei lopu silloin tiettyyn kellon aikaan."*

At times it feels like you're at school all the time because the day doesn't end at a specific time.

(4) *"Etäopetus on ollut raskaampaa, kuin normaali opetus. Aluksi tuntui, että opettajat antoi todella paljon tehtäviä. Etäopetuksesta raskaan teki myös se, että joutui istua paljon tietokoneen ääressä."*

Distance learning has been more burdensome than contact teaching. At first it felt like teachers gave us really large amounts of exercises. Distance learning was also tough because you had to sit in front of the computer so much.

From the above examples we can conclude that the switch to distance learning has not been easy for most students. Students mentioned that they had more work than during contact teaching (1, 4), and other factors such as sitting in front of the computer all day (4) and exams (2) added to the workload. It is also worth mentioning that every fifth student wrote that distance learning has been more difficult than contact teaching. As reasons to this many mentioned the difficulty to ask for help from the teacher and the lack of actual lessons where the students learn in a group:

(5) *"Erilaista, vaikeampaa minulle koska tarvin opettajaa yleensä auttamassa."*

It's different, more difficult for me because I usually need the teacher to help me.

(6) *“Opettajat ovat olleet hyvin mukana opiskelussa, mutta kyllä tuntuu siltä, että koulussa asiat jäävät paremmin mieleen ja ne oppii paremmin.”*

Teachers have supported us well in studies, but I still feel that I learn better in school.

(7) *“[Etäopiskelu on] Mukavaa vaikka joissain aineissa ei oppinut niin hyvin kuin tavallisilla tunneilla.”*

[Distance learning] is pleasant even though in some subjects I haven't been able to learn as well as during normal lessons.

Among the comments that were both positive and negative in nature (41%), many mentioned that distance learning was difficult at first, but pleasant after they got used to it (9). Several comments also revealed that while distance learning offered them more freedom, they had to do more work (9, 10). Some students also found distance learning effective or easy even though it had not been completely without problems (8, 10).

(8) *“Opiskelutapa on toimiva, vaikka alussa olikin ongelmia monilla koneitten kanssa jne. Tehtävien tekemisestä on tullut melkein jo rutiini. Pidän, mutta ikävä kouluun on.”*

This way of studying is functional, even though many had problems with computers etc. in the beginning. Doing the exercises has become a routine now. I like it, but I miss school.

(9) *“Alussa tuntui tosi vaikealta, mutta ajan kanssa etäopetus on alkanut luonnistumaan ja tuntumaan kivalta. Joskus tuntuu, että tehtäviä on tosi paljon.”*

It felt very difficult in the beginning, but with time it started to go well and feel nice. Sometimes it feels like there are a lot of exercises.

(10) *“Helppoa, mutta enemmän työtä tuottavaa!”*

It's easy, but requires more work!

Additionally, some students found that distance learning had positive effects on their learning skills.

(11) *“Etäopetuksessa on oppinut opiskelemaan eri tavoilla. Joissain aineissa etäopiskelu on ollu tosi kivaa, ja on oppinut ainetta eri tavoin, kuin normaalisti.”*

In distance learning I've learned to study in different ways. In some subjects distance learning has been very fun, and I have learned the subjects in a different way than usually.

The positive feedback (12%) consisted mostly of short answers like “distance learning has been successful”, “I like it”, and “it’s pretty nice”. However, positive feedback was also given based on the fact that for some students it is easier to concentrate at home where there is less noise and disturbances.

(12) *“Etäopiskelu oli minulle ehkä helpompaa kuin koulussa, koska koulussa en välttämättä luokan melun takia pysty keskittyä niin hyvin.”*

Distance learning was perhaps easier for me than studying at school because at school I might not be able to concentrate as well due to the racket in the classroom.

All in all, we can conclude that the switch to distance learning has not been easy for students, and it has caused at least some sort of stress or difficulties to 88% of the informants. Over half of them said they had to do more work than usually, which is in line with the survey of the Union of Upper Secondary School Students. It should be noted, however, that individual students reacted very differently to the situation from distress to enjoying the distance learning period. Therefore, it cannot be said that distance learning affected all students negatively, but entirely positive feedback was clearly a minority.

## 5.2 Students’ experience of TBLT during distance learning

To find out how students experienced TBLT in more detail, the questionnaire had two questions that concentrated on two different types of tasks. The first task was a video exercise where students had to film their yard or some other place outdoors, and explain for example what they saw, what they liked to do there and which spot was their favourite. The task offered all students a chance to perform it at their own level while encouraging them to practice their pronunciation and spontaneous speech. The second task was only for the first grade students who had written an essay earlier in the course for which they had received an initial grade and feedback. In this task, the teacher had highlighted problematic parts of the essays with different colours to indicate different types

of issues in the text, and the students had to correct their own essays with the help of the feedback. They could also ask help from the teacher through a video call where they could join at any point of the lesson. The goal of the task was to help students identify their own mistakes and use their cognitive skills to figure out solutions, as well as to pay attention to their own learning process. After the corrections students received an improved grade and final corrections on the essays by the teacher.

When we asked students to give feedback on the video exercise, 79% gave only positive feedback. 4.5% gave the exercise negative feedback, while the remaining 16.5% gave neutral feedback. The 16.5% also includes students who were absent that day or did not do the exercise. Those who gave negative feedback on the exercise explained that it made them nervous or even anxious because they did not feel comfortable talking on a video (note: students did not have to film themselves):

(13) *"Mulle se oli vaikeaa saada sanoja ulos kameran edessä."*

It was difficult for me to get words out of my mouth in front of a camera.

(14) *"Ahdisti ja unohdin koko ajan mitä olin sanomassa."*

I felt anxious and I forgot all the time what I was saying.

It could be argued that the students were not used to doing such exercises. This idea is supported by other comments, mostly by those who gave neutral or both positive and negative feedback:

(15) *"Puhuminen kameralle oli outoa, vaikka sitäkin olen tehnyt ja puhun muutenkin kokoajan englantia kavereilleni jotka eivät ole Suomesta."*

It was weird to talk on the camera, even though I had done it before too and I speak English with friends who don't live in Finland all the time.

(16) *"Vähän ahdisti puhua kameralle, mutta ulkoilu teki ihan hyöää."*

I felt a bit anxious about talking on a camera, but being outside made me feel a bit better.

Additionally, every fifth of the students who gave only positive feedback for the exercise said that they felt nervous or even anxious about talking to the camera (17, 18, 19). Nonetheless, they still liked the exercises and explained that it improved their oral production and encouraged them to practice their pronunciation (17, 19). They were also forced out of their comfort zone, which helped them to develop (18, 19).

(17) *“Mielestäni videotöhtävänä onnistui ihan hyvin, vaikka huomasiin kyllä sitä jälkeen päin katsoessani moniakin pieniä virheitä, mutta se oli toisaalta ihan hyvä ja niistähän sitä oppii. :) Vieraan kielen puhuminen oli aika jännittävää ja pelottavaakin, koska pelkäsi omia virheitä ja ei meinannut aluksi oikein tulla sanoja suusta, mutta kun rentoutui eikä ajatellut niin vakavasti, alkoi sujumaan.”*

In my opinion I managed the video exercise quite well even though I noticed many small mistakes when I watched it afterwards. But it's on the other hand pretty good because you learn from them. :) Speaking in a foreign language made me a bit nervous and it was even scary, because I was afraid of my own mistakes and at first I couldn't get words out of my mouth, but when I relaxed and didn't think about it so seriously, it started to go well.

(18) *“Suoriuduin videosta luultavasti ihan hyvin vaikka vähän jännitti kyllä. Oli kuitenkin mukava kokeilla jotain uutta, mitä ei yleensä tulisi tehtyä!”*

I think I managed the video exercise pretty well even though it made me nervous. Still, it was nice to try something new that I would never do otherwise!

(19) *“Oli aluksi ahdistava ajatus puhua kameralle englantia, mutta lopulta se toi vain enemmän rohkeutta puhua Englantia.”*

At first the thought of talking English on a camera made me anxious, but in the end it gave me more confidence to speak English.

Students also found out more about their own language proficiency. For example students in examples 20 and 21 mentioned that even though they were good at writing essays, they realized that speaking is more difficult. Both of these students also came to a conclusion that they need more practice on their oral production:

(20) *“Suoriuduin videotöhtävästä ihan hyvin, mutta se oli kyllä vaikeampaa kuin esimerkiksi esseen kirjoittaminen. Se vain kannusti harjoittamaan ääntämistä ja puheen tuottoa enemmän.”*

I got through the video exercise quite well, but it was more difficult than writing the essay for example. But it only encouraged me to practice pronunciation and speech production more.

(21) *“Oli hieman outoa puhua kameralle englantia, ja siinä tajusi että vaikka osaan kirjoittaa tosi hyvin, niin puhuminen on vielä vähän hakusessa. Pitäisi siis puhua enemmän englantia.”*

It was a bit strange to talk on the camera in English. In doing so I realized that even though I can write English really well, speaking is still challenging. Therefore I should speak more in English.

While talking to the camera added to the difficulty of the task for some students (17, 19), those who had experience with talking on a video (22, 23), or who were confident in their oral skills in English (24), seemed to find the exercise rather easy. All in all, 16 students mentioned that the task was easy for them.

(22) *“Video tehtävä oli helppo, koska Youtube videoiden kautta tulee opittua. Vieraalla kielellä puhuminen tuntui luontevalta.”*

The video exercise was easy, because I have learned from Youtube videos. It felt natural to speak in a foreign language.

(23) *“Englannin puhuminen kameralle ei ole uusi kokemus eikä toki viimeinenkään, joten tunsin oloni melko rennoksi.”*

This wasn't my first time speaking English on a camera and surely not the last either, so I felt pretty relaxed doing it.

(24) *“Videon tekeminen oli aika helppoa, koska taroitsi vain puhua osaamaansa englantia.”*

Making the video was pretty easy because you only had to speak English at your own level.

Additionally, while many students felt nervous about talking on a video, for one student it was actually easier than talking to their peers. This proves that such exercise can draw very varied reactions from individual students.

(25) *“Helpompi puhua kameralle kuin toiselle ihmiselle koska silloin ei ajattele oikein ääntämistä niin paljon eikä jännitä.”*

It is easier to talk on a camera than to another person because then I don't think about pronunciation so much and I don't get nervous.

Moreover, I was interested in whether doing an exercise outside rather than indoors had any effect on the students' well-being. Half of the informants wrote comments about doing the exercise outdoors, and of them 97% gave positive feedback:

(26) *"Ulkoilua luultavasti ei olisi tullut ikinä jos ei olisi ollut [näitä] tehtäviä."*

I doubt I would have ever gone outdoors if there hadn't been [these] exercises.

(27) *"Ulkoilu piristi oloani ja toi energiaa!"*

Going outside cheered me up and gave me energy!

(28) *"Ulkona olo piristi ja iltapäivän tunneilla jaksoi olla paremmin."*

Being outside cheered me up and I had more energy to participate in the afternoon lessons.

(29) *"Ulkoilu piristi ja välillä koko päivänä ei ole kouluhommien takia kerennyt pihalle, joten oli hyvä että koulujutut olivat välillä siellä. Auttoi myös jaksamaan loppupäivän."*

Going outside cheered me up and sometimes I did not have time to go outside all day because of school work. Therefore it was good that some exercises were outside. It also helped me to have enough energy for the rest of the school day.

(30) *"Ulkoilu oli mukavaa ja piristi, kun ei tarvinnut samassa paikassa istua koko ajan ja pystyi sitten keskittymään muihin lopputunteihin."*

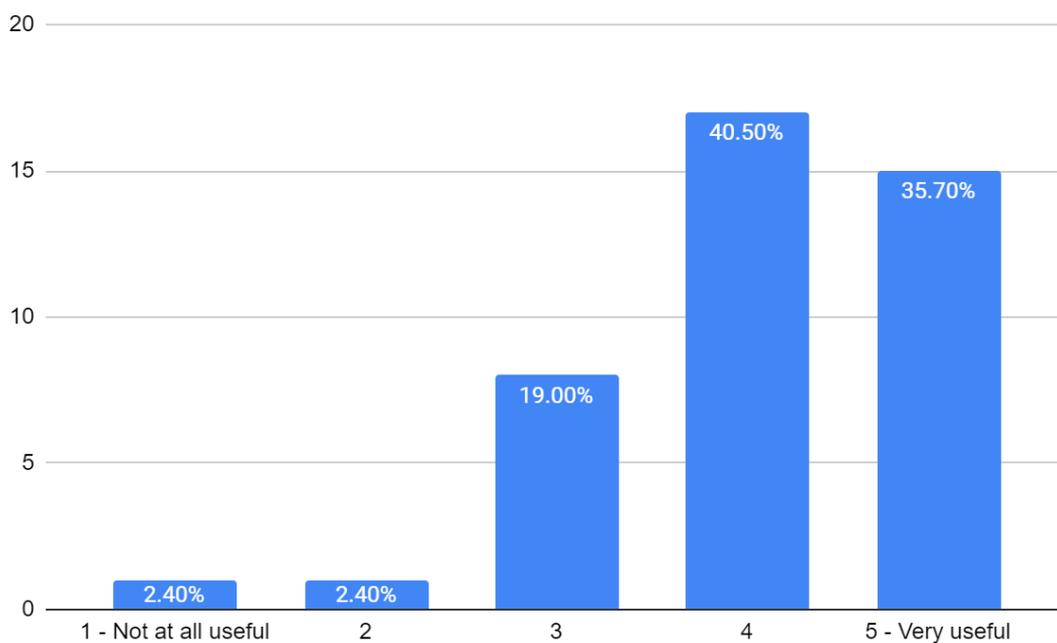
Going outside was nice and cheered me up because I didn't have to sit in the same spot all the time. I could concentrate on other lessons better afterwards.

From these comments it is evident that going outside did not only help many of the students learn English in a different way, but also supported their overall well-being and even learning in other subjects. The students for example mentioned that doing the exercise outside refreshed their minds (27, 28, 29, 30) and gave them a break from sitting in front of the computer (30), which they would not have had otherwise. It also helped them to concentrate in the afternoon lessons better (28, 29, 30). Only one respondent commented negatively on doing an exercise outdoors due to bad weather conditions.

On the exercise where first grade students had to correct their essays, we asked the students to rate the exercise on a scale from 1 to 5 on how useful they found the exercise, with 1 meaning “not at all useful” and 5 “very useful”. From *Figure 1* we can see that 76% of the students chose 4 or more, finding the exercise useful, while 19% answered 3. 5% (2 students out of 42 respondents) selected 1 or 2. Students however did not mention why they selected the numbers. It could be that those students who were skilled writers did not benefit from the exercise because they did not have any corrections to make. The task, nonetheless, was mentioned in the open feedback section about the course in a positive light:

(31) *“Se että sai korjata oman esseen ja nähdä omat virheensä niin auttoi myös oppimisessa.”*

The fact that I got to correct my own essay and see my mistakes helped me learn.



*Figure 1. The usefulness of students correcting their own essays.*

On top of these two tasks we specifically asked about in the survey, students mentioned other course tasks several times in the open-ended questions of the survey. For example, when asked what the best part of the courses was, 46% wrote about the diverse exercises which made the course fun and engaging:

(32) *“Etäopetuksessa mukavaa oli, että sisältö oli monipuolista, eikä vain istuuttu tekemässä kirjan tehtäviä. Etäopetus ei tuntunut mielestäni raskaalta, koska tunnit oli niin mukavia.”*

In distance learning it was nice that the contents were so varied and we didn't just sit doing exercises from the book. Distance learning didn't feel arduous because the lessons were so nice.

(33) *“Tykkäsin kurssista paljon ja välillä iltaisin katsoin mielenkiinnosta mitä huomenna tehdään tunnilla. Kurssilla oli monipuolisesti erilaisia juttuja joten tunnit olivat aina mukavia.”*

I enjoyed the course a lot and sometimes in the evenings I checked, out of curiosity, what we are going to do in the next lesson the following day. There were diversely varied tasks so the lessons were always nice.

In the free word section about the course, 86% of respondents gave only positive feedback, and the majority of positive feedback was on the course content and exercises as well as the realistic amount of work expected to be done by the students (34, 35). Consequently, students also mentioned that the English course did not cause them stress or otherwise burdening (35, 36).

(34) *“Tehtävä määrä oli realistinen, sillä joissain aineissa opettajat eivät tajua laittaneensa liikaa tehtäviä.”*

The amount of exercises was realistic, because in some subjects the teachers didn't realise there was too much to do.

(35) *“Enkussa etäopiskelu ei ole tuntunut raskaalta, vaan ennemmin tosi mielisalta. Tuntien tehtävät oli tosi kivoja, koska ne oli omaperäisiä ja erilaisia, eikä vain kirjan tehtäviä.”*

Distance learning didn't feel burdening in English, rather it was very pleasant. The exercises in the lessons were very nice because they were original and different, not just exercises from the book.

(36) *“Kurssi oli tehty todella helpoksi ettei tarvinnut huolehtia mistään kun tiesi että on taas englannin tunti, ihanasti sovellettu tehtäviä ja myös keksitty kivoja hommia.”*

The course was made really easy so I didn't have to worry about anything when I knew that it's again time for an English lesson with lovely applied exercises and nice tasks.

Furthermore, students mentioned that the tasks were practical and related to everyday situations, which made learning more interesting:

(37) *“Kurssin sisältö oli mielestäni todella miellyttävä ja hauska. Etäopiskelu enkussa tuntui mielestäni juuri sopivalta ja kivalta, ja enkku oli varmasti yksi niistä aineista, joka ei oikeastaan stressiä aiheuttanut! Etäopiskelu oli tietysti hyvin erilaista kuin kontaktiopetus, mutta hyvällä tavalla. Teimme kaikenlaisia erilaisia kiinnostavia tehtäviä englanniksi, ja sitä oppi käyttämään ja ymmärtämään ihan ns. arkisissakin asioissa, eikä vain pelkästään "koulun penkillä".”*

The contents of the course were really pleasant and fun. Distance learning in English felt very reasonable and nice, and English was definitely one of those subjects that didn't cause me stress. Distance learning was of course very different from contact teaching, but in a good way. We did all sorts of varied and interesting exercises in English and I learned to use and understand it in, so to say, everyday situations, and not only in school.

(38) *“Kurssi oli todella mukava ja uudenlainen. Ei ollut pelkkää teoriaa vaan paljon käytännönkin toimia mitkä liittyi englantiin.”*

The course was very nice and novel. It wasn't just theory but a lot of practical actions that were related to English.

In addition, 28% of the respondents also compared the English course with other courses, where English course was viewed more positively. The comparison concentrated on factors such as the English classes being less burdening and not adding to students' stress levels (39, 40, 41). Some informants commented that in other subjects the lessons were always the same and they only had to work with exercises from their workbooks (40, 42). The courses were described as fun and interesting in general (39, 42), even to a point where students looked forward to the English lessons (41).

(39) *“Tää kurssi oli ainoa tämän jakson kursseista, josta tykkäsin. Lähes jokanen tunti oli mielenkiintoinen, kun tehtiin aina niin erilaisia ja mielenkiintoisia asioita.”*

This course was the only course in this period that I liked. Almost every lesson was interesting because we did such different and interesting things.

(40) *“Se, ettei ollut joka ikinen kerta vain valmiita kirjallisia ohjeita siitä, mitä tehdä, oli kans ihan kiva poikkeus. Etäopiskelu tuntui raskaalta oikeastaan kaikissa muissa aineissa paitsi englannissa.”*

That we didn't have written instructions for what to do every single time was a nice exception. Distance learning actually felt arduous in every other subject but English.

(41) *“Etäopiskelu muissa aineissa on hyvin raskasta ja työlästä ja tuntuu, että meille annetaan enemmän tehtävää kuin yleensä, mutta englannintunnit toivat aina päivään jotain positiivista ja oli kiva odottaa että mitä kivaa seuraavalle*

*tunnille on keksitty. Ehdottomasti lemppari kurssi kaikista muista jakson kursseista!”*

Distance learning in other subjects is very tough and arduous and it feels like we are given more work than usual, but the English lessons always brought something positive to the day and it was nice to wait what kind of fun exercises the teacher had come up with for the next lesson. It was definitely my favourite course from all the other courses in this period!

*(42) “Tämä kurssi oli paras tässä jaksossa. Kaikissa muissa aineissa edettiin kirjan mukaan ja tehtiin tylsiä tehtäviä päivästä toiseen. Englannin tunti oli aina mukava virkistys muiden kesellä, sillä näillä tunneilla oli mahdollista tapahtua jotain muutakin kuin tehtäviä.”*

This course was the best in this period. In every other subject we followed the textbooks and did boring exercises from one day to the other. The English lessons were always a nice refreshment between the other lessons because it was possible that something else than exercises happened.

Negative comments about the English course were given by 11%, and the comments concentrated on individual things, like compulsory participation in Google Meet video calls, lack of pair work (43) and the difficulty to ask for help. No negative feedback was given on exercises or task-based language teaching.

*(43) “Ainoa huono puoli oli se, että ei päässyt keskustelemaan kenenkään kanssa englanniksi.”*

The only bad thing was that I didn't get to talk with anyone in English.

To conclude, judging from the feedback students seemed to enjoy the activities used during the course. Therefore, it could be argued that TBLT can also be used during distance learning, and it benefits the students by making the lessons more engaging and fun, as well as increasing their well-being in general. However, students simply liking the tasks does not mean it has a positive effect on their learning outcomes. Therefore, in the next chapter I will look more closely on students' experience on how the distance learning period affected their learning.

### **5.3 Students' experience of the effect of distance learning on their learning outcomes**

Before we take a closer look at the learning outcomes, I will discuss factors that additionally can affect learning. These factors include how students overall participated in the lessons, how clear they found the instructions, how easily they got support from the teacher, and how they used English in their free time.

When I talk about attendance in distance learning, it is important to understand what kind of an attendance policy there was in the Upper Secondary School during distance learning as schools in Finland had different ways to manage it. In the school under study, the students were expected to follow their schedules and study each subject when they would have normally had a lesson. Teachers, on the other hand, were expected to mark absent students. The easiest way to follow attendance was through Google Meet video calls, which most teachers used for every lesson. However, other methods were also used, such as in the English courses where on-call lessons were held only when necessary. In fact, when students were asked if there were enough Google Meet lessons as a group, only 6 students (9%) said that there were too few lessons together. Therefore, in order to prove their attendance, the students were required to turn in exercises by the end of each lesson. Most of the time, though, the instructions for the following lesson were given ahead of time, so students could finish the tasks even on the previous day. On many occasions the time to turn in exercises was also extended to offer students more flexibility.

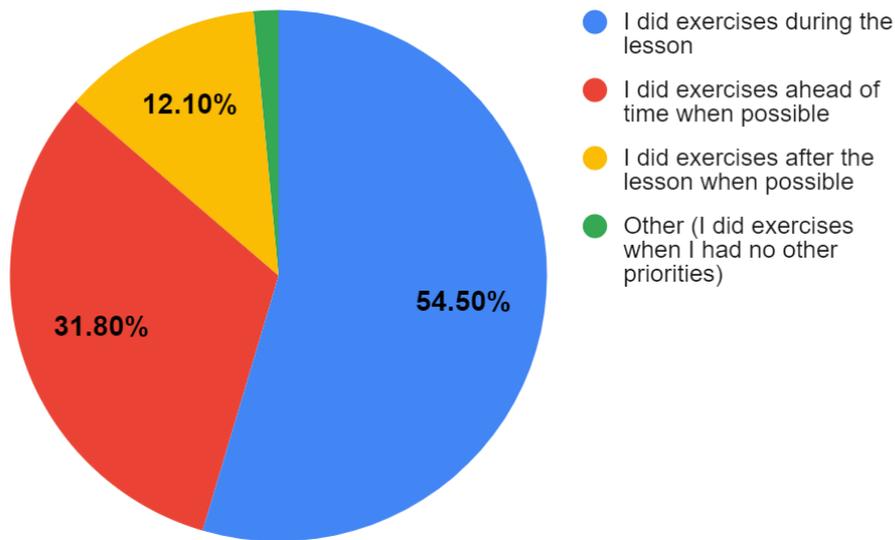


Figure 2. The time of exercise completion.

As we can see from *Figure 2*, over half of the students did exercises during the time when they would have had a lesson in contact teaching. However, almost a third preferred to do the exercises ahead of time, while 12.1% reported completing the tasks after the actual lesson when possible. The flexible completion time of the exercises was appreciated by the students, as can be seen from their answer in the course feedback section of the questionnaire:

(44) *“Tehtävät [oli nähtävissä] edellisenä päivänä, jolloin ne kerkesi tekemään illalla, seuraavan päivän ollessa muuten ihan täynnä, niin englannin tunnin sai levätä.”*

The exercises were visible the previous day so you had time to get them done in the evening when the following day’s schedule was full. This way you could rest during the English lesson.

(45) *“Oli erittäin mukavaa, että laitoit tehtävät etukäteen niin ne sai heti pois alta.”*  
It was really nice that you made the instructions visible ahead of time so students could get them over and done with right away.

Therefore, we can conclude that the flexibility of the exercise completion time was beneficial for the students.

Moving on to the clarity of the instructions, it is worth mentioning that the instructions were shared on a virtual learning environment of the Upper Secondary School (Peda.net), where each lesson had its own folder. The instructions were sometimes written in Finnish, sometimes in English, and sometimes in both languages. The instructions also included videos online and videos made by the teacher, as well as invitation links to Google Meet video lessons where further instructions were given orally. When asked how clear the instructions were on a scale from 1-5, where 1 was “I usually didn’t know what I’m supposed to do” and 5 was “The instructions were very clear, I always knew what I should do”, a majority of students found the instructions clear. Out of 66 students, only 3 answered 3 or less, from which we can deduce that the clarity of the instructions was not a factor that caused problems in regards to learning for more than 4% of the respondents.

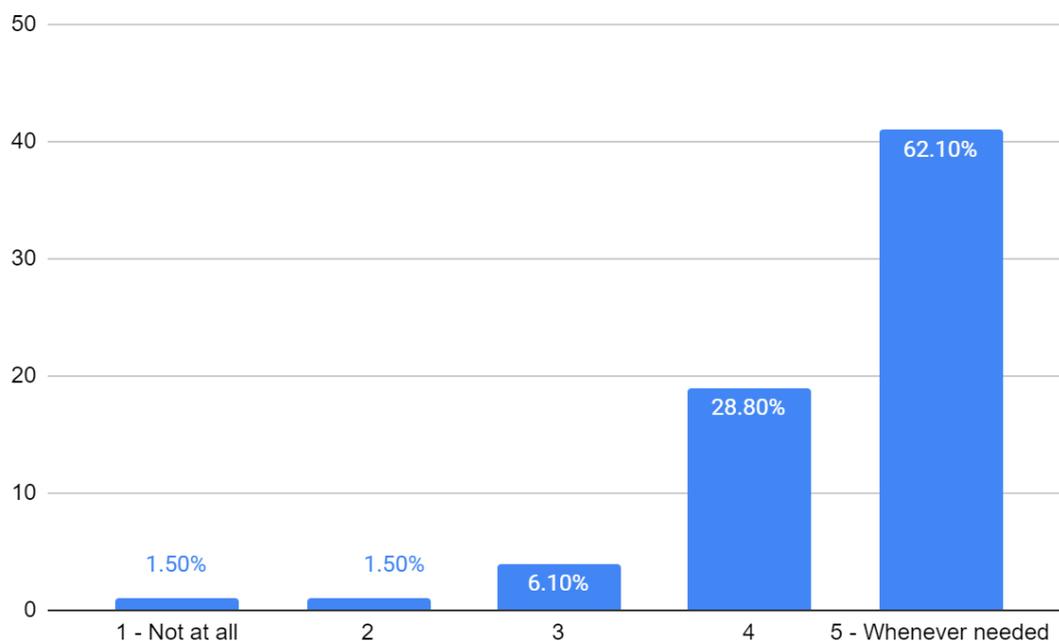


Figure 3. How well students experienced that they got support from the teacher.

Further, on a similar scale we asked students to choose how well they could get support for any difficulties in the English course. In this scale, 1 meant “I didn’t get any support at all” and 5 “I got support whenever I needed it”. As we can see

from *Figure 3*, over 60% of the respondents thought that they got help whenever they needed it, and almost 30% had experienced getting help almost every time they needed it. Only 6 students out of 66 answered 3 or less.

The experience of not getting any support from the teacher could be explained by the fact that it was more difficult for the teacher to follow how students progress in the exercises and if they struggle with them during distance learning than in a classroom setting. This meant that the students had to actively ask for help themselves, which might have been more challenging when it was not possible to ask for help face to face. This issue was voiced several times in students' responses:

(46) *"Vaikean kohdan tullessa ei voinut pyytää niin helposti apua."*  
When I faced difficulties it wasn't as easy to ask for help.

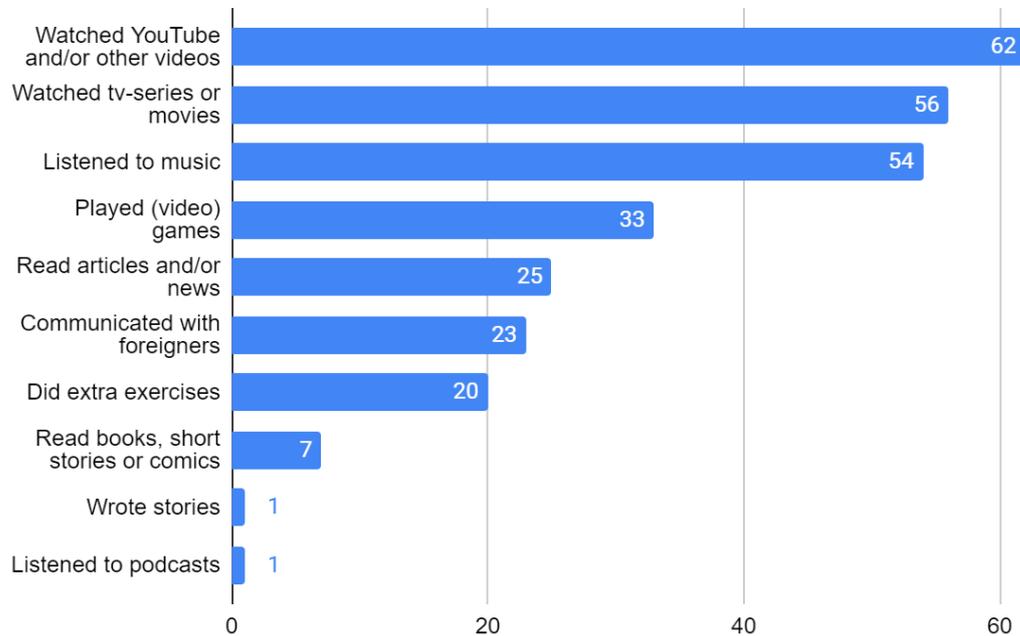
(47) *"Kontaktiopetuksessa uskallan pyytää apua helpommin ja tehtävänannon ymmärrän helpommin."*  
In contact teaching I dare to ask for help more easily and I understand instructions more easily.

(48) *"Etäopetus on hankalampaa kun ei aina viitsi kysyä apua toisin kuin normaali tunnilla."*  
Distance learning is more difficult because I don't always care to ask for help unlike during a normal lesson.

(49) *"Etäopetuksessa avun pyytäminen on minulle vähän vaikeaa, koska se tuntuu tavallaan niin vaikealta laittaa viesti ja selittää sillätavoin mitä tarkoittaa. Se onkin ehkä suurin miinus etäopetuksessa."*  
Asking for help during distance learning was difficult for me because it felt kinda hard to send a message and explain what I meant. I think that's the biggest minus in distance learning.

Additionally, we wanted to know in which other ways students used English in their free time. They mentioned, among other activities, playing games, reading, watching videos, and talking to foreigners (friends or relatives) in English. By far the most popular ways were watching videos on YouTube and other platforms, watching series or movies as well as listening to music, which the majority of the students did in their free time. No student replied that they did not use English

in any way outside the lessons, as can be seen from *Figure 4*. Therefore, it is safe to say that all students were in contact with English even in their freetime, which might have positively affected their learning outcomes.



*Figure 4. The ways in which students used English outside the classroom. All activities listed are in English.*

Taking into account the above factors - attendance, the completion time of the exercises, clarity of the instructions, teacher's support and using English in students' free time - we can assume that these factors supported students' learning process for the vast majority. Therefore, it is not surprising that when asked how students thought distance learning affected their learning outcomes, the majority responded they learned as well as they had learned before (*Figure 5*). Interestingly, almost a fourth of the informants answered that they learned better than in contact teaching. Moreover, 10.6% felt that they had learned more poorly than normally, while 7.6% responded with "other". To further understand the reasons behind these numbers, we asked students to explain why they picked "better" or "worse".

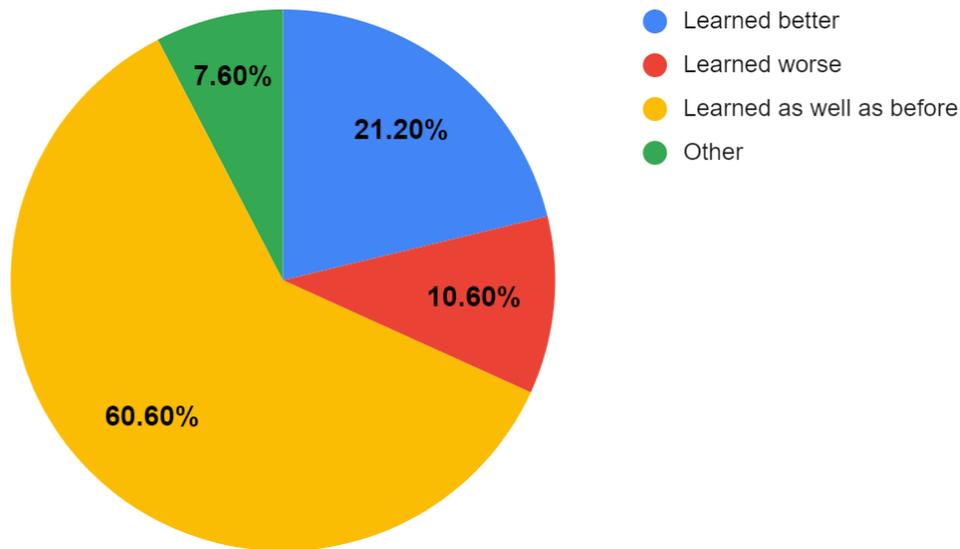


Figure 5. Students' evaluation of the effect of distance learning on their learning outcomes in English.

Among those who responded that they learned better during distance learning, their explanations, even though there was some overlap in the responses between the categories, could be divided into three groups. First, 35% believed they could learn English better because they could concentrate better at home, as the home environment was more peaceful than a classroom.

(50) *"Sai opiskella rauhassa ja keskittyä siihen asiaan. Joutu ite suomentaa joitain tehtävänäntoja, joka kehitti itteä."*

I could study in peace and concentrate on what I'm learning. I had to translate some instructions by myself, and it helped me to develop.

(51) *"Pystyin keskittymään paremmin tekemiseeni, koska ympärillä ei ollut hälinää. Ymmärsin asiatkin hyvin, vaikka en ollut fyysisesti koulussa."*

I could concentrate better on what I do because there was no ruckus around me. I also understood things well, even though I wasn't physically at school.

Second, another 35% said that their better learning outcomes were due to the structure of the lessons, and different types of exercises and tasks during them. The students felt the exercises were interesting thus motivating.

(52) *"Tuntitehtävät olivat erilaisia kuin normaalisti koulussa esim. että mentiin pihalle ja kuvattiin video ja se että sai korjata oman esseen ja nähdä omat virheensä niin auttoi myös oppimisessa."*

The tasks were different than what we normally do in school, we for example went outside and filmed a video, and we had to fix our own essays and look at our mistakes which also helped with learning.

(53) *“Videoiden tekeminen auttoi, koska piti oikeasti itse puhua ja laittaa itsensä likoon.”*

Doing the videos helped because you actually had to talk yourself and put yourself out there.

Third, 30% found that because it was compulsory to turn in exercises after almost every lesson, they had to work more than during contact teaching. This is because in contact teaching it is enough that a student is in the classroom to be marked as “present”, but in distance learning students were required to turn in exercises to prove they have attended the lesson.

(54) *“Vaikka tehtävien pakollinen palautus tuntui ärsyttävältä, sain kuitenkin enemmän aikaiseksi tällä metodilla kuin tunneilla ilman tehtävien tarkastusta.”*

Even though it was irritating that you had to turn in the exercises, I actually got more done with this method than in lessons when it’s not checked (whether you have done the exercises).

(55) *“Nyt oli pakko keskittyä ja opiskella, ei voinut vain laiskotella tunnilla ja piirrellä vihkoon/pöydän pintaan.”*

Now I had to concentrate and study, I couldn’t just slack and draw on the notebook/on the desk.

(56) *“Etäopetuksessa tehtävät on pakko tehdä, jotta uskotaan sinun olleen tunnilla. Tämä auttoi oikeasti kehittymään.”*

In distance learning you had to do the exercises so that the teacher believes you’ve attended the lesson. This really helped me to develop.

Finally, while all respondents mentioned at least one of these categories, also other points could be found in individual answers. For example, the book was described as easy to follow, and the teacher was seen as supportive. One informant even mentioned that because they could eat whenever they were hungry, they had more energy to work than in school where the lunch hour is always at the same time. Also, the teacher’s feedback was seen as a positive factor.

When we look at the negative factors, on the other hand, over a half of those who believed they learned English more poorly during distance learning mentioned the lack of motivation. In these cases, the lack of motivation was caused by distance learning in general:

(57) *“Ei kiinnosta koulunkäynti tällä hetkellä.”*  
I’m not interested in studying right now.

(58) *“Suuri työmäärä, hämmennys, kaikkien opettajien omat tyylit etäopetuksen suorittamiseen, sekä kotona on vaikeampi keskittyä vaikutti motivaatioon.”*  
The large amount of work, confusion, the teachers’ individual varied styles to remote teaching, and also the fact that it’s harder to concentrate at home affected my motivation.

As other explanations for the negative outcomes, two other aspects were mentioned. Two students mentioned that it was more difficult for them to understand instructions and grammar when they were not in the classroom. Regarding the same setting, one student said they did not learn as well as before because they could not practice conversational skills in English with their peers or discuss problems with them like they do in the classroom.

Moving on to the informants who replied with “other”, all expressed that they could learn or understand something better, but at the same time distance learning caused issues. From their answers it could be concluded that they would still learn better in contact teaching, as the following examples suggest:

(59) *“Paremmiin ja huonommiin, pystyi ehkä enemmän keskittymään itselle johonkin vaikeaan asiaan, mutta toisaalta olen oppinut mielestäni hyvin tunneilla [kontaktiopetuksessa].”*

Both better and worse, I could maybe concentrate better on things that were difficult for me, but on the other hand I have learned well during lessons [in contact teaching].

(60) *“En osaa oikein sanoa, jotkut asiat olis varmaan iskeny paremmiin kontaktiopetuksessa.”*

I can’t really say, I probably would have learned some things better in contact teaching.

(61) *“Enemmän oppii kyllä lähiopetuksessa mutta en tippunut kärryiltä etäopetusessa.”*

I learn better in contact teaching, but I didn't fall behind during distance learning either.

While we concentrated on the written feedback of those who learned either better, more poorly, or answered “other”, it is good to remember that over 60% of the informants believed they learned as well as before during distance learning. This view is supported by the mean value of student grades in English courses: when we compared the grades of the course during which the switch to distance learning happened to the previous course that was completely in contact teaching, we could notice there was little to no change in the mean value in two of the studied groups. In Figure 6, we can see that in the group of the second year students, the average grade in the previous course was 8.32, and after distance learning 8.45 after the Finnish grading system, where the lowest grade given is 4 (fail), and highest is 10 (excellent). In the second group of first year students (1C), there is no change: the average grade is 9.

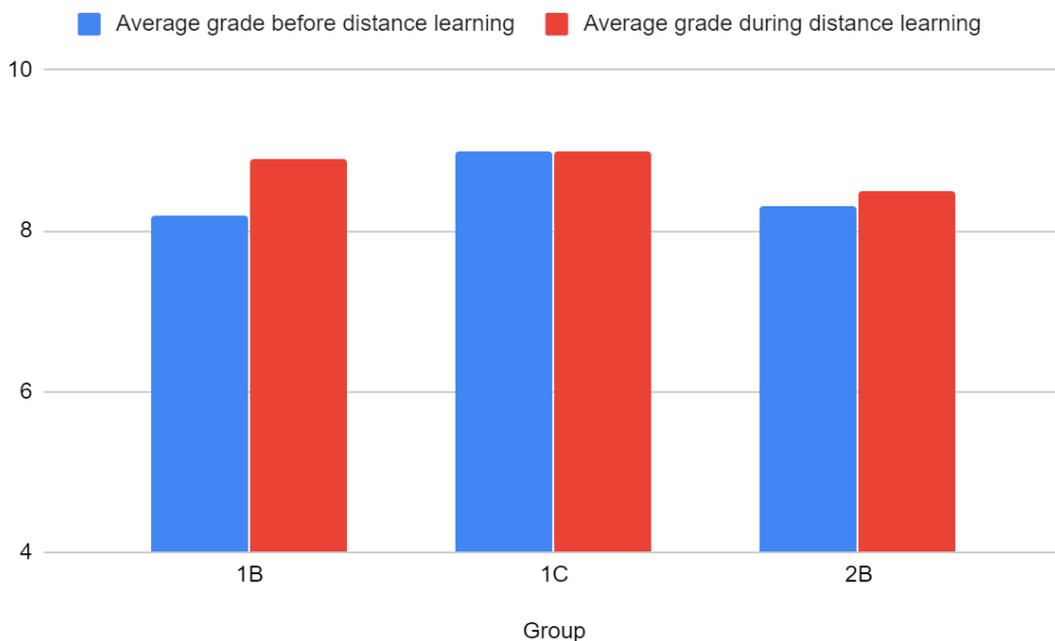


Figure 6. The average grade of the students in three groups, before and after distance learning.

However, group 1B has a more significant change in the average grade: before distance learning, their average grade was 8.2, and the grades improved to 8.9 during distance learning. Nevertheless, we cannot make any conclusions about distance learning being a better way for the students to learn. While the average grade got better and some individual students significantly raised their grade, it can be due to many factors. To begin, the course contents were different from the previous course. It could be that the grammar items or vocabulary was more familiar to the students, or that their skills in English had improved in general and resulted in better grades. The next reason is that it was easier to get extra credit by doing additional exercises, which many students did eagerly. The most significant problem, however, was that the course evaluation was different from contact teaching. In contact teaching, students' grade is based on their work in the classroom, word tests, essay writing and exam. While the same elements were used as the base of grading in distance learning, there was a difference on how these were implemented. For example, because the teacher could not control the use of books and other sources when students worked on tests or exams in distance learning, they were allowed to use them. On the other hand, the exams were more demanding, but students could still get relatively much help from the course book. Students also had a chance to improve their essay grades by correcting them. Therefore, it is not possible to draw any conclusions from the grades.

To conclude the chapter, most students believed that they learned English during distance learning as well as during contact teaching. Only every 10th student thought they learned more poorly, while every fifth student experienced they had learned better. These responses are in line with the comparison of grades from a course that was held completely during contact teaching, and a course that was partly taught as distance learning. However, as we pointed out earlier, the improvement of course grades can be explained by many factors, most importantly by the course assessment being slightly different, and therefore any conclusions about distance learning being more effective than contact teaching

cannot be made. In the final chapter of our study, we will discuss the overall results of our study and what can be learned from it regarding distance learning and the use of TBLT.

## 6 DISCUSSION

In this study, I aimed to find out how the distance learning period in spring 2020 affected students' well-being and learning outcomes in English, and how the use of Task-Based Language Teaching contributed to these factors. For data collection we conducted a survey with multiple-choice and open-ended questions. Overall, the study succeeded in finding answers to the three research questions presented. The study had an adequate number of informants to provide an overview of the whole Upper Secondary School and the students on the studied three courses. However, the study could have been done over a longer period or a full course given during distance learning instead of just a part of it. Moreover, the survey questions provided eligible answers to our research questions as they gave an overall idea of the research questions as well as insight into the experience of individual students.

First, the study aimed to understand how the students experienced distance learning in the Upper Secondary School. What was alarming in the results was that distance learning caused difficulties and stress for most students in the school, which does not differ from the nationwide study of the Union of Upper Secondary School Students in Finland. The most frequently mentioned factor that contributed to these results was the increased amount of schoolwork, but also other factors such as difficulties to concentrate at home, increased amount of time spent in front of a computer, lack of communication with peers and teachers, and lack of hobbies in the free time.

Second, I wanted to find out how students reacted to Task-Based Language Teaching during distance learning. From the results we could conclude that TBLT was generally liked by the students, as also Long (2015) argued, and it helped students to stay motivated, develop themselves in new ways, as well as concentrate better in English lessons and even other subjects. The students especially enjoyed outdoor tasks and tasks that encouraged every-day language

use, and they felt they learned English in a new way while the tasks added variety to their school days apart from working with a textbook. Although any conclusions could not be drawn from the effect of distance learning and TBLT on the learning outcomes, it is still apparent that TBLT had a positive impact on the students' well-being.

Third, I was interested in how the students felt that distance learning affected their learning outcomes in English. Over 80% of the students replied that they learned as well as or better than during distance learning, which is also visible in the average grade of the students before and during the distance learning. Many students commented that the different types of tasks helped them to improve, and that they managed to improve aspects of language they had problems with earlier such as oral production. Furthermore, for some students it was easier to concentrate at home than in a classroom, and some found it helpful that it was compulsory to turn in exercises at the end of the lesson to prove they have participated in the lesson. However, while the average grade stayed the same or even improved in all studied groups, it is necessary to point out that the grading was different from the previous course and that students could use their textbooks during the exam. Additionally, the study gives no insight on what kind of long-term effects distance learning might have.

The most significant finding of this study, which is also supported by the survey of the Union of Upper Secondary School Students in Finland, is that distance learning is emotionally burdening for students. However, the study also succeeded in finding methods that help students to stay motivated during distance learning. In the light of these findings and from the open-ended questions in the survey, five factors that seemed to contribute to the well-being and motivation of students could be derived. Therefore, I present a list of factors that language teachers could consider to ease students' emotional burden and job strain during distance learning, especially if the situation of spring 2020 was to repeat:

- 1) **Meaningful tasks:** design tasks that students find useful, and combine them with real life, if possible, to keep students motivated.
- 2) **Different types of tasks:** the students will be more motivated if the study method is different from lesson to lesson (individual, pair work, group work, projects...).
- 3) **Catering to students' needs:** give clear instructions and give students chances to do lighter exercises from time to time if you notice exhaustion; make communication between peers possible.
- 4) **Flexibility:** it is not always necessary to have a video lesson; offer the students a chance to complete the exercises before or after the actual lesson time when possible.
- 5) **Availability:** students may find it difficult to ask for help in distance learning - provide easy ways to contact you, or find a way to follow and give feedback on students' work to notice any issues.

If teachers manage to implement TBLT in their distance learning courses even occasionally, considering the findings of this study, it will have a beneficial effect on students' motivation and well-being. However, further and more continuous research on TBLT during distance learning needs to be done in order to find out if it has any significant influence on learning outcomes.

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## APPENDIX

Survey questions in Finnish.

### 1. Ryhmä

- a. 1B / ENA3.2      b. 1C / ENA3.3      c. 2B / ENA6.2

### 2. Sukupuoli

- a. Nainen                      b. Mies                      c. En halua vastata

### 3. Miten kuvailisit etäopiskelua kokonaisuudessaan (kaikki aineet) muutamalla sanalla?

### 4. Kuinka selkeitä kurssin tehtävänannot olivat mielestäsi?

- 1 - En useimmiten tiennyt, mitä pitää tehdä.  
2  
3  
4  
5 - Todella selkeitä, tiesin aina, mitä pitää tehdä.

### 5. Miten hyvin sait tukea vaikeisiin asioihin englannin kurssilla?

- 1 - En lainkaan  
2  
3  
4  
5 - Sain tukea aina, kun sitä tarvitsin.

### 6. Olisiko mielestäsi pitänyt käydä tehtävänantoja, vastauksia ja kielioppia läpi enemmän yhdessä esimerkiksi Google Meetin kautta?

- a. Kyllä, asioita käytiin yhdessä läpi liian vähän.  
b. Ei, asioita käytiin yhdessä läpi sopivasti.  
c. Google Meet -kokouksia oli liikaa.  
d. Muu: \_\_\_\_\_

### 7. Kuinka osallistuit englannin tunneille? Valitse parhaiten sopiva vaihtoehto.

- a. Tein tehtävät ja osallistuin silloin, kun minulla oli englantia lukujärjestyksessä.  
b. Tein tehtävät etukäteen lähes aina kun se oli mahdollista.  
c. Tein tehtävät yleensä joskus myöhemmin oppitunnin jälkeen.  
d. Muu: \_\_\_\_\_

### 8.1. Miten koet etäopiskelun vaikuttaneen englannin opiskeluusi?

- a. Vaikutti negatiivisesti - opin huonommin kuin kontaktiopetuksessa  
b. Ei vaikuttanut millään tavalla - opin ihan yhtä hyvin  
c. Vaikutti positiivisesti - opin paremmin  
d. Muu: \_\_\_\_\_

**8.2. Mikäli vastasit yllä negatiivisesti tai positiivisesti, mitkä tekijät vaikuttivat siihen?**

**9. Kuinka hyödylliseksi koit oman esseen korjaamisen (3. kurssi, eli 2B älkää vastatko tähän!)?**

- 1 - En lainkaan hyödylliseksi
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5 - Todella hyödylliseksi

**10. Miten arvioisit suoriutumistasi videotehtävästä? Miten koit vieraan kielen puhumisen kameralle? Vaikuttiko ulkoilu jotenkin vointiisi?**

**11. Millä muulla tavoin opit englantia etäopiskelujakson aikana kurssin lisäksi?**

- Pelasin pelejä englanniksi
- Katsoin tv-sarjoja tai elokuvia englanniksi
- Luin kirjoja, novelleja tai sarjakuvia englanniksi
- Luin artikkeleita ja/tai uutisia englanniksi
- Katsoin englanninkielisiä YouTube yms. -videoita
- Keskustelin ulkomaalaisten kanssa englanniksi (esim. sosiaalisen median välityksellä)
- Kuuntelin musiikkia tai lauloin englanniksi
- Tein lisätehtäviä
- Muu: \_\_\_\_\_

**12. Mikä oli parasta englannin etäopetuksessa?**

**13. Entä mikä oli ikävintä?**

**14. Vapaa palaute kurssista. Esimerkiksi mitä mieltä olit tuntien sisällöistä, kokeen toteutuksesta jne., ja tuntuiko etäopiskelu enkussa liian raskaalta? Miten vertaisit etäopiskelua kontaktiopetukseen?**