FINNISH UPPER SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS' PERSPECTIVES ON SELF-ASSESSMENT OF ENGLISH ORAL SKILLS

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Tiivistelmä – Abstract

Itsearviointitaidot ja niiden kehittäminen ovat nykyään selkeä osa sekä perusopetuksen että lukion arviointikulttuuria (NCCBE 2016, NCCGUSE 2020). Esimerkiksi Nieminen (2019) on todennut, että itsearviointia on tärkeä harjoitella ja, että opettajan tulisi tukea oppilaita itsearvioinnissa. Lukiossa itsearviointi on osa myös kielten opiskelua esimerkiksi kieliprofiilin muodossa (NCCGUSE 2020).

Tämä maisterin tutkielma yhdistää itsearvioinnin ja englannin suullisen kielitaidon teemat tavoitteenaan selvittää lukion ensimmäisen vuosikurssin opiskelijoiden näkemyksiä ja kokemuksia englannin suullisen kielitaidon itsearvioinnista ja siihen liittyvästä tuesta. Tutkimuksen tavoitteena oli myös selvittää, millaista tukea opiskelijat mahdollisesti toivoisivat saavansa enemmän englannin suullisen kielitaidon itsearviointiin. Tutkimus keskittyy nimenomaan englannin suulliseen kielitaitoon, koska suullisella kielitaidolla on nykyään huomattava rooli kielten opetuksessa

Tutkimuksen aineisto kerättiin kyselyllä, johon vastasi yhteensä 42 lukion ensimmäisen vuosikurssin opiskelijaa kahdesta lukiosta. Tutkimuksen tulokset osoittavat, että opiskelijat ovat pääosin tyytyväisiä englannin suullisen kielitaidon itsearvioinnin määrään ja siihen saamaansa tukeen. Lisäksi tuloksista selviää, että osallistujien näkemykset vaihtelevat positiivisen ja negatiivisen välillä, mutta enemmistö kokee englannin suullisen kielitaidon itsearvioinnin olevan ainakin melko hyödyllistä ja helppoa.

Tutkimuksella kartoitettiin opiskelijoiden näkemyksiä ja kokemuksia, jotta opettajat voisivat mahdollisesti tukea opiskelijoita entistä paremmin. Opiskelijat eivät siis itse kokeneet tarvetta lisätuelle itsearviointiin liittyen, mutta opiskelijoiden vastaukset antoivat osittain kovin kapean kuvan itsearvioinnin hyödyistä, minkä vuoksi tutkimuksen pohdinnassa tuodaan esille mahdollinen tarve laajentaa opiskelijoiden ymmärrystä itsearvioinnista ja sen hyödyistä.

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1   INTRODUCTION

In the history of the Finnish school system written exams have strongly dominated the assessment culture, but due to pressure to diversify assessment other forms of assessment, such as verbal assessment and essays, have been added to be used alongside written exams (Atjonen 2007). One of those forms of assessment is self-assessment that has answered to the requirement to activate and engage students in assessment and to let them have a role in deciding on their learning goals (Atjonen 2007: 81). Today, self-assessment and students' self-assessment skills are highlighted throughout the school path of Finnish students: the current National Core Curricula (NCC) for both basic education and upper secondary education highlight the importance of self-assessment as a part of assessment that support students learning and development (NCCBE 2016, NCCGUSE 2020). Self-assessment is included in the assessment culture, and it is presented, for example, as a means to recognize one's strengths and develop one's learning so that the set learning goals can be achieved (NCCGUSE 2020). In other words, self-assessment is considered to be a way to improve students' learning skills and their learning results.

In general, self-assessment is defined as a process in which learners reflect on and assess their development and performance in relation to assessment criteria as well as recognize their strengths and areas for development (Nieminen 2019). Moreover, self-assessment is a means for individual goal setting and taking responsibility for one's own learning (Alanen and Kajander 2011). Self-assessment has been found to have several benefits. In English studies, these benefits include, for instance, improved self-efficacy and confidence, and some improvement on English performance (Baleghizadeh and Masoun 2014, Butler and Lee 2010). Furthermore, in studies on students' views on self-assessment, their views have been found to be rather versatile. Even though students view self-assessment as one of the most often used interactive assessment types, they have rather cautious views on usefulness of self-assessment (Atjonen et al. 2019). Students' views have also been found to vary between positive and negative: some students find it useful in relation to their own development and others find it an entirely unnecessary process that is done to benefit the teacher (Alanen and Kajander 2011). Moreover, some students do self-assessment

for themselves and consider it to have benefits whereas other students do self-assessment when they are forced by a teacher and consider self-assessment to be unnecessary (Alanen and Kajander 2011).

According to the Finnish NCC for both basic and upper secondary education, self-assessment is also included in language studies. The NCC for basic education mentions self-assessment in the subject specific learning goals for languages (NCCBE 2016). Assessment of English in grades 7-9 is described as "Learning is assessed in many different ways, including self and peer assessment" (NCCBE 2016: 377). Self-assessment of language skills is also present in the newest NCC for upper secondary education in which the language profile, which the students create and update during their studies to get to know themselves as language users and learners, is a new form of self-assessment for upper secondary school students (NCCBUSE 2020). The purpose of the language profile is to help students recognize their strengths and to get to know themselves as language learners (NCCGUSE 2020).

Another theme that has been gaining more attention in the new Finnish NCC for basic and upper secondary education is teaching oral skills (Tergujeff and Kautonen 2019). Developing pronunciation and learning how to interact in various situations are emphasized as learning goals in the NCC for both basic education and upper secondary education (Tergujeff and Kautonen 2019). Furthermore, oral skills are a rather complex concept which has many different definitions (Tergujeff and Kautonen 2019). Many definitions, for instance the Common European Framework of Reference for languages (2001), divide oral skills into several components due to which assessment of oral skills requires planning and versatile tasks to assess learners' skills and development reliably (Ahola 2019). Thus, I became interested to examine whether students experience self-assessment of English oral skills to be easy or challenging and whether language teachers, including I as a future teacher, could support students in self-assessment of English oral skills better so that they would benefit from self-assessment as much as possible.

As explained above both self-assessment and the teaching of oral skills are important in language teaching in Finland. Hence, the present Master's thesis combines these two topics with the aim of finding out Finnish first-year upper secondary school students' views on self-assessment of English oral skills. Since in the NCC for general upper secondary education it is stated that self-assessment that is done with support from a teacher helps students understand their learning (NCCGUSE 2020) and since it has been acknowledged that self-assessment of oral skills should be practiced (Ahola 2019), the present study also aims at finding out students' views on support for self-assessment of English oral skills. As mentioned above, students' views on self-assessment have already been studied to some extent, but according to my knowledge, the perspective of support for self-assessment has

not been considered in research in Finland. In addition, because students should be the ones benefitting from self-assessment the most, it is important to increase teachers' knowledge about students' views on the matter. In other words, it is important to ask students what kind of views they have on self-assessment and how teachers could possibly aim at supporting their students better so that students could benefit from self-assessment as much as possible.

The present Master's thesis comprises of 6 chapter. Chapters 2 and 3 discuss the central concepts of the present study that is self-assessment and oral skills. In addition, those chapters introduce some previous research on them. Chapter 4 presents the methodology and chapter 5 the findings of the present study. Finally, chapter 6 discusses the findings in relation to previous research along with some implications and conclusions. The reliability of the present study and suggestions for further research are also considered in chapter 6.

2 SELF-ASSESSMENT

This chapter introduces the concept of self-assessment and explains why self-assessment was chosen from a couple of possible terms to be used for the purposes of the present study. Some previous research on self-assessment and students' conceptions on self-assessment is also presented.

2.1 Definitions of self-assessment

Self-reflection, self-evaluation, and self-assessment all seem to be rather appropriate terms to describe the concept that is the topic of this thesis. Nieminen (2019) explains the nuances of these terms. According to him, *self-reflection* is seen as general and rather constantly occurring observations of one's skills and performance and it does not require generally set learning goals. *Self-evaluation*, in turn, usually considers a situation in which a student has, for example, a percentual control over their own grade (Nieminen 2019). Lastly, *self-assessment* is a type of formative assessment which is often guided by set goals or criteria that form the basis of the activity (Nieminen 2019). The term 'self-assessment' is used for the purposes of the present study. The choice is supported by the fact that the corresponding Finnish term 'itsearviointi' is defined similarly to the definition of self-assessment above. This chapter sheds light on the multiple layers and processes that self-assessment can include.

Furthermore, self-assessment refers to a process in which a student observes and reflects on their learning and performance (Nieminen 2019). In order to arrive at a conclusion of their strengths, weaknesses and ways to improve their performance, a student is in a way forced to analyze their learning and actions usually basing the analysis on given assessment criteria (Nieminen 2019). The criteria can be based on a core curriculum, or they can be defined and adapted by the teacher who possibly involves students in deciding on the criteria (Nieminen 2019). On the other hand, some

definitions of self-assessment, such as Boud's (1986: 5), emphasize students' role in defining the assessment criteria more than Nieminen's (2019) above. Boud (1986: 5) makes this evident by stating that there are two core elements of self-assessment. Firstly, it is important to give students a role in "identifying standards and/or criteria to apply to their work" (Boud 1986: 5). Secondly, in self-assessment students should be given opportunities for "making judgements about the extent to which they have met these criteria and standards" (Boud 1986: 5). Today, the definitions of self-assessment have shifted the emphasis away from deciding on the assessment criteria towards deciding on, for instance, the learning goals. Moreover, in the context of the present study, the assessment criteria refer to assessment criteria for English oral skills. Examples of those criteria are presented in chapter three.

Atjonen (2007: 81) provides a definition of self-assessment that is similar to Nieminen's (2019) definition above. She states that in general, self-assessment is seen as a process in which someone, in the case of the present study a student, assesses and evaluates their own performance (Atjonen 2007: 81). According to Atjonen (2007: 81-82) the important themes in self-assessment are 1) deciding on one's learning goals, 2) learning how to achieve those goals, and 3) assessing one's development and the consequences of one's actions. A goal for self-assessment is to make learners take a more active role on their own learning processes by guiding them to actively pay attention to their learning (ibid). Atjonen (2007:82-83) also explains that self-assessment can concern many aspects, such as personal resources, situation in life and learning strategies. Common to those aspects is that they cannot be assessed as well by anybody else but the learner themselves. For example, a learner's resources and situation in life may be rather unknown for someone else assessing the learner's skills and thus, the learner has the advantage of knowing how those matters may affect their learning process and performance (ibid).

In addition to assessment, learning is an aspect of self-assessment which has been acknowledged by, for instance, Atjonen (2007: 81-81) who states that learning how one learns is a part of self-assessment. The relationship between assessment and learning within self-assessment has been emphasized by Boud (Boud 1995 cited in Tan Heng Kiat 2012: 7-8). He has suggested that self-assessment can improve learning results (Boud 1995 cited in Tan Heng Kiat 2012: 7-8). However, he also noted that self-assessment should not be regarded as merely assessment or learning but including both. In addition, Boud (1986) considers self-assessment to be a means towards becoming an independent learner. He explains that merely relying on teachers' assessment creates a hindrance for learners to gather trust in their own evaluation of their learning results.

Reflection is also a characteristic of self-assessment (Alanen and Kajander 2011). Generally, reflection is defined as a conscious thought process in which a person

contemplates and views their actions from different perspectives (Alanen and Kajander 2011, Atjonen 2007:82). Moreover, past experiences are also seen as part of reflection (Alanen and Kajander 2011). Alanen and Kajander (2011) highlight the link between reflection and self-assessment by suggesting that development of reflection skills significantly relate to careful and meaningful self-assessment. Moreover, they state that the link is particularly significant when doing self-assessment at the end of a course. They also explain that in addition to reflecting on subjects such as the learning environment or the contents that are learned, it is important to reflect on one's emotions due to their effects on learning. In other words, emotions, for example confusion, can start a reflection process about the ways that could be used to relieve the confusing, unwanted situation that the learner is in. In the present study, self-assessment is, in short, defined as a process in which a learner reflects on and assesses their learning and learning results as well as considers their strengths, areas for development and personal leaning goals.

2.2   Self-assessment in the Finnish National Core Curricula

The role of self-assessment has gained more significance in the current Finnish NCC (Lepistö and Ripatti 2017). This section discusses how the role is described in the four latest NCC for basic and upper secondary education. To capture how the role has changed, both older and the newest NCC are reviewed in this section.

The Finnish NCC for basic education is renewed approximately in every 10 years. The current NCC for basic education is from 2014 and it was introduced progressively between 2016 and 2019 (Opetushallitus 2022b). The English translation was published in 2016. The newest NCC for general upper secondary education was published in 2019 and has been used since the fall of 2021. Its translation into English was published in 2020. The previous NCC for general upper secondary education was published in 2015 (Opetushallitus 2022a).

2.2.1   National Core Curriculum for basic education

The NCC for basic education from 2004 explains that the purposes of self-assessment are to strengthen students' self-esteem and positive self-image, to practice noticing one's development towards the set goals and to set goals for one's own learning (POPS 2004: 264). Guidance is mentioned to be a perquisite for developing self-assessment skills and teachers' feedback is the only means that is explicitly mentioned to guide and encourage students towards versatile self-assessment.

The current NCC for basic education from 2014 links self-assessment to assessment culture by referring to the Finnish law and stating that "Under the Basic

Education act, the aim of pupil assessment is to guide and encourage learning and develop the pupil's capacity for self-assessment" (NCCBE 2016: 49). In addition, the newest NCC for basic education pays more attention to the process of developing self-assessment skills and the role that a teacher is encouraged to take in the process. It is stated that a goal for students is to understand the learning goals and to find methods for attaining them with a teacher's help (NCCBE 2016: 51). Some additional guidelines are also provided for improving students' self-assessment skills. It is described that at the beginning of primary school teachers should help students notice their success, acknowledge learning goals and with positive feedback help students understand that there are several ways to succeed (NCCBE 2016: 51). According to the NCC students in higher grades still need teachers' assistance to pay attention to their strengths but is it also mentioned that "the examination of the pupil's personal learning and progress may be more analytical" (NCCBE 2016: 51). Moreover, it is mentioned that European Language Portfolio can be used for assessment purposes (NCCBE 2016).

A couple of noteworthy developments can be found between the two NCC for basic education presented above. Firstly, improving students' self-assessment skills is mentioned to be a responsibility of basic education in the NCC from 2004 (POPS 2004: 264) while it is described to have a significant role in the assessment culture in the NCC that was published in 2014 in Finnish (NCCBE 2016: 49). Secondly, a difference between the NCC for basic education from 2004 and 2014 is the fact that the newest includes self-assessment in the set goals for each subject at least by briefly mentioning self-assessment whereas, the older does not mention self-assessment in the subject-specific goals. For instance, a goal for teaching and learning English in lower secondary school (grades 7-9) in the newest NCC for basic education is "to encourage the pupil to set goals, utilize different ways for learning English, and assess his or her learning independently" (NCCBE 2016: 376). In other words, the emphasis that is given to self-assessment in the NCC for basic education from 2004 is rather limited compared to the current NCC for basic education. Moreover, the new final assessment criteria for basic education that has been introduced in August 2021 also acknowledges self-assessment to relate to the assessment and includes it in the subject specific learning goals in common with the NCC for basic education (Perusopetuksen päättöarvioinnin kriteerit 2020). These examples, consequently, reflect the added emphasis on self-assessment in the NCC for basic education.

2.2.2   National Core Curriculum for general upper secondary education

The purpose and meaning of self-assessment are tied to general assessment culture in Finnish upper secondary education as well. The previous NCC for general upper secondary education that is from 2015 has a similar view on self-assessment as the

current NCC for basic education: assessment is based on criteria and its purpose is to aid students' learning (LOPS 2015: 228). Moreover, self-assessment is a part of assessment providing students a chance to modify the set goals as their own goals and as a means to improve the methods to achieve the goals (LOPS 2015: 228). In common with basic education, self-assessment and development of self-assessment skills are also included in the subject-specific goals and assessment. For instance, assessment of English is described to be versatile, and it guides students to see and use the advantages of self-assessment (LOPS 2015: 108).

According to the newest Finnish NCC for general upper secondary education, the most significant goals of assessment are guiding and supporting learning and demonstrating how the set learning goals have been achieved (NCCGUSE 2020). Self-assessment is seen as a part of the guidance towards set goals and it is stated in the NCC that "Feedback given during study units as well as self and peer assessment carried out with the teacher's support during the upper secondary school studies help students understand their learning, identify their strengths, correct their mistakes, and develop their work, enabling them to achieve the objectives set for learning" (NCCGUSE 2020). In other words, a continuum from basic education can be noticed since recognizing one's strengths and developing one's working methods are other purposes that are named for self-assessment also in upper secondary education (NCCGUSE 2020).

Furthermore, in the newest NCC for general upper secondary education, self-assessment is considerably included in language studies. It is stated that students create their own language profile at the beginning of their English studies (NCCGUSE 2020). The language profile is assumed to help students identify their strengths and weaknesses and it is edited in accordance with students' progression in their studies and learning. Furthermore, the goals for creating the language profile include encouraging students for lifelong learning and to getting to know what kinds of language users and language learners they are (Inha et al. 2021). Adding the language profile to language studies shows that the role of self-assessment is considered more significant than in the previous NCC for general upper secondary education, and it is expressed that self-assessment skills are not merely learned for school but also for life after upper secondary school.

A difference between the two discussed NCC for general upper secondary education is the word choice when discussing self-assessment. In the previous NCC for general upper secondary education, the word that is repeated regarding self-assessment, for instance, in the subject-specific assessment guidelines is 'guide' (LOPS 2015). In contrast, the newest NCC indicates that teachers should provide 'support' for self-assessment (NCCGUSE 2020). The word 'guide' is also included in NCCGUSE (2020) but as the word 'support' has been added to the context of self-assessment, it

would be beneficial to study if students feel that they are supported enough in self-assessment. Consequently, it is an interest of the present study to see if students feel that they receive the necessary support.

2.3   Previous research on self-assessment

The hoped effect of self-assessment is to achieve better learning results by engaging students more in their own learning processes (Lepistö and Ripatti 2017). Alanen and Kajander (2011) state that self-assessment is a means for goal setting, taking a process perspective on learning, seeing one's development during the process, and taking responsibility for one's own learning. This section introduces some research on the effects of self-assessment.

2.3.1   Advantages and challenges of self-assessment

Research has found that self-assessment can have several positive effects. Butler and Lee (2010) have studied the impacts of self-assessment on elementary students in South Korea. One positive effect they found was that students slightly improved their self-assessment skills. In other words, accuracy of their self-assessment was slightly higher after practicing self-assessment during a semester. Some minor positive effects have also been found regarding improved English performance and increased confidence regarding English use and learning (Buther and Lee 2010). For instance, Baleghizadeh and Masoun (2014) have studied the effects of self-assessment on self-efficacy among intermediate English students in Iran and found that regularly implemented formative self-assessment has positive effects on learners' self-efficacy, that is, on their experience of their capability to learn English. In other words, the learners' experience of their capability to learn English improved when using regular self-assessment compared to a control group who did not implement self-assessment (Baleghizadeh and Masoun 2014).

Although self-assessment is considered to have several positive effects on learning and learners' behaviour, also challenges have been reported in the use of self-assessment regarding, for instance, its reliability. Nieminen (2019), for instance, states that self-assessment is a though-provoking topic and assumptions about it can easily affect how self-assessment is seen in practice (Nieminen 2019). For instance, a belief that girls more often than boys assess themselves more critically may easily affect how a teacher interprets a girl's self-assessment if attention is not paid to considering what is a fact and what is a belief (Nieminen 2019). Moreover, reliability of self-assessment

has also been debated because it is a process of self-reflection which can make being objective challenging (Nieminen 2019). In connection to the example above on believed differences between girls and boys, it has been questioned if students really are honest in their self-assessment. In addition, it should be discussed whether students' motivation of doing self-assessment is based on a hope of getting a higher grade and what the effects are if they see self-assessment as an unnecessary process (Nieminen 2019).

2.3.2   Students' views on self-assessment

This section introduces some previous research on students' views on self-assessment. In other words, this section presents a part of the body of research that the present study is an addition to. As can be seen in this section, research has been conducted on different levels of education from comprehensive school to university students, but findings of several studies show similar results: students have rather versatile views on self-assessment ranging from positive to negative (e.g., Alanen and Kajander 2011, Elsinen 2007). In addition, this section introduces some research that has been conducted on students' conceptions on what self-assessment is, why it is implemented, and which factors affect students' self-assessment.

Students' views of assessment have been of interest for the Finnish National evaluation centre. According to the centre's report, the data of which was gathered in 2018 from Finnish students in comprehensive school and upper secondary school, students recognize self-assessment as the most used method of interactive assessment alongside teachers' feedback for a group (Atjonen et al. 2019: 118). According to the report, 18 % of the students estimated that self-assessment is done 'often' and 9 % that self-assessment is done 'always'. The corresponding numbers for teacher's feedback for a group are 19 % and 7 %. The results also indicate that students feel that the use of self-assessment is most frequent in language teaching compared to other subjects. Moreover, the students are reposted to find that self-assessment is used slightly less in lower secondary schools than in primary schools and upper secondary schools (Atjonen et al. 2019: 118). In short, it can be stated that Finnish students seem to be rather familiar with self-assessment. However, results regarding usefulness of self-assessment, that is how helpful self-assessment is considered to be in learning, indicate only moderate positive experiences from students (ibid.). In addition, there is a difference between students who were excited about school and learning and students whose excitement was lower: the students in the former group are reported to experience self-assessment to be significantly more useful than the students in the latter group.

Students' views on self-assessment have also been studied regarding particularly self-assessment of language skills. For example, Alanen and Kajander

(2011) have studied Finnish upper secondary school students' views on self-assessment and found that upper secondary school students are familiar with the term self-assessment (or the Finnish term 'itsearviointi'). Their results show that all the participating students considered self-assessment to be precisely assessment and evaluation (Kajander, Alanen 2011). The results of Kajander and Alanen's (2011) study show that compared to the term 'self-assessment' reflection (or the Finnish term 'reflektio') was a rather unfamiliar term for the participants of the study who tended to consider reflection to be more related to assessment of one's skills than a process of contemplating on several aspects of learning as it was defined above.

In addition to students' conceptions of the term self-assessment, Kajander and Alanen (2011) have studied what kinds of views students have regarding self-assessment. They found that Finnish upper secondary school students have rather versatile views. Students who have positive views on self-assessment see that it has advantages such as them noticing areas for development whereas, students who have more negative views appear to think that self-assessment is something they are forced to do without gaining anything from doing it (Alanen and Kajander 2011). Positive and negative aspects were combined in views according to which self-assessment has some benefits but sometimes it is also unnecessary (Alanen and Kajander 2011).

Similar results to Alanen and Kajander have also been reported by Elsinen (2007) who has studied university students' views on self-assessment of language skills. In other words, she describes students similarly having both positive and negative views. A majority of the students are reported having positive views as they find that self-assessment helps them to see what should be developed and to take responsibility for their own learning (Elsinen 2007). The participants whose views were negative argued for their view by stating that they as students are not competent to assess their language skills or by expressing that they do not see self-assessment having any advantages (Elsinen 2007). Another cause for negative views was a feeling that self-assessment is implemented too often which causes it to lose its advantages (Elsinen 2007).

Hanrahan and Isaacs (2001) have also studied university students' views on self- and peer-assessment. The participants in their study did self- and peer-assessment on a written essay task. Their results show similarities with the results of Alanen and Kajander and Elsinen since they report both positive, and negative and skeptical views. The positive views include discovering skills that could be improved and understanding the assessment criteria better. As for negative view, they are based on experiencing that self-assessment is redundant as they felt that they already had done the best they could, or they did not take it seriously due to a lack of motivation (Hanrahan and Isaacs 2001).

Furthermore, students' conceptions of assessment of specifically English have been studied in a Finnish context (Pollari 2020). According to Pollari (2020), upper secondary school students are rather content with assessment of English. However, students do not seem to be well acquainted with the assessment criteria (Pollari 2020). Moreover, the students reported that self-assessment was done occasionally, and their conception of the process appears to be closer to self-evaluation, according to Nieminen's (2019) definition that was presented above, since they explained that it was done, for instance, by suggesting a grade for themselves (Pollari 2020). Furthermore, Pollari's (2020) results also show similar views on self-assessment as Alanen and Kajander's (2011) study. She explains that 40% of the participants considered self-assessment useful whereas, self-assessment was considered of no use by 37,5% of the participants. In addition, a suggestion that teachers would base grades for the most part in self-assessment arouse rather strong negative views among the participants (Pollari 2020). Pollari (2020) concludes that, overall, students' appreciation for self-assessment was quite low and that there is a need to develop methods for self-assessment and feedback.

Kajander and Alanen (2011) have also studied students' conceptions on why they think self-assessment is done. Their findings show that some students do self-assessment for themselves. In other words, students consider that knowing about one's strengths and weaknesses regarding one's skills as well as individual goal setting and motivational factors are reasons for doing self-assessment (Kajander and Alanen 2011). Some students, in turn, experience that self-assessment is done for the teacher to give them an idea of the students' skills and the students' conceptions of their own skills (Alanen and Kajander 2011). The most negative student views express that self-assessment is merely means to facilitate teachers' work so that they can relax occasionally (Kajander and Alanen 2011). In short, it can be stated that the variation of students' views on self-assessment is rather significant.

Moreover, Huhta (2019) has conducted research on the factors that affect students' views on their foreign language skills. His findings show that some students put more emphasis on factors that are related to school and others on factors that are related to activities and language use outside the classroom when doing self-assessment. Success in school examinations and in language use outside the classroom as well as the degree of experienced easiness or difficulty of language learning are the three factors that Finnish 9th graders consider affecting their self-assessment of their foreign language proficiency the most (Huhta 2019). Feedback from foreigners, peers and teachers, and comparison to peers are factors which have a lesser impact when assessing students' own language proficiency (Huhta 2019). Huhta (2019) also found that a student's proficiency level, which was defined by the student's latest school grade, has a slight effect on the experiences about the discussed factors. The results

show that the students with higher grades regarded all of the listed factors to affect their self-assessment of their language skills to a greater extent than the students with lower grades (Huhta 2019).

3   ASSESSMENT AND TEACHING OF ORAL SKILLS

For the purposes of the present study, it is important to understand what is meant with oral skills to know what specific skills students presumably assess when doing self-assessment on their oral skills. Hence, the first section in this chapter introduces widely used definitions of orals skills that Finnish students can also be familiar with. Previous research on students' views on oral skills is also presented to shed light on their understanding about the concept. In addition, the teaching and assessment of oral skills in schools are discussed in the second and third section of this chapter. The assessment is reviewed because self-assessment can be based on the same assessment criteria as assessment completed by teachers. As for the teaching of oral skills, some research is introduced because it can affect students' conception of oral skills and the assessment practices.

3.1   Definitions of oral skills

This section presents a couple of definitions of oral skills. Most of these definitions are labelled *communicative competence* since they include both spoken and written communication. However, the word *oral skills* is used for the purposes of the present study since its interest is in spoken language.

There are several models that can be used as definitions of oral skills and one of the most widely used is Canale and Swain's (1980) model of communicative competence. Canale and Swain (1980) explain that the concept of communicative competence, which includes both written and spoken communication, includes three kinds of skills or competencies: *grammatical*, *sociolinguistic*, and *strategic*. Canale and Swain (1980) include, for example, knowledge of lexical items, phonology, syntax and morphology in the grammatical competence. According to Canale and Swain (1980),

sociolinguistic competence, in turn, concerns knowledge about rules regarding discourse and sociocultural aspects which define the appropriateness of language use in interaction. In Canale and Swain's (1980) model, the strategic competence is defined as the means, verbal and non-verbal, which the speaker or learner has in use in case problems occur in communication. Canale (1984) has developed the definition by adding a competence called *discourse competence*. It is defined as a skill to create coherent text in written and spoken forms (Canale 1984). Consequently, it has been acknowledged long time ago that communicative competence is a multifaceted concept.

Another widely used model for communicate competence which also includes both spoken and written communication is provided in the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) (2001). CEFR (2001) is a framework for language teaching and assessment that is used in Finland quite frequently and it divides communicative competence into three different components. According to the framework, the components of communicative competence are *the linguistic component*, *the sociolinguistic component* and *the pragmatic component* (CEFR 2001: 28-29). The linguistic component includes knowledge about the lexical, phonological and syntactical aspects of a language (CEFR 2001). The sociolinguistic component, in turn, comprises of knowledge about rules regarding aspects of, for instance, politeness and social groups when using a language, in other words, knowledge about the social context of using a language (CEFR 2001). As for the pragmatic component, it concerns functional knowledge about language use that is needed in interaction (CEFR 2001). An ability to create cohesion, coherence and recognizing irony are examples of skills included in the pragmatic component (CEFR 2001).

CEFR (2001: 28-29) further divides aspects of spoken language use into *range*, *accuracy*, *interaction, coherence* and *fluency*. In this division, range refers to vocabulary that a learner possesses to express themselves and accuracy, in turn, to the degree of grammatical correctness (CEFR 2001: 28-29). The aspect of interaction includes skills that are needed for starting, maintaining and ending a conversation (CEFR 2001: 28-29). Coherence refers to the linguistic devices such as linking words or phrases that make utterances clear wholes (CEFR 2001: 28-29). Fluency is seen as a feature that describes how spontaneously the learner can communicate and how much pauses there are in a learner's speech and the tempo with which a learner speaks (CEFR 2001: 28-29). Regarding fluency, it has also been stated that many descriptions of fluency have been found to be ambiguous and that it may be difficult to decide whether aspects of fluency are more connected to language skills and which to personal traits (Olkkonen and Peltonen 2017).

Phonological competence is also defined as a separate aspect of language skills in CEFR (2001: 116-117). It consists of knowledge and control of both segmental and

suprasegmental features of pronunciation such as sounds, distinctive features of sounds and prosodic features like intonation and stress (CEFR 2001: 116-117). Since the competence level descriptions for phonological competence are rather vague in CEFR from 2001, they have been revised in the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: learning, teaching, assessment companion volume with new descriptors (2018). In this newer Framework phonological control is divided into *overall phonological control*, *sound articulation* and *prosodic features* (Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: learning, teaching, assessment companion volume with new descriptors 2018: 136). A description of a learner's phonological control is presented in more detail in section 3.2.

In addition to speech production, listening comprehension meaning understanding one's interlocutor is a component of oral skills. It is an aspect that has not received as much attention in in the definitions presented above. Understanding speech consists of recognizing sounds and constructing meaningful units of the heard sounds (Laakso 2019). Understanding speech also requires some pragmatic skills to understand utterances in the context where they are heard (Laakso 2019).

Research has shown that Finnish students' conceptions of oral skills revolve around communication and speech that is comprehensible (Ilola 2020). Students also understand accuracy, interaction and non-verbal aspects to be components of oral skills (ibid.) Furthermore, pronunciation is the component of oral skills that students have been found to see as the most significant component of oral skills (Ilola 2020). Preferences about pronunciation vary between native-like goals and the goal of speaking so that others understand your speech (ibid). In sum, it can be said that students appear to have a rather versatile conception of oral skills. Rather many of the aspects included in the definitions above are present in students' conceptions. However, for instance, listening comprehension is a component that does not consistently appear in their conceptions.

3.2   Assessment of oral skills

This section provides more detailed descriptions of the competencies that are presented in section 3.1. In other words, the section elaborates the criteria that can be used to determine what kind of knowledge and control a learner on the CEFR level B2 has of the components of spoken language introduced in section 3.1. The level B2 is introduced because the goal level for interaction in English for Finnish upper secondary school students is B2.1 (*First stage of independent proficiency*). The section firstly presents what the self-assessment grid in CEFR (2001) explains about spoken interaction and production. Secondly, the five aspects of spoken language in CEFR

(2001) that are introduced in 3.1 are discussed from the perspective of assessment. Thirdly, the section introduces the assessment criteria provided in the NCC for general upper secondary education. The assessment criteria in NCC are presented because it creates the foundation for assessment in Finland. Moreover, the CEFR is introduced as the assessment criteria for English in the NCC is based on it (NCCGUSE 2020).

CEFR (2001) is sometimes used for assessment purposes, and it includes descriptions of six proficiency levels from the lowest A1 (*Breakthrough*) to the highest C2 (*Mastery*). The self-assessment grid for the proficiency levels (A1 to C2) in the CEFR (2001: 27) describes skills for spoken interaction and spoken production, which are the two sub-skills under speaking, on level B2 in the following way:

> "I can interact with a degree of fluency and spontaneity that makes regular interaction with native speakers quite possible. I can take an active part in discussion in familiar contexts, accounting for and sustaining my views."

and

> "I can present clear detailed descriptions on a wide range of subjects related to my field of interest. In can explain a viewpoint on a topical issue giving the advantages and disadvantages of various options."

The quotes above show that a learner on the proficiency level B2 is expected to be able to converse around familiar topics quite fluently and understandably. In addition, when the topic is of interest to the learner, they are expected to, for instance, discuss the topic from several perspectives. However, it may be difficult the interpret some phrases, such as "familiar contexts" or "quite possible" which affects the use of this criteria.

In the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: learning, teaching, assessment companion volume with new descriptors (2018), a language user's phonological control is explained in detail. It is described that on level B2 a learner has basic control of intonation, stress and pronunciation of individual sounds but there may be some little accented features in their speech (Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: learning, teaching, assessment companion volume with new descriptors 2018: 136). Moreover, it is explained that a learner on level B2 can maintain a mainly clear pronunciation for longer stretched of speech and use correct prosodic features in their speech (ibid.).

As mentioned in section 3.1, CEFR (2001) also includes descriptions for the five aspects of spoken language which are range, accuracy, fluency, interaction and coherence. In section 3.1 it is explained which skills each aspect refers to and the following example of the level B2 presents how each aspect can be assessed. In short, it is described that a learner on the level B2 can discuss their views on general topics (range) with "a relatively high level of grammatical control" (accuracy) (CEFR 2001:

28). Moreover, long pauses are infrequent in their speech (fluency) although there "may be some 'jumpiness' in a long contribution (coherence) (CEFR 2001: 28). They can also participate in conversations by, for instance, taking turns rather appropriately (interaction) (CEFR 2001: 28).

Appendix 2 of the newest NCC for general upper secondary education is an application of the levels of the CERF (NCCGUSE 2020). In the application, "interaction skills" are divided in to three categories: "interaction in different situations", "using communication strategies" and "cultural appropriateness of communication" (ibid.) The description for level B2.1 includes similar points as the self-assessment grid presented above stating that a student on this level can express themselves fluently also in discussions around abstract topics, they can express their opinions and use communicative strategies, for instance, to negotiate about complicated meanings (NCCGUSE 2020). Moreover, they aim at paying attention to other people and the context of the communication to be appropriate and respective (NCCGUSE 2020). Furthermore, it is mentioned that the presented criteria are used for teacher's assessment and self-assessment of language skills (ibid.).

Different descriptions of proficiency levels regarding language skills include both advantages and challenges which can also be linked to self-assessment as the descriptions can function as criteria for self-assessment of language skills as mentioned above. Advantages of describing language skills as proficiency levels include the process view of learning and the aim of creating common descriptions for what language skills mean (Huhta 2020). However, there are also challenges concerning use of proficiency levels. One challenge is that despite the aim to make the descriptions of each proficiency level clear and easy to understand, there is always a possibility to interpret them in different ways (Huhta 2020).

Furthermore, assessment of oral skills can be found challenging because oral skills are often divided into several components. Hence, it has been suggested for teachers, for example, to plan which assessment criteria they use and which skills they assess in each instance of assessment, such as an oral exam or an oral presentation (Ahola 2019). These perspectives should also be considered regarding self-assessment which supports the suggestion students should consistently practice self-assessment with teachers' support. In addition, based on the possible ambiguity of the proficiency level descriptions, interpretation of them may be considered one target for practicing. In other words, it is important that teachers help their students understand the descriptions in case they are used for purposes of self-assessment. Hence, it would be important to study whether students feel that they receive enough support for understanding the proficiency level descriptions or the assessment criteria.

3.3   Teaching of English oral skills in Finland

This section discusses oral skills from the perspective of teaching. It is important to understand the participants' background with the teaching of oral skills to some extent because it probably affects their views on oral skills as a concept and on self-assessment of oral skills.

Teaching of oral skills has a more central role than before in language teaching in Finland (Tergujeff and Kautonen 2019). Thus, the topic has been studied quite extensively. However, it seems that the teaching of pronunciation has received more attention in research than the teaching of oral skills in general. Hence this section mainly introduces some research regarding the teaching of pronunciation. This understanding is meaningful since the general principle is that assessment, including self-assessment, should regard the aspects of language skills that have been taught. In other words, aspects that have not been discussed and practiced with students should not be assessed either.

Research has shown that the teaching of pronunciation is important according to Finnish language teachers (Virkkunen and Toivola 2020). However, the teaching of pronunciation is affected by teachers' conception of its easiness (Virkkunen and Toivola 2020). For instance, teachers who consider the teaching of pronunciation to be easy have been found to teach more about prosodic aspects such as intonation and stress (Virkkunen and Toivola 2020). In addition, pronunciation teaching has been found to concentrate more on pronunciation of individual words than prosody (Virkkunen and Toivola 2020). Hence, there may be rather significant differences on how and how much students in different schools receive teaching of pronunciation.

Research has also been conducted regarding different methods for teaching pronunciation. For example, reading aloud, drilling, discussion activities and exercises in which sounds are compared are common ways of teaching pronunciation in Finnish schools (Virkkunen and Toivola 2020). Also, activities that explicitly pay attention to aspects of pronunciation, such as voiced and unvoiced sounds, have been mentioned to be included in pronunciation teaching (Virkkunen and Toivola 2020) Students have also expressed that discussion activities in pairs are a way to learn oral skills (Ilola 2020). Moreover, students give a rather significant role to activities that occur outside the classroom, such as watching TV and listening to music, in learning oral skills (Ilola 2020).

It has also been found that textbooks are very actively used in pronunciation teaching (Virkkunen and Toivola 2020). However, it has been stated that teachers may trust the quality of textbooks regarding teaching of oral skills too much which may cause that teaching of oral skills does not cover all aspects of oral skills equally (Tergujeff 2019). Research has shown that English textbooks mainly include

traditional pronunciation exercises such as exercises that utilize IPA, reading aloud, and listening and repeating (Tergujeff 2010). Other types of exercises are included in smaller quantities and most exercises are learner-centered (Tergujeff 2010). However, it is also stated that many useful exercise types are not included, and that textbooks lack material for teaching prosodic features such as intonation, rhythm and connected speech (Tergujeff 2010). In other words, the textbooks do not offer explicit material that covers all aspects of pronunciation. Moreover, this may show a connection to Virkkunen and Toivola's study which showed that the amount of teaching prosody varies between teachers.

4   THE PRESENT STUDY

4.1 Aim and research questions

The aim of the present study is to explore how upper secondary school students experience self-assessment of English oral skills and whether they are content with the support that they receive for self-assessment of English oral skills. According to my knowledge, the support for self-assessment, in particular, has not been studied extensively. can have positive effects on learners' own conception of their leaning and learning outcomes (e.g., Atjonen 2007). Another widely acknowledged aspect of self-assessment is that effective self-assessment requires practice and support from teachers (e.g., Atjonen 2007, NCCGUSE 2020). Thus, it is important to study students' views regarding the support so that teachers could possibly improve their supporting practices. This aim was also chosen because it is generally acknowledged that self-assessment However, it appears that in Finland, there is rather little research on students' views on self-assessment of oral skills which makes the present study important. The research questions to guide the present study are the following:

1. How do Finnish first-year upper secondary school students experience self-assessment of English oral skills?
2. What kind of views do Finnish first-year upper secondary school students have on being supported in self-assessment of English oral skills?
3. In what ways would Finnish first year upper secondary school students possibly like to be supported more in self-assessment of English oral skills?

4.2   Data collection

4.2.1   Participants

The participants of the present study were first year students in Finnish upper secondary school (16-17-year-olds) In total, 42 students participated in the study. 24 participants identified themselves as female, 17 as male, and one chose not to tell this information. The participants were from two schools, and they were recruited by contacting English teachers and head teachers at Finnish upper secondary schools which were found by searching online. Since the students participating in the study were minors, a description of the data collection process and the study was sent through their teachers to the guardians of the participants. It was pointed out that it is voluntary to participate in the study and no personal information, such as names, is gathered.

This group of participants was chosen because they have experience of self-assessment from basic education and upper secondary education. In addition, they are the first group of students that have started their upper secondary studies with the newest NCC for general upper secondary education that as described in section 2 has some differences compared to the pervious NCC for general upper secondary education which are of interest in the present study.

4.2.2   Method of data collection

The data for the present study was gathered in February 2022. The questionnaire that can be found in the Appendix was used for data collection. Questionnaire was chosen as the data collection instrument because it is possible to collect information from a rather large group of participants quickly when using a questionnaire (Dörnyei and Taguchi 2010). In addition, the larger the sampling is, the more generalizable the results of the study are. Moreover, questionnaire was chosen because it is a suitable instrument when studying experiences. In addition, it enables both qualitative and quantitative analysis methods (Alanen 2011). The questionnaire was answered anonymously meaning no personal information was collected except for the participants' gender which the participants could also choose not to tell.

The questionnaire was in Finnish to ensure that the participants understand the questions as well as possible. Furthermore, it was explained in the questionnaire that participation in the study was voluntary and that by answering the questionnaire the participants gave their permission to use their answers for the purpose of the present study. To control the time that answering the questionnaire takes, the questionnaire was piloted by one upper secondary student whose answers were not used in the

presents study. Based on the piloting, a couple of questions were removed from the questionnaire to make it a little shorter.

The questionnaire includeded multiple-choice questions, open-ended questions and questions that utilize Likert scales. Multiple-choice questions were used to quicken answering the questionnaire when the alternatives are fairly easy to decide. Open-ended questions, which are useful for ensuring space for the participants' own free reflection (Alanen 2011), were used to give the participants an opportunity to freely express their own thoughts and to explain the answers that they selected in the closed questions. The questions concerned, for example, the participants' views on the use of self-assessment of English oral skills, the assessment criteria used for self-assessment, the experienced easiness and usefulness of self-assessment, and the support for self-assessment.

Regarding the questions that utilized Likert scales, the appropriate size of the scale has been studied rather extensively from the perspective of reliability and validity, and the views regarding the matter are varying (Preston and Colman 2000). For the purposes of the presents study, a scale from one to six was used because reliability has been found to be higher with scales of more than four points (Preston and Colman 2000). The six-point scale was also used to avoid answers that imply not having an opinion or not knowing. Since not providing a neutral alternative in a six-point scale forces the participants to choose from two polar alternatives, an open-ended question was added after almost every question that utilized Likert scale to provide the participants a chance to argue for and reflect on their answer.

4.3   Methods of analysis

Content analysis was used for analyzing the data of in the present study. Content analysis was chosen because it aims is to create a condensed description of the data and it is a suitable method when analyzing data that are in text form (Tuomi and Sarajärvi 2018: 117). However, there has been some disorganization regarding the use of terms content analysis and thematic analysis and thus, the used method could also have been called thematic analysis (Tuomi and Sarajärvi 2018). However, Vaismoradi and Snelgrove (2019) state that content analysis allows the use of quantitative data in addition qualitative data and hence, the method of analysis in the present study is labelled content analysis. In addition, the present study provides a general report of, for instance, the similarities and differences between the participants' views which is common to content analysis compared to the more profound report that is characteristic for thematic analysis (Vaismoradi and Snelgrove 2019). However, the

findings of the present study are nevertheless presented as themes which can also be done in content analysis (Vaismoradi and Snelgrove 2019)

The analysis began by reading the data several times and by making notes and color codes of answers that were repeated by several participants and answers that represented strong polar views. In addition, percentages were calculated regarding the multiple-choice and Likert-scale questions to see how the participants' answers were divided between the given alternatives. This provided information about majorities that agreed on some matters and about matters that divided the participants' views more widely between different alternatives. Observations about the percentages and color-coded text answers were tabulated to see which themes the observations formed, and examples of the answers were divided to support each theme. Finally, the following four themes were found: the use of self-assessment of English oral skills, the usefulness of self-assessment of English oral skills, the degree of easiness of self-assessment of English oral skills and the support for self-assessment of English oral skills. These themes are presented in more detail when the findings are discussed in the next chapter.

5   FINDINGS

This chapter presents the findings of the present study. In other words, the chapter discusses the findings concerning the participating students' views on self-assessment of English oral skills and support for self-assessment of English oral skills. This chapter is organized based on the themes mentioned above in 4.3.

5.1   Use of self-assessment of oral skills

This section discusses the findings concerning the participants' views on the use of self-assessment of English oral skills in their studies, that is, how often and in what ways self-assessment is implemented and to what extent the participants are content with it.

The results show that most of the participants estimated that they do self-assessment of English oral skills once during each English module. The results can be seen in more detail in Figure 1.
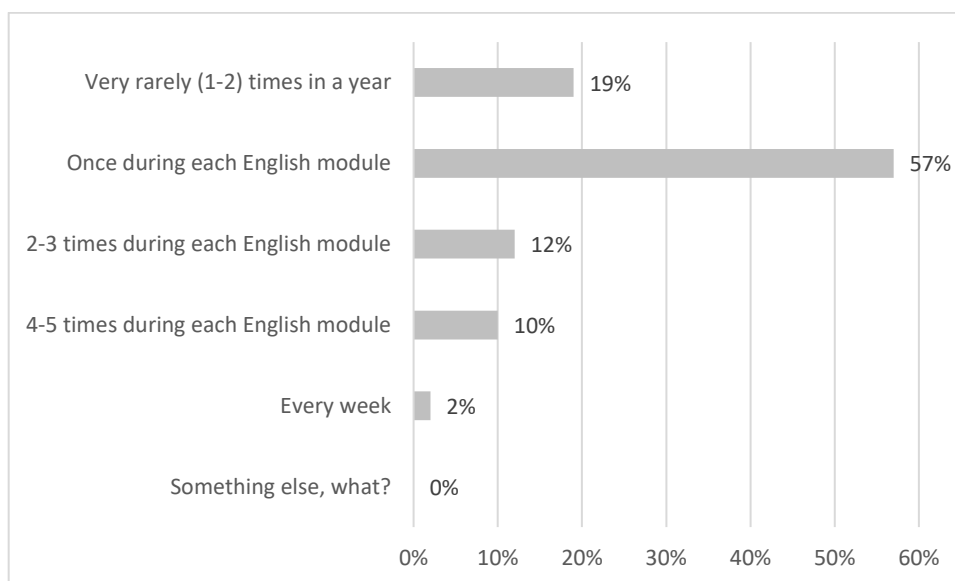
FIGURE 1   Students' estimates of how often self-assessment of English oral skills is implemented. (For the original answer options in Finnish, see question 2 in Appendix 1.)

Figure 1 shows that more than a half of the participants estimated that self-assessment of English oral skills is implemented once during an English module and a little more than a fifth that it is implemented more than once during an English module. Moreover, a little less than a fifth of the participants estimated that it is implemented very rarely. Considering that the participants are from only two schools and the question only concerns the present moment, the variation is slightly unexpected. The result may at least partly be explained by the situations in which the participants reported implementing self-assessment. Self-assessment in relation to an oral exam was reported as the most common situation in which self-assessment is done. All the results regarding the situations for implementing self-assessment can be seen in Figure 2.
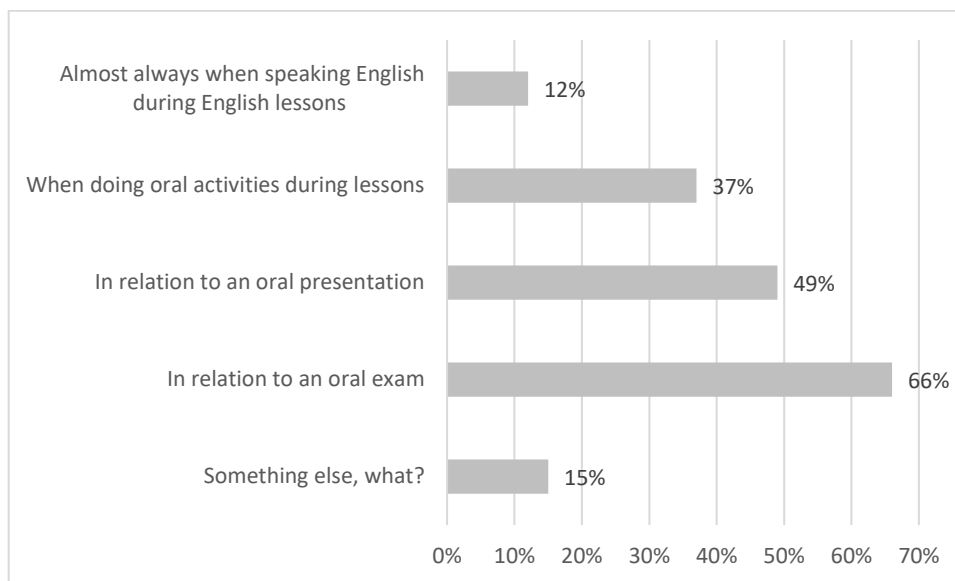
FIGURE 2   Students' views of situations in which self-assessment is implemented. (For
                 the original answer options in Finnish, see question 4 in Appendix 1.)

Figure 2 shows that in addition to oral exams, oral presentations and other oral activities during lessons are rather common contexts for self-assessment of English oral skills. Other contexts that the participants mentioned for the use of self-assessment were beginning of a module, when speaking English on spare time, and when being told by a teacher. Consequently, those participants who reported doing self-assessment more often than once during an English module have probably considered doing self-assessment also on their spare time instead of merely doing self-assessment at school. In addition, each module probably includes one oral exam and/or oral presentation which explains why the majority participants reported implementing self-assessment once during each English module. Moreover, implementing self-assessment at the beginning or at the end of an English module also add to that view.

The participants also seemed to be rather content with the amount of self-assessment of English oral skills. A majority of them reported that they do not hope that self-assessment of English oral skills would be implemented more. More detailed results regarding this can be seen in Figure 3.
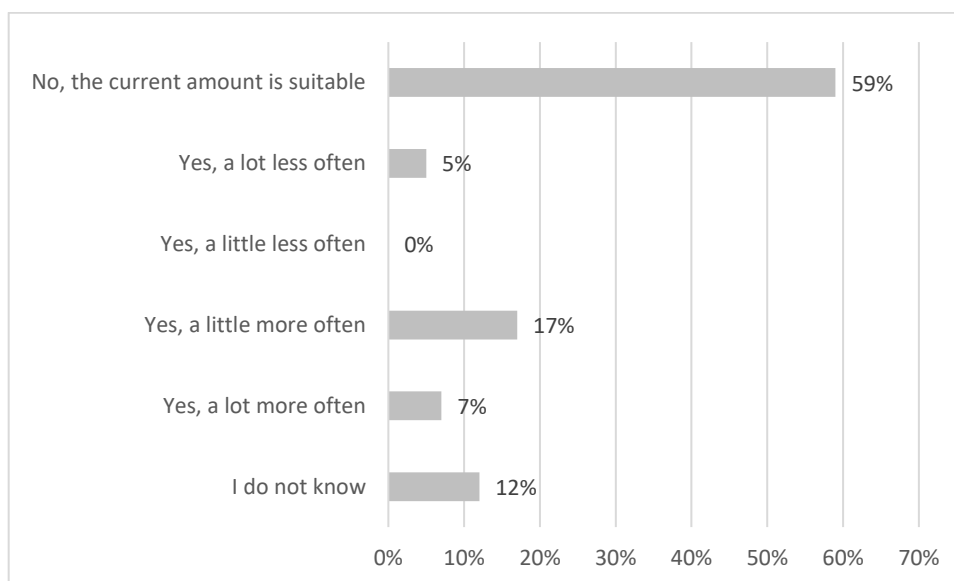
FIGURE 3   Students' answers to question "Would you like to do self-assessment of
                  English oral skills more or less often?" (For the original answer options in
                  Finnish, see question 3 in Appendix 1.)

As it can be seen in Figure 3, a little more than half of the participants reported that they are content with the amount of self-assessment of English oral skills whereas, approximately a fourth reposted that they would like to do self-assessment more often and 5 % less often. In addition, 12 % of the participants were uncertain and replied not knowing if they would prefer the amount to remain unchanged. Furthermore, the amount of implemented self-assessment was inconsistent among the participants who would like to do self-assessment of English oral skills more often. In other words, their answers regarding the amount of implemented self-assessment varied between very rarely and 2-3 times during each English module.

5.2   Usefulness of self-assessment of oral skills

The participants' views on the usefulness of self-assessment is the second theme to be discussed. The results show that, in general, most of the participants consider self-assessment to be quite useful. More than a half of the participants reported that both self-assessment in language studies in general and self-assessment of particularly English oral skills are at least quite useful for them. The results can be seen in Figure 4.

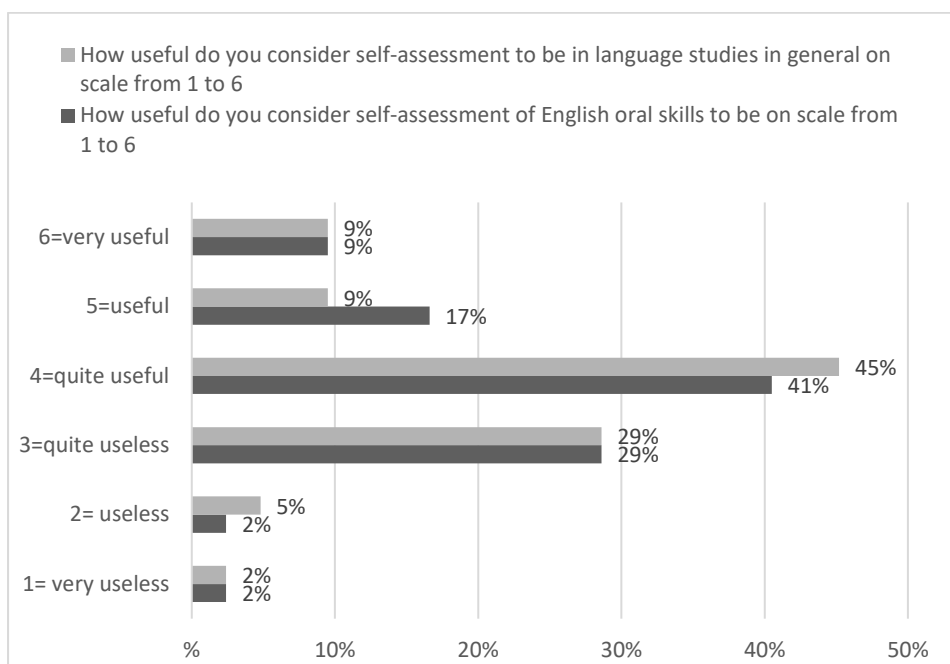FIGURE 4   Students' views on usefulness of self-assessment of oral skills and self-assessment in general. (For the original answer options in Finnish, see questions 6 and 7 in Appendix 1.)

As can be seen in Figure 4, most of the answers settled in the middle of the scale that is the answers imply only slightly inclining to either useful or useless. In other words, most of the participants only see little use or advantage of self-assessment or they wanted to avoid appearing extreme with their views. The differences between self-assessment in general and self-assessment of English oral skills are rather small. Self-assessment of English oral skills is perceived quite useful, useful, or very useful by 67 % of the participants and the corresponding number for self-assessment in general is 64 %. The participants were also asked to motivate their answer, and some uncertainty can be seen in those answers:

> (1) *Self-assessment is not that useful in the end. You can however learn what to improve and in that case it is then useful.* (Itsearvioinneista ei loppujen lopuksi ole kovin paljon hyötyä. Siitä voi kuitenkin oppia vielä parannettavaa, ja näin ollen siitä on silloin hyötyä.)

> (2) *It is a little useful because you can assess your competence yourself. But implementing self-assessment does not usually develop my language skills in any way.* (Se on hieman hyödyllistä, koska pääsee itse arvioimaan omaa osaamista. Mutta itsearvioinnin tekeminen ei yleensä kehitä kielitaitoani mitenkään.)

In the examples above the use of words "not that useful" and "a little" imply that the participants are slightly unconvinced about the usefulness of self-assessment but nevertheless, possibly find some benefits from it. This is also consistent with the fact that most of the answers settled in the middle alternatives in Figure 4. However, the

participants also conveyed more polarized views on the matter. Examples below present the participants' positive views:

> (3) *Self-assessment of English oral skills is very useful because it helps you to see what things you already are good at and where you could improve.* (Englannin suullisen kielitaidon itsearviointi on erittäin hyödyllistä, koska se auttaa sinua näkemään, missä olet jo hyvä ja missä on parannettavaa.)

> (4) *Because self-assessment surveys my current level of oral skills well and comprehensively.* (Koska itsearviointi kartoittaa hyvin ja kattavasti sen hetkisen tason suullisen kielitaidon osalta.)

> (5) *In my opinion, self-assessment of English oral skills is quite useful because it helps you to learn better in the future.* (Mielestäni koen englannin suullisen kielitaidon itsearvioinnin aika hyödylliseksi, koska sen avulla oppii paremmin jatkossa.)

As examples 3 and 4 show, some of the participants have strong positive views regarding the usefulness of self-assessment of English oral skills. Word choices such as "very useful", "well and comprehensively" rather strongly express that self-assessment is considered useful. There were only a few participants who expressed their view of usefulness as strongly as in example 4. Example 5 as well as examples 1 and 2 above present more moderate positive views which were more common. However, some participants also expressed negative views or views that convey that self-assessment of English oral skills is useless as can be seen in the examples below:

> (6) *Nobody likes them.* (Kukaan ei tykkää niistä.)

> (7) *I do not consider getting anything else than depression out of assessing myself.* (En koe että saan itseni arvoinnista muuta irti, kuin masennusta.)

> (8) *I get almost no benefit at all from doing it.* (En saa siitä melkein mitään hyötyä että sen teen.)

Strong views of the uselessness of self-assessment of English oral skills were expressed with words such as "nobody" and "depression" as examples 6 and 7 demonstrate. Similarly to the highly positive views discussed above, a minority of the participants expressed these highly negative views and example 8 presents a more subtle negative view including the word "almost".

Arguments for the usefulness or the uselessness of self-assessment of English oral skills were often based on benefits or the lack of benefits that it is considered to have. When considering these benefits improving or developing one's skills was the most mentioned benefit. In addition, the participants mentioned recognizing one's strengths or what one already is good at:

> (9) *It helps to develop the parts that are not that strong for me yet.* (Se auttaa kehittämään niitä osa-alueita missä en ole vielä niin vahvoilla.)

(10) *After the assessment I can develop the weaker parts.* (Arvioinnin jälkeen voi kehittää heikompia alueita.)

(11) *Maybe I have sometimes known what I am bad at.* (Olen ehkä joskus tiennyt missä olen huono.)

(12) *I have learned to know my strengths regarding my language skills.* (Olen oppinut tuntemaan vahvuuksiani kielitaidossani.)

(13) *Sometimes I have gotten a little information about what topics I have known.* (Joskus saanut vähän tietoa mitä aiheita on osannut.)

The examples above demonstrate that the word develop occured in the participants' answers several times. It can be interpreted that these participants want to develop their skills and see self-assessment as a means to achieve that. Another observation of these examples is that the tone of the answers partly reflects negative experiences regarding self-assessment. Using negative forms ("are not that strong for me yet") and words such as "bad at" create this negative tone which can also been seen in example 7 which expresses that self-assessment causes depression. The unconvinced views on the usefulness of self-assessment which were introduced above are also repeated in examples 11 and 13 which include the words 'maybe', 'sometimes' and 'a little'. These words and their combinations imply that the participants were uncertain about their answers.

In addition to the rather polarized views on the usefulness of self-assessment of English oral skills presented above, the data nevertheless included answers that reflected neutral views. In addition, there were benefits that were mentioned notably less than the benefits discussed above. These benefits included, among others, learning pronunciation, improving one's learning skills, improving motivation and learning how one manages to speak foreign languages.

The participants also reflected on the language profile from the perspective of usefulness in relation to self-assessment of English oral skills. The language profile, which is an addition to NCCGUSE 2020, seemed to provoke rather cautious views among the participants. A little over a half of the participants reported that they have started to create their language profile. According to them, the language profile has had minor or no effects on self-assessment. In addition, their experiences of the language profile as a part or a means of self-assessment seemed partly rather positive or neural and partly rather negative the latter experiences being dominating. Examples of the participants' negative experiences can be seen below:

(14) *The language profile is useless from all points of view.* (Kieliprofiili on kaikelta kannalta turha.)

(15) *No more useful than self-assessments.* (Ei yhtään sen hyödyllisempi kuin itsearvioinnit.)

(16) *Quite unnecessary. We have not done any self-assessment in it. The language profile feels also otherwise difficult and unnecessary, so I have not thought about it more than that.* (Aika turhana. Ei sinne ole mitään itsearviointeja ole tehty. Kieliprofiili tuntuu muutenkin vaikealta ja turhalta, joten en ole sitä sen enempää ajatellut.)

It can be seen in examples 14-16 that the participants motivated their rather negative experiences by explaining that they find self-assessment and/or the language profile as unnecessary ("useless", "no more useful", "unnecessary"). Example 16 also shows that the language profile may not always be perceived as self-assessment. In other words, it may imply that, for instance, self-assessment forms should be added into the profile to make it self-assessment. This may reflect a lack of understanding of the fact that the language profile could be self-assessment without adding self-assessment forms, which the students has filled in, into it:

(17) *The language profile has hardly affected my self-assessment. Oral activities give self-confidence for speaking but I have not noticed effects that reflect on self-assessment.* (Kieliprofiili ei juurikaan ole vaikuttanut itsearviointiini. Suulliset tehtävät antavat kyllä itsevarmuutta puhumiseen, mutta en ole huomannut itsearviointiin heijastuvia vaikutuksia.)

(18) *We nearly never do it, so the language profile has been quite insignificant.* (Emme tee sitä melkein, koskaan, joten kieliprofiili on ollut aika mitään sanomaton.)

(19) *It is done quire rarely, but it is quite useful.* (Sitä tehdään aika harvoin, mutta on se ihan hyödyllistä)

(20) *It has facilitated studying English and achieving goals.* (Se on helpottanut englannin opiskelua ja tavoitteiden saavuttamista.)

The participants with neutral and positive experiences mostly stated that they see little use for the language profile due to the little time that has been used for furthering it (examples 17-19). The participants who considered that they benefit from doing the language profile (example 20) were few. Many answers indicated that the language profile is a new part of language studies, and that it has not entirely been concluded what kind of role it will have in language studies. Hence, it seems that students are only constructing their views on why the language profile is done. In addition, the participants were asked to reflect on the language profile from the perspective of self-assessment of English oral skills. It is unclear if some of the participants merely reflected on the profile as a whole instead of the named perspective as their answers rarely included the word self-assessment.

5.3   Easiness of self-assessment of oral skills

The third theme to be discussed is the participants' views on the easiness of self-assessment of English oral skills. A majority of the participants (71 %) replied that they

consider self-assessment of English oral skills to be fairly easy, easy or very easy which can be seen in Figure 5.
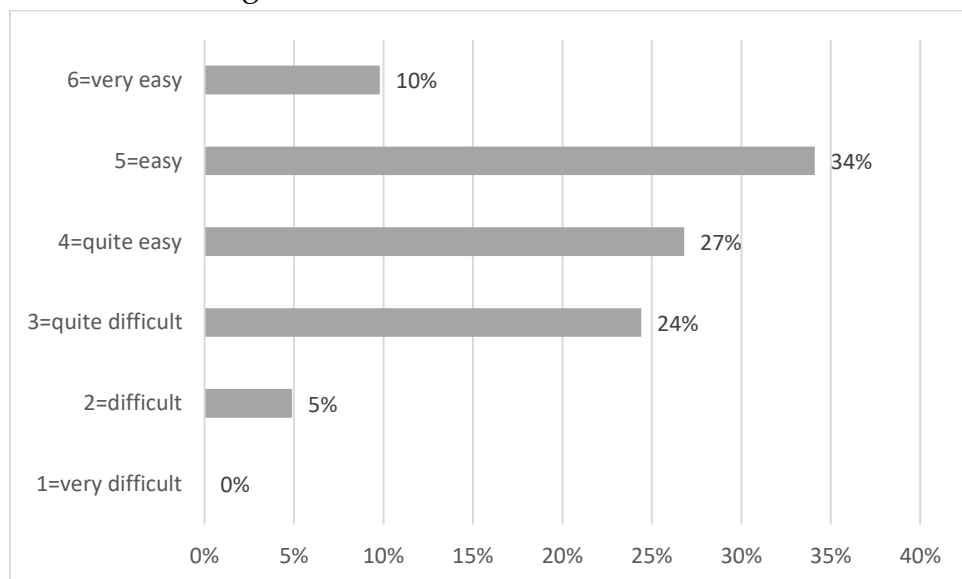
FIGURE 5   Students' views on easiness of self-assessment of English oral skills. (For the original answer options in Finnish, see question 11 in Appendix 1.)

As can be seen in Figure 5, the difference in the proportion of answers is rather small between 'quite easy' (27 %) and 'quite difficult' (24 %). In effect, the alternatives that only slightly incline towards either easy or difficult were popular among the participants. As it was determined in chapter 3 that oral skills are a quite complex concept, the participants were asked which component of oral skills is the easiest or the most difficult to self-assess. Figure 6 presents the results for the components that the participants selected the easiest to self-assess.

FIGURE 6   Which component of oral skills is the easiest for the participants regarding self-assessment. (For the original answer options in Finnish, see question 13 in Appendix 1.)

It can be seen in Figure 6 that the participants reported pronunciation and fluency as the easiest components of English oral skills to self-assess. It is also noteworthy that except for 'ending a conversation' and 'something else, what?' all alternatives have been chosen which implies differences among the participants. The same variety of views was evident regarding the components of English oral skills that the participants selected as the most difficult to self-assess. Those results can be seen in Figure 7.

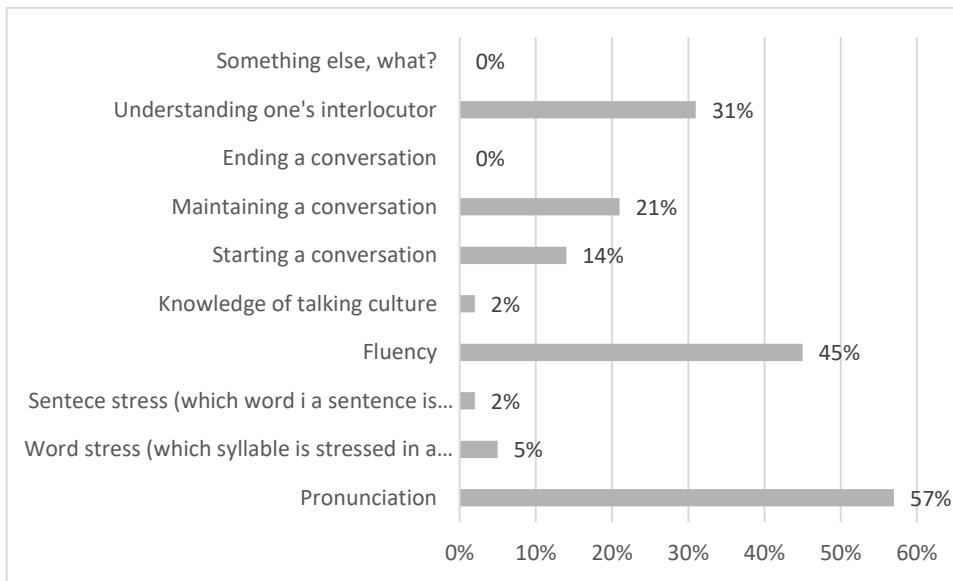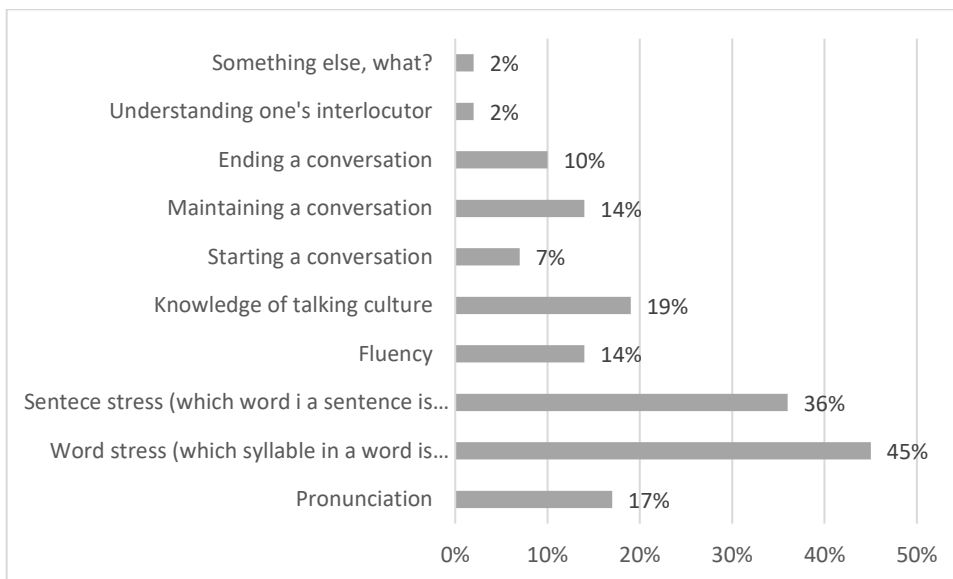FIGURE 7   Which component of oral skills is the most difficult for the participants regarding self-assessment. (For the original answer options in Finnish, see question 14 in Appendix 1.)

34

It can be seen in Figure 7 that to the participants word stress and sentence stress are the most difficult components of English oral skills to self-assess. It can also be seen that the answers are divided rather evenly between several alternatives which, similarly to the easiest components in Figure 6 above, implies personal preferences among the participants. It should also be considered that this study did not examine the participants' conceptions or knowledge of English oral skills and thus, some of the alternatives may be unfamiliar to the participants which could affect the answers. When observing these answers, it should also be considered that the participants were asked to choose one to three alternatives and they were not given an alternative of not choosing any alternative. However, one participant utilized the 'Something else, what' alternative and explained that nothing felt difficult.

The participants were also asked to give reasons why self-assessment of English oral skills is easy or difficult for them. This task produced both answers that show little reflection on the matter and answers that motivate the view more profoundly as can be seen in the examples below:

(21) *They are not too difficult.* (Ei ne ole kovin vaikeita.)

(22) *Self-assessment of English just is easy.* (Englannin itsearviointi on vain helppoa.)

(23) *I know my own strengths quite well and the questions are never too difficult.* (Tiedän omat vahvuuteni melko hyvin ja kysymykset eivät ole ikinä kovin hankalia.)

(24) *I can tell without self-assessment how good I am so it is easy to just put everything to paper from my head.* (Osaan sanoa ilman itsearviointiakin kuinka hyvä olen joten kaikki on helppoa vain tunkea suoraan päästä paperille.)

When explaining their answers about the easiness of self-assessment of English oral skills, many participants merely stated that it is easy without reflecting any further on it, as can be seen in examples 21 and 22 above. Some participants stated that self-assessment is easy when they know their skills (example 23). A couple of participants seem to refer to self-assessment as an action of filling in a form which is easy for them (example 24). This may also reflect an indifferent attitude towards self-assessment and that some participants merely do self-assessment as an obligatory school activity instead of doing it for their own development.

The most reoccurring concern or reason why self-assessment is challenging or difficult for the participants seems to be its reliability which can been seen in the following examples:

(25) *One cannot necessarily assess oneself. One should be neutral toward oneself. One does not know what one thinks.* (Ei välttämättä osaa itseä arvioida. Pitäisi olla neutraali itseään kohtaan. Ei tiedä mitä mieltä on)

(26) *It can be difficult to give oneself a realistic grade or feedback.* (Se voi olla hankalaa asettaa itselleen realistista arvosanaa tai palautetta.)

(27) *It requires a teacher's or somebody else's feedback because I do not see my strengths/weaknesses in oral [tasks].* (Se vaatii opettajan tai jonkun muun henkilön palautetta, koska en aina näe vahvuuksiani/heikkouksiani suullisissa.)

(28) *One can start to criticize oneself too much. That is, one just pays attention to the mistakes that one makes during an oral task.* (Itseään saattaa alkaa moittimaan liikaa. Eli kiinnittää huomiota vain virheisiin joita tekee suullisen tehtävän aikana.)

Examples 25-27 show that the participants explained that they consider giving neutral feedback to themselves to be challenging and that they consider a teacher or another person to be more competent in assessing them (example 28). In addition, negative experiences arose as the participant in example 27 explained that they are likely to be too critical towards themselves. Self-criticism could interrelate with the negative experiences, such as depression, which were discussed above.

5.4   Support for self-assessment of oral skills

The fourth theme in the data is the support for self-assessment of English oral skills. In general, the participants conveyed that they are mainly content with the amount of support that they receive both for self-assessment of English oral skills and for self-assessment in their studies in general. These results can be seen in Figure 8.

I feel that I get enough support for self-assessment in general/in other subjects.

I feel that I get enough support for self-assessment of English oral skills.

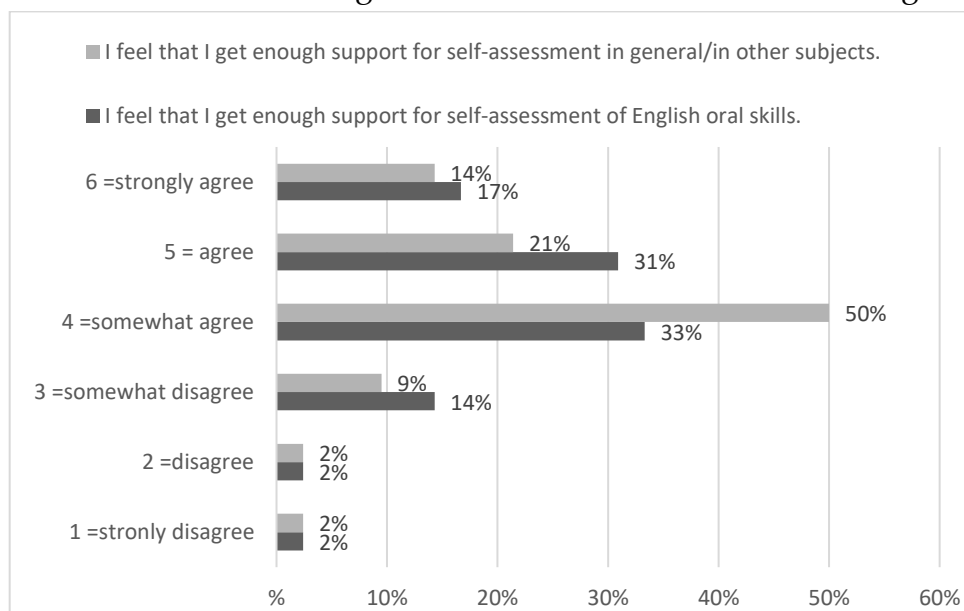| Category	General/other	English oral
6 =strongly agree	14%	17%
5 = agree	21%	31%
4 =somewhat agree	50%	33%
3 =somewhat disagree	9%	14%
2 =disagree	2%	2%
1 =stronly disagree	2%	2%

FIGURE 8   Students' views on the sufficiency of the amount of received support for self-assessment. (For the original answer options in Finnish, see questions 17 and 18 in Appendix 1.)

Figure 8 shows that most of the participants somewhat agreed, agreed or strongly agreed with statements regarding receiving enough support for self-assessment in

general and for self-assessment of English oral skills. The participants reported being slightly more content with the support for self-assessment in general than support for self-assessment of English oral skills. It should also be noted that the alternatives "disagree" and "strongly disagree" have the least number of responses (2 % for each) which implies that the quite clearly discontented participants are a small minority. In addition, 64 % of the participants reported that they have received support for self-assessment of English oral skills evenly throughout their school years.

Contentment for the amount of support for self-assessment of English oral skills is also apparent because a rather large majority of the participants expressed that they do not wish to receive more of it. Consequently, 12 % of the participants would like to receive more support and 2 % of them reported that they have not received support before but would like to receive it. In addition to contentment, some of these answers could be explained by some confusion and uncertainty that some of the participants seem to experience regarding support for self-assessment. Examples of answers that reflect confusion can be seen below:

> (29) *Barely nothing, is it not the point that you assess yourself, and a teacher does not affect the matter.* (En juuri mitää, eikös ole juuri tarkoitus että itse arvioidaan, eikä opettaja vaikuta asiaan.)

> (30). *I do not understand how support can help with SELF-assessment.* (En ymmärrä miten tuki auttaa ITSEarvioinnissa)

> (31) *I have not experienced any benefits because I think self-assessment should be done entirely alone.* (En ole kokenut hyötyä, koska mielestäni itsearviointi pitää tehdä täysin yksin.)

> (32) *I do not know because I do not know if there is a big need for support to assess yourself, but of course it encourages to assess yourself.* (En osaa sanoa, sillä en tiedä onko itsensä arviointiin saadulla tuella mitään suurta tarvetta, mutta toki se kannustaa arvioimaan itseään.)

Examples 29-32 present a couple of uncertain or confused views on the support for self-assessment. Examples 29 and 31 express a view according to which, a teacher should not affect self-assessment and instead self-assessment should be implemented entirely independently. Example 30 which highlights the word 'self' implies a similar view whereas, example 32 shows uncertainty about the need for support for self-assessment. Based on these answers, it could be argued that the views expressed in them partly explain the rather low need for more support for self-assessment of English oral skills. In other words, the participants feel that self-assessment should be done independently and consequently, they feel that there is not a need for support.

The uncertainty may also show in the participants answers regarding usefulness of the received support for self-assessment. A third of the participants answered that that they do not know if the received support has been useful. The received support was considered useful by a little less than a half of the participants and of no use by 10 % of the participant. 12 % expressed that they have not received support for self-

assessment of oral skills. It could be deduced that the third of the participants who expressed that they do not know have some uncertainty or confusion regarding support for self-assessment. On the other hand, one of these participants clearly argued for their answer by saying that they have not received enough support to form a view regarding the matter which explains that the uncertainty is caused by receiving only little support.

Examples of the received support again show a variety of experiences. Some participants explained that they have not received support because they do not need it whereas, some explained that teachers' feedback, help with difficult questions and explained assessment criteria are common ways to support self-assessment:

> (33) *I have not received [support], because I have not needed.* (En ole saanut, kun en ole tarvinnut.)

> (34) *I have not needed support but I would get it if I asked for it.* (En ole tarvinnut tukea mutta saisin jos pyytäisin.)

> (35) *I have received constructive feedback.* (Olen saanut rakentavaa palautetta.)

> (36) *I have been told the criteria for a good work.* (Minulle on kerrottu kriteerit hyvästä työstä.)

> (37) *Feedback, a teacher has supported.* (Palautetta, opettaja on tukenut.)

> (38) *A teacher has clarified questions that have been unclear for for if there have been any.*
> (Opettaja on selventänyt minulle epäselvät kysymykset, jos niitä on ilmennyt.)

Examples 33 and 34 demonstrate that some participants do not feel they need support for self-assessment. Some participants also explained that they are sure they would receive support if they needed it (example 34). As for examples 35 and 37, the participants referred to feedback as a means of support for self-assessment. Some vagueness can also be observed in example 37 as the participant merely stated that a teacher has supported them without any further explanation of the type of support. Clarifications for challenging questions are also considered to be support for self-assessment (example 38). In addition, the participants' views regarding the support for self-assessment range from positive to negative similarly to views regarding the usefulness of self-assessment. Examples of negative views can be seen below:

> (39) *Nothing much. Some criteria have been given but they have remained quite unclear and I have not been able to apply them to my own doing.* (En paljon mitään. Joitan kriteerejä on joskus annettu, mutta ne ovat jääneet aika epäselviksi ja en ole osannut sovittaa niitä omaan tekemiseen.)

> (40) *I have been told: "you know yourself which level you are at".* (Sanottu: "tiedät itse, millä tasolla olet".)

Example 39 presents a rather negative experience of not receiving enough support and the little received support not being helpful as that the criteria has remained unclear

to them after an explanation, and they feel that they have not been able to apply it. Example 40 can also be interpreted as a negative view as it could imply that the participant had sometimes asked for support and the teacher's answer had not been helpful. Alternatively, example 40 can be interpreted as a neutral view since it does not explicitly say if being told that they know their level themselves is a positive or a negative experience. In the same way as the usefulness of self-assessment of English oral skills, the variety of views regarding the received support for self-assessment also includes positive views. Examples of the views can be seen below:

(41) *If I have questions, I get help.* (Jos on kysyttävää niin minua autetaan.)

(42) *The topics for assessment have been explained well. Always been helped to get started.* (Arvoinnin aiheet on selitetty hyvin. Autettu aina alkuun. Kerrottu mitä pitää tehdä.)

(43) *It is always helpful when someone gives advice.* (Ainahan se auttaa kun joku neuvoo.)

In examples 41-43, the positivity of the views can be seen in the answers since words such as "always" ("aina"), "well" ("hyvin") and "help" ("autetaan," "autettu") appear in the answers. The answers imply being certain that the participants receive help and support if they need it. In addition, there are rather neutral answers, such as example 43 that slightly assumes that the support is always useful but does not specify how or why the support has been useful for them.

Regarding the assessment criteria that was already mentioned above, 68 % of the participants reported that some assessment criteria have been used when doing self-assessment. Of that group, a large majority considered that the given criteria have usually been clear to them, whereas 7 % expressed that they would need more support to understand the criteria. Consequently, it could be concluded that most teachers have explained the criteria that can be ambiguous (Huhta 2020) in an understandable way or that the criteria are rather clear for the participants without any explanations. Moreover, explaining the assessment criteria in more detail does not explicitly occur in the participants' wishes regarding additional feedback. Due to the majority's contentment for received support, only three participants answered the question regarding wishes for additional support and the answers are rather general. One hoped for "all the possible support that they could get", one for more and different questions, and one for help for understanding the questions and more instructions on how to assess. The wish for further instructions on how to assess could be in relation to assessment criteria, but it is not explicitly mentioned.

6   DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

In this chapter the findings of the present study are summarized and discussed in relation to findings form previous research. Moreover, some implications of the findings are discussed. The reliability of the present study and suggestions for further research are presented.

6.1   Summary of the findings

The aim of the present study was to find out how upper secondary school students experience self-assessment and support for self-assessment of English oral skills. The findings were discussed in four categories: the participating students' views regarding the amount of implemented self-assessment of English oral skills, the usefulness and easiness of self-assessment of English oral skills, and the support for self-assessment of English oral skills. The results showed that in general, most participants did self-assessment approximately once during each module and most of them are content with the amount of self-assessment. In other words, only a small minority of the participants reported doing self-assessment more often or more seldom than once during an English module and hoped that self-assessment of English oral skills would be implemented more often or more seldom.

The findings also indicated that the first-year upper secondary school students who participated in this study experienced self-assessment of English oral skills in rather versatile ways. Regarding the usefulness of self-assessment of English oral skills, a majority of the participants expressed that they consider self-assessment to be either quite useful or quite useless. However, there were also participants who had more polarized views. These views included both rather strongly positive and strongly negative views: some found it very unnecessary or even depressing and others very useful for knowing one's strengths and areas for development. The

language profile that was newly introduced in NCC for general upper secondary education (NCCGUSE 2020) and its usefulness in relation to self-assessment were also experienced varyingly: some participants considered it entirely unnecessary, whereas others saw advantages in it. However, the most general perspective was that the participants had worked on their language profiles so little that their views were incomplete. The participants' views on the easiness of self-assessment were also versatile. Common to usefulness, most of the participants selected the alternatives in the middle of the scale, that is, they considered self-assessment of English oral skills to be either quite easy or quite difficult. There were also differences regarding which components of English oral skills were considered the easiest and the most difficult to self-assess which is discussed more thoroughly below in 6.2.

Regarding the support for self-assessment of English oral skills, a majority of the participants reported to be content with the amount of support they receive both in general and for self-assessment of English oral skills, in particular. In other words, most participants did not feel that they need more support for self-assessment of English oral skills. In addition, most of the participants considered the received support to be useful. However, the concept of support for self-assessment also seemed to cause some confusion among the participants. Some participants argued that the idea of self-assessment is that it is done entirely independently. Consequently, they argued that support from teachers should not be involved of self-assessment. Moreover, many participants explained that they have not needed support for self-assessment and thus, they have not received it. These views are mostly in line with the participants' views regarding the easiness of self-assessment since most of the participants considered self-assessment of oral skills to be at least quite easy. On the other hand, some participants experienced the support for self-assessment more positively and explained that they have received support in the form of, for instance, constructive feedback and that they have been helped with difficult questions.

Only the few participants who hoped for more support conveyed their ideas regarding the needed further support. These suggestions included "all the possible support that students could get", "more different questions" and "more explanations of what students are being asked and how to assess". In other words, the suggestions were rather general instead of being concrete suggestions which teachers could follow to improve their practices. The small number of suggestions is partly disappointing as one of the aims for the present study was to find out how teachers could improve their ways of supporting students' self-assessment. However, the result is also positive as it implies that students already receive the kind of support that they need.

6.2   Discussion of the findings and implications

Regarding the amount of self-assessment, it is stated in the report of the Finnish National evaluation centre, that most students estimated that self-assessment is done 'often' or 'always' (Atjonen et al. 2019). Most of the participants in the present study reported that they do self-assessment once during an English module which could be suggested to, on average, be rather often. Thus, the results imply similarities with the of the evaluation centre's report. However, it is difficult to estimate what the participants in the present study would consider to be often or always since they were given more precise alternatives. Moreover, there was a slight inconsistency in the findings of the present study regarding the amount of self-assessment of English oral skills: only 5 % of the participants hoped that it would be implemented less often but approximately a third of them considered it to be quite useless, useless or very useless. Since the participants considered it to be rather useless, it could have been expected that more participants would have hoped to do less self-assessment.

As a majority of the participants were at least quite content with the support that they receive, their views on the support for self-assessment of English oral skills were one of the most positive findings of the present study. In effect, most of the participants reported that they are content with the amount of received support and that they find the support useful. This can imply that teachers provide appropriate support for self-assessment for their students. In addition, these findings seem to be consistent with the findings regarding the easiness of self-assessment as self-assessment of English oral skills was generally considered to be quite easy.

The findings regarding the participants' views on the easiness of self-assessment were slightly surprising. A majority of the participants considered self-assessment of English oral skills to be at least quite easy which is a little surprising because it has been stated that assessment of oral skills requires careful planning due to the number of factors that affect oral skills, including, for example, knowledge of vocabulary, pronunciation and even personality traits (Ahola 2019). In other words, assessment of oral skills can be experienced challenging. In addition, it has been suggested that self-assessment also requires practice (Ahola 2019) and thus, it was expected in the present study that more participants would experience self-assessment challenging rather than easy. The participants might have experienced self-assessment of oral skills to be easy because they are in upper secondary school and have practiced self-assessment during several years in comprehensive school. Hence, it would be an interesting aim for future research to study how students find their self-assessment skills have developed over the years.

It was also interesting to discover how versatile views the participants had on which component of English oral skills was considered the easiest and which the most

difficult for self-assessment. In effect, almost all alternatives were chosen by some participants to be the easiest and the most difficult which implies that the participants have differences regarding the matter. According to the participants, the easiest components to self-assess were pronunciation and fluency. It was an interesting finding that the participants experienced fluency as one of the easiest components to self-assess. The finding is interesting because it has been stated that criteria for fluency can be ambiguous (Olkkonen and Peltonen 2017) which can make assessment of fluency rather challenging. On the contrary, the participants of the present study found it easy. Consequently, the results imply that the participants and research may not define fluency similarly. Thus, the results shed light on the participants' views even though they may not be entirely comparable with other research.

Pronunciation was the other component of oral skills that the participants considered to be the easiest to self-assess which could be due to familiarity of the concept of pronunciation. Research has shown that students regard pronunciation as the most significant component of oral skills (Ilola 2020) which could cause that they pay more attention to that in their language studies. Hence, paying most attention to pronunciation could also make self-assessment of pronunciation easier than self-assessment of other components of oral skills. However, it should also be considered that pronunciation is a rather complex concept which includes many features such as intonation and stress (the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: learning, teaching, assessment companion volume with new descriptors 2018: 136) that were not all specified in the questionnaire. Hence, the results of the presents study do not show which features of pronunciation the participants are aware of and how widely the features are considered in their self-assessment. Instead, it sheds some light into the participants' views and shows possible connection to previous research which says that pronunciation is one of the most important components of English oral skills.

The participants considered both word stress and sentence stress to be the most difficult components of oral skills to self-assess. This finding could be explained by the fact that previous research has shown that the teaching of pronunciation can cover different features of pronunciation in varying extents depending on the teacher (Virkkunen and Toivola 2020). It has been found that particularly the teaching of prosodic features compared to the teaching of pronunciation of individual words varies significantly between different teachers (Virkkunen and Toivola 2020) which could explain why word stress and sentence stress, which are prosodic features, were considered difficult to self-assess by the participants of the present study. In addition, it has been found that English text books lack material for teaching prosodic features (Tergujeff 2010). In other words, word stress and sentence stress may be more unfamiliar concepts to the participants, and they may have had less practice in self-

assessing them because they are taught and thus also self-assessed less. Consequently, they are considered difficult when doing self-assessment

Furthermore, it was perhaps expected in the present study that a greater number of the participants would have considered understanding the used assessment criteria to be challenging. This expectation was based on some discussion regarding possible ambiguity of the assessment criteria and descriptions of proficiency (Huhta 2020) and, for instance, Pollari's (2020) study which indicates that students are not well acquainted with the assessment criteria. However, most of the participants of the present study considered the assessment criteria to be clear and easy to understand. However, "clarifying what students are asked to assess" was included in the suggestions for further support (see section 5.4) which could refer to clarifying the assessment criteria. This finding could, therefore, provide an interesting topic for further research as it could be studied what kinds of assessment criteria teachers provide as guidelines for self-assessment of English oral skills, how teachers explain the criteria, or how students interpret them. In addition, the topic could be studied from the perspective of other languages than English or of younger students than upper secondary school students to explore whether language or age affect the results.

Regarding the usefulness or uselessness of self-assessment of English oral skills, the present study showed similar results compared to the Finnish National evaluation centre's report. In the report it is stated that students have moderate positive views regarding usefulness of self-assessment in general (Atjonen et al. 2019). The findings of the present included similar results regarding self-assessment of English oral skills since 'quite useful' and 'quite useless' were the most selected answer options among the participants. Moreover, Pollari (2020) states that almost the same number of second—fourth year students considered self-assessment to be useful (40 %) and useless (37,5 %) in English studies at upper secondary school. The present study shows slightly more positive views regarding self-assessment of English oral skills since a majority (67 %) of the participants considered self-assessment of English oral skills to be at least quite useful. This difference could possibly be due to differences in the size of the population or the age of the participants. In the future, it could also be interesting to study whether students' appreciation for self-assessment varies between, for instance, oral language skills and written language skills to explore whether students' views concern self-assessment generally or whether the topic of self-assessment affects their views on, for instance, the usefulness of self-assessment.

In the present study, the usefulness of self-assessment was the theme that provoked the strongest variation between positive and negative views even though most of the participants expressed rather moderate views. Moreover, the present study specifies that the versatile views concern usefulness of specifically self-assessment of English oral skills since strong views that vary between positive and

negative have also been found in previous research regarding self-assessment in language studies in general (Alanen and Kajander 2011, Elsinen 2007). Alanen and Kajander (2011) explain that students with negative views expressed, for instance, that self-assessment is implemented to reduce teachers' workload and that self-assessment is unnecessary. In the present study, the view of self-assessment being unnecessary also appeared, but the negative experiences were also related to self-criticism which was not mentioned by Alanen and Kajander (2011). Seeing advantages, such as recognizing one's strengths and areas for development, in self-assessment was usual among the participants who expressed strong positive views on usefulness of self-assessment both in the present study and in Alanen and Kajander's (2011) study.

Although the strongly negative views among the participants of the present study were a minority, they are slightly concerning. Participants who had strongly negative views expressed self-criticism to be the most significant factor that causes negative views and even the word 'depression' occurred in the data. The self-criticism could relate to, for example, the participants' success at school or in language studies. In other words, self-assessment could be experienced negatively as students consider having weak language skills and thus, they find it difficult to acknowledge their own strengths when doing self-assessment. Another concern regarding self-assessment was its reliability: the participants saw teachers as more capable to do assessment than themselves. These participants most likely do not recognize the difference between self-assessment and a teacher's assessment. It might be necessary to study in more detail how students could be supported to see the advantages of self-assessment. In addition, studying what teachers explain to their students about self-assessment and its reliability could also be important in future research. In other words, it would be beneficial to find out if reliability is highlighted so much that it causes students pressure to assess themselves correctly or if students are encouraged to do self-assessment so that their strengths are highlighted and their own learning goals defined which is what the Finnish NCC guides self-assessment to concern (NCCBE 2016, NCCGUSE 2020).

Research has shown that self-assessment can have several advantages. These advantages include, among other things, improved self-efficacy and confidence, taking responsibility for one's learning and noticing one's strengths and weaknesses (e.g., Butler and Lee 2010, Baleghizadeh and Masoun 2014, Elsinen 2007). The same advantages are also recognized in the NCC for basic education and for upper secondary education (NCCBE 2016, NCCGUSE 2020). Considering the number of advantages that self-assessment is considered to have and the significance of the role that the Finnish NCC for basic and general upper secondary education give to it, the participants' views seemed to be based on rather few or hardly any advantages. To be more specific, most of the participants found at least some minor, occasional benefits

but the number of different mentioned benefits was rather small. This raises a slight concern regarding the extent of the participants' understanding of self-assessment and its benefits.

The concern for the participants understanding and knowledge of self-assessment is also supported by a couple of other matters in the results. Firstly, some of the participants seemed to refer to self-assessment merely as an activity of filling in a form which may also imply having a rather limited conception of self-assessment. Similar results were also found by Alanen and Kajander (2011) whose results show that some students do self-assessment for their teacher instead of doing it for their own development. Secondly, the data of the present study included perspectives according to which self-assessment should be done entirely independently, that is, without any support which seems to be a quite narrow view on the matter. Thirdly, in the present study, some of the participants' responses implied slight uncertainty regarding the usefulness of self-assessment of English oral skills and the support for self-assessment of English oral skills. Thus, it can be contemplated whether the uncertainty is, perhaps, due a lack of knowledge about self-assessment. Consequently, it should perhaps be considered in teaching if students have a comprehensive conception of self-assessment. In effect, it should be examined if the support for self-assessment should be support for understanding how students could benefit the most from self-assessment, for instance by doing self-assessment so that they consider their own development instead of writing a report of their skills and learning for the teacher. Thus, it might be important in future research to study students' awareness and conceptions of advantages of self-assessment so that self-assessment practices could be developed to serve students in the best possible way.

Furthermore, the language profile, which is an addition to the current NCC for upper secondary education, was of interest in the present study. However, it must be concluded that the participants still had little experience of the language profile. In their answers, rather many participants explained that they have used little time for doing the language profile. In addition, some of the participants did not regard the language profile to include self-assessment. Hence, studying both students and teachers' views on the language profile in the future would be important to see whether students learn to appreciate it more than they did based on the findings of the present study.

6.3   Evaluation of the present study

The present study included students who were minors in the data collection process and thus, ethical perspectives have been carefully considered. In short, to ensure that

the participants of the present study remain anonymous, no personal data, except for gender that the participants could choose not to tell, was gathered in the questionnaire that was used for data collection. In addition, names or locations of the schools in which the participants study are not mentioned in this research report. Headteachers and English teachers of the participants gave permission for the data to be collected in the groups that participated in the questionnaire. In addition, a description of the data collection process and the study was sent through their teachers to the guardians of the participants.

Regarding the findings of the present study, it is important to consider that the number of participants is rather small, and that the participants are from only two schools. Hence, the results are not widely generalizable. However, the results have been discussed in relation to previous research which provides some possibilities for generalizability. In addition, the questionnaire unfortunately produced shorter answers towards the end of it which could imply that it was slightly too long. Thus, the questionnaire could have been piloted with more than one person to better assure that its length was suited, and questions properly formulated for upper secondary school students. This also would have produced more reliable data. Adding a couple of interviews would have given an opportunity get more specific perspectives, but it was not possible within the limits of the present study.

In addition, it was also considered if teachers' views could have been included in the present study, but it was determined that extent of this Master's thesis would become too wide if they were included. Thus, studying teachers' views on self-assessment would be important in the future since their views and preferences probably have rather significant effects on how they build their students' conceptions about self-assessment. In other words, an important topic for future research might be whether teachers experience, for instance, self-assessment to have enough benefits for it to be a relevant topic to discuss with students.

Moreover, the participants were asked to reflect specifically on self-assessment of English oral skills in most of the questions in the questionnaire but some of the participants did not answer using full sentences or explicitly mention oral skills in their answers. Hence, it can be that they also reflected on self-assessment in general. However, the answers have been interpreted to concern self-assessment of English oral skills because the questions clearly mention it as the perspective. Despite its limitations, the present study provides information about Finnish first-year upper secondary school students' views on self-assessment of English oral skills and some suggestions for further research which can help improving self-assessment practices in schools so that students would benefit from self-assessment as much as possible.

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APPENDIX: QUESTIONNARE FOR STUDENTS

Hei! Tämä kysely koskee englannin suullisen kielitaidon itsearviointia ja sitä, miten opiskelijat kokevat tulevansa tuetuiksi suullisen kielitaidon itsearvioinnissa.

Tässä kyselyssä suullisella kielitaidolla tarkoitetaan puhutun kielen kokonaisuutta, joka kattaa sanaston ja kieliopin hallinnan, ääntämisen (äänteet, lause- ja sanapaino, intonaatio), puhumisen sujuvuuden, kulttuurin tuntemuksen sekä keskustelukumppanin ymmärtämisen ja kommunikaatiotaidot, joilla esimerkiksi ylläpidetään keskustelua. Itsearvioinnilla puolestaan tarkoitetaan sekä koulussa että vapaa-ajalla tehtävää pohdintaa ja arviointia omasta oppimisesta ja osaamisesta.

Kyselyyn vastaaminen on vapaaehtoista ja siihen vastataan nimettömästi. Vastaamalla tähän kyselyyn annat suostumuksesi vastauksien käyttämiseen maisterin tutkielmaani varten.

Arvostan kaikkia vastauksia. Mitä tarkemmin vastaat kysymyksiin, sitä enemmän vastauksistasi
on hyötyä opetuksen ja tutkimuksen kehittämisessä.

Kiitos vastauksistasi!

1. Sukupuoli
   a. nainen
   b. mies
   c. muu
   d. en halua kertoa

2. Kuinka usein keskimäärin teet itsearviointia englannin suullisesta kielitaidostasi?
   a. Joka viikko
   b. 4–5 kertaa yhden englannin moduulin aikana
   c. 2–3 kertaa yhden englannin moduulin aikana
   d. Kerran yhden englannin moduulin aikana
   e. Hyvin harvoin (1–2 kertaa vuodessa)
   f. Joku muu, mikä? _____

3. Haluaisitko tehdä englannin suullisen kielitaidon itsearviointia harvemmin tai useammin?

   a. Kyllä, paljon useammin
   b. Kyllä, vähän useammin
   c. Kyllä, vähän harvemmin
   d. Kyllä, paljon harvemmin
   e. En, nykyinen määrä on sopiva
   f. En osaa sanoa

4. Millaisissa tilanteissa teet itsearviointia englannin suullisesta kielitaidostasi koulussa (voit valita useamman kuin yhden vaihtoehdon)

   a. Suullisen kokeen yhteydessä
   b. Suullisen esitelmän yhteydessä
   c. Oppituntien suullisten tehtävien yhteydessä
   d. Lähes aina, kun puhun englantia oppitunneilla
   e. Joku muu, mikä? _____

5. Kerro muutama esimerkki siitä, miten koulun itsearviointi tilanteet ovat mahdollisesti muuttuneet kouluvuosiesi aikana.

6. Arvioi asteikolla 1-6 kuinka hyödyllisenä koet itsearvioinnin kielten opiskelussa yleensä (1=erittäin hyödytöntä, 2=hyödytöntä, 3=melko hyödytöntä, 4=melko hyödyllistä, 5=hyödyllistä, 6=erittäin hyödyllistä)

7. Arvioi asteikolla 1-6 kuinka hyödyllisenä koet englannin suullisen kielitaidon itsearvioinnin (1=erittäin hyödytöntä, 2=hyödytöntä, 3=melko hyödytöntä, 4=melko hyödyllistä, 5=hyödyllistä, 6=erittäin hyödyllistä)

8. Perustele vastauksesi (nro 7) kolmella lauseella.

9. Mihin englannin suullisen kielitaidon itsearvioinnista on ollut eniten hyötyä sinulle. Mainitse vähintään kolme esimerkkiä.

10. Mihin englannin suullisen kielitaidon itsearvioinnista on ollut vähiten hyötyä sinulle. Mainitse vähintään kolme esimerkkiä.

11. Arvioi asteikolla 1–6 kuinka helppona tai vaikeana koet englannin suullisen kielitaidon itsearvioinnin. (1=erittäin vaikeaa, 2=vaikeaa, 3=melko vaikeaa, 4=melko helppoa, 5=helppoa, 6=erittäin helppoa).

12. Perustele vastauksesi (nro 11) kolmella lauseella.

13. Merkitse minkä englannin suullisen kielitaidon osa-alueen itsearviointi on sinulle helpointa (valitse 1–2 vaihtoehtoa)

    a. Ääntäminen

    b. Sanapaino (millä tavulla sanassa on paino)

    c. Lausepaino (millä sanalla lauseessa on paino)

    d. Puheen sujuvuus

    e. Puhekulttuurin tuntemus

    f. Keskustelun aloittaminen

    g. Keskustelun ylläpitäminen

    h. Keskustelun lopettaminen

    i. Keskustelukumppanin ymmärtäminen

    j. Joku muu, mikä?

    _____

14. Merkitse minkä englannin suullisen kielitaidon osa-alueen itsearviointi on sinulle vaikeinta (valitse 1–2 vaihtoehtoa)

    a. Ääntäminen

    b. Sanapaino (millä tavulla sanassa on paino)

    c. Lausepaino (millä sanalla lauseessa on paino)

    d. Puheen sujuvuus

    e. Puhekulttuurin tuntemus

    f. Keskustelun aloittaminen

    g. Keskustelun ylläpitäminen

    h. Keskustelun lopettaminen

    i. Keskustelukumppanin ymmärtäminen

    j. Joku muu, mikä?

    _____

15. Oletko aloittanut kieliprofiilin tekemisen englannin opinnoissa?

    a. Kyllä

    b. En

16. Kuvaile kolmella lauseella, millaisena olet kokenut sen tekemisen suullisen kielitaidon itsearvioinnin kannalta?

17. Arvioi seuraava väite asteikolla 1-6. (1= Täysin eri mieltä, 2=eri mieltä, 3=melko eri mieltä, 4=melko samaa mieltä, 5=samaa mieltä, 6 = täysin samaa mieltä)

    a. Koen saavani tarpeeksi tukea englannin suullisen kielitaidon itsearviointiin

18. Arvioi seuraava väite asteikolla 1-6. (1= Täysin eri mieltä, 2=eri mieltä, 3=melko eri mieltä, 4=melko samaa mieltä, 5=samaa mieltä, 6 = täysin samaa mieltä)

    a. Koen saavani tarpeeksi tukea itsearviointiin yleensä/muissa oppiaineissa

19. Mainitse kolme esimerkkiä siitä, millaista tukea olet saanut englannin suullisen kielitaidon itsearviointiin.

20. Oletko kokenut itsearviointiin saamasi tuen hyödylliseksi?

    a. Kyllä

    b. Ei

    c. En osaa sanoa

    d. En ole saanut tukea suullisen kielitaidon itsearviointiin

21. Perustele edellinen vastauksesi (nro 20) lyhyesti:

22. Kerro muutama esimerkki tilanteista, joissa saat tai olet saanut tukea englannin suullisen kielitaidon itsearviointiin?

23. Onko englannin suullisen kielitaidon itsearviointiin yleensä käytetty arviointikriteerejä?

    a. Kyllä

    b. Ei

24. Ovatko kriteerit yleensä olleet sinulle selkeät?

    a. Kyllä

    b. Ei, olen yleensä kaivannut tukea niiden ymmärtämiseen.

25. Toivoisitko saavasi enemmän tukea englannin suullisen kielitaidon itsearviointiin?

    a. Kyllä

    b. En ole saanut tukea, mutta haluaisin saada sitä

    c. En

26. Millaista tukea haluaisit enemmän?

27. Koetko saaneesi tukea suullisen kielitaidon itsearviointiin tasaisesti kaikkien kouluvuosiesi aikana?

    a. Kyllä

    b. En

    c. En ole saanut lainkaan tukea kouluvuosieni aikana

28. Kuinka saadun tuen määrä ja tukemisen tavat ovat muuttuneet?