

**FINNISH UPPER SECONDARY STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS
OF AUDIOBOOKS AS A RESOURCE FOR EFL LEARNING
AND READING**

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Tiivistelmä - Abstract <p>Kirjallisuuden lukeminen on vähentynyt suomalaisten lasten ja nuorten keskuudessa, minkä pohjalla on mahdollisesti muiden mediamuotojen suosion kasvu. Nykyiset opetussuunnitelmat korostavat autenttisten tekstien tärkeyttä englanninopetuksessa monilukutaidon tukemiseksi. Äänikirjojen mahdollisuuksia ei ole tutkittu Suomessa juurikaan, etenään nuorten kielen opiskelijoiden näkökulmasta.</p> <p>Tämän tutkielman tarkoituksena oli selvittää lukiolaisten näkemykset äänikirjoista englannin oppimisen ja lukemisen resurssina. Tutkielmassa haluttiin saada selville lukiolaisten omia kokemuksia juurikin englanninkielisen kirjallisuuden ja äänikirjallisuuden parissa sekä kartoittaa heidän näkemyksiään äänikirjojen hyödyistä englannin oppimisessa. Lisäksi tavoitteena oli selvittää, mitkä tekijät vaikuttavat oppilaiden valintoihin ja kokemuksiin englanninkielisen lukemisen parissa. Tutkielman keskiössä olivat oppilaiden omat kokemukset ja näkemykset, ja se toteutettiin kyselytutkimuksena, johon osallistui 34 lukiolaista. Kysely sisälsi sekä suljettuja että avoimia kysymyksiä liittyen oppilaiden kirjallisuuden kulutukseen, heidän kirjapreferensseihinsä sekä heidän mielipiteisiinsä äänikirjojen hyödyistä englannin oppimisessa. Kysely toteutettiin helmikuussa 2024.</p> <p>Tutkielmassa selvisi, että suurin osa vastaajista kokee äänikirjat hyödylliseksi kielenoppimisen kannalta. Perinteinen kirja oli kuitenkin äänikirjaa suositumpi lukemismuoto. Äänikirjojen hyödyllisinä ominaisuuksina nähtiin joustavuus ja kyky yhdistää lukeminen muuhun tekemiseen. Tutkielma on otoksen pienestä koosta johtuen rajallinen, mutta se antaa osiittaa lukiolaisten näkemyksistä äänikirjoista. Tuloksista käy ilmi, että lukiolaisten näkemykset äänikirjoista ja niiden hyödyistä kielenoppimisessa ovat pääosin positiivisia. Tulokset osoittavat, että äänikirjojen käytössä englanninopetuksessa voi olla potentiaalisia hyötyjä sekä oppimisen että lukemismotivaation kannalta.</p>	
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

1	INTRODUCTION	3
2	PREVIOUS RESEARCH.....	5
	2.1 Literature in the English classroom	5
	2.2 Audiobooks in foreign language learning and reading	6
	2.3 Approaches on creating positive perceptions about reading	8
3	THE PRESENT STUDY.....	10
	3.1 Aim and research questions.....	10
	3.2 Data	10
	3.3 Method of analysis.....	12
4	RESULTS AND ANALYSIS	13
	4.1 Consumption of English-language literature at school and in free time.....	13
	4.2 Students' perceptions and attitudes about audiobooks	15
	4.3 Factors influencing students' reading choices and experiences	18
5	CONCLUDING DISCUSSION	20
	REFERENCES	23
	APPENDICES	

1 INTRODUCTION

In an article by Hanifi (2022, March 17), it is said that reading books has faced a decline among Finnish children and youth in the last two decades. The mentioned article is focused on Finnish-language books, but it nonetheless offers a general picture of the situation in Finland. Reading and listening comprehension skills are developed through the use of content, such as social media, but books have become less favoured as a medium of either entertainment or learning. The reading habits of current generations have shifted to the digital world, and so can be expected to happen with future generations. Most reading is happening in online settings, and reading traditional, printed media is becoming increasingly uncommon (Putro & Lee, 2017, pp. 778-779). Among these online texts is content found on social media. Social media applications that are popular among children and especially teenagers, such as Youtube, Instagram and TikTok, constantly expose their users to English-language content. It is probable that young people see no need to read books in English, as other forms of media give them enough exposure to the English language.

Authentic texts offer many benefits in the language classroom, and Finnish education takes note of the fact. Finnish National Core Curriculum (2014) emphasizes the importance of offering students English education that prepares them for authentic language use, and one of the goals is to support multiliteracy with the use of versatile, authentic texts. Upper secondary curriculum of foreign languages (2019) builds upon this agenda; the perception of texts is diverse in language education; written, spoken, visual, audiovisual texts as well as combinations of these forms of texts are all essential, and both academic and fictional texts should be used in teaching. Most of the six mandatory study modules of English emphasize that the students learn about different genres of text, and teachers are encouraged to include creative production of texts. There are, however, no definite policies as to what kind of materials teachers should use as authentic texts.

All students are individuals that have different needs, strengths and weaknesses in terms of foreign language learning. Offering the option to choose the form of reading is one way to ensure that reading books in English does not become something repulsive, or anxiety inducing for students. Audiobooks offer an alternative way to support literacy and maintain motivation to read. Multiple studies have been conducted on the usefulness of audiobooks in language learning. Studies have concluded that using audiobooks benefits literacy and enhances a positive outlook towards reading (see, e.g., Koskinen et al., 1999; Grover & Hannegan, 2011; Have & Pedersen, 2018). More studies have been conducted on learners of English as a first language (L1), but in recent years learners of English as a second language (ESL) and English as a foreign language (EFL) have become an avenue of research as well. However, there is little research made on this phenomenon in Finland with Finnish EFL students. Since studies conducted in other countries have shown positive results, it would be worthwhile to see how the results would appear in Finland.

The aim of this study is to find out about English-language book reading habits of Finnish upper secondary school students as a part of studying and in their free time, scope out what factors affect students' reading choices and reading experiences in English. The focus of the study is on the perceptions of Finnish upper secondary students.

The present thesis is divided into five chapters. In the following chapter, I will introduce previous research on literature and audiobooks in language learning. The third chapter explains the aims and methods of research in the current study, and in the fourth chapter, I will discuss the results of the study and present my analysis. The final chapter conclusively gathers the main points of the study and discusses the implications and possible avenues for future research.

2 PREVIOUS RESEARCH

In this section I will present previous research and theories related to the present study.

Firstly, the use of literature in the English classroom will be discussed. Secondly, I will discuss previous studies about audiobooks foreign language learning and reading. Thirdly, I will discuss what previous research has deemed as major factors in why, what and how young students read.

2.1 Literature in the English classroom

Literature is quite commonly used as material in English language education, although there can be obstacles preventing its extensive use. Some reasons for the lacking use of literature include lack of time (to find appropriate material) and the difficulty level of authentic material. Moreover, other areas of language have become more valued in English education in recent years, such as the example from Japan; the goal of English teaching has shifted towards “developing learners’ practical communicative competence” (Takahashi, 2015, p. 27).

Nonetheless, literature in foreign language teaching has shown to have many advantages. Literature requires the reader to concentrate both on form and meaning which are equally important to language learning (Hall, 2015, p. 14). Collie and Slater (1987) present why utilizing literature in foreign language teaching is beneficial: literature is authentic material, literature enriches the reader both culturally and linguistically, and it enhances personal involvement. Therefore, the learning goes beyond the technicalities of language and the learner is engaged more deeply with the story. Moreover, Hall (2015) argues that literature can be an essential resource when it comes to learning to utilize language creatively and urges that creative writing alongside reading literature is to be supported in foreign language teaching (p. 17).

Literature is useful in the language education of all age groups. For younger learners, such as primary school students learning a second language, the introduction of story books is encouraged and deemed beneficial for language acquisition. Reading story books elicits

motivation, shifts the focus from form to meaning and exposes the children to language in a natural context at an early stage of the language learning journey (Elley & Mangubhai, 1983, p. 55-56). Moreover, Grabe and Stoller (2011) state that sustaining interest and motivation towards reading is essential for the development of reading skills (p. 211). Experiencing positive emotions while learning impacts individuals' language learning motivation (MacIntyre et al., 2020, pp. 190-191). Elley and Mangubhai (1983) claim that story books provide second language (L2) learners with intrinsic motivation, meaning that they will find the reading activity purposeful without outer sources of motivation, such as passing a class, or impressing a teacher (p. 56). On a similar note, Chu and Tseng (2021) state that easy and interesting texts could generate "motivation, confidence and self-assurance in a reader" (p. 80). Essentially, while it is good to introduce literary texts to English learners, it is equally important to consider the difficulty level of the pieces of literature used in order to not extinguish their interest towards reading, especially with younger students.

2.2 Audiobooks in foreign language learning and reading

Utilizing audio content is a standard practice in foreign language teaching (Moore & Cahill, 2016, p. 6). In the context of Finland this can be seen in, for example, the wide use of audio delivery of texts in textbooks. Reading aloud is another form of learning the written word through audio, and according to Wolfson (2008), audiobooks have a similar effect on the development of reading skills. Audiobooks can be a valid form of reading and support literacy (Grover & Hannegan, 2011). Audiobooks do not require decoding the piece of text one is reading and thus readers with literacy difficulties are able to acquire vocabulary, fluency and comprehension more effectively (Grover & Hannegan, 2011, p. 10). Audiobooks can be useful in creating a positive language learning environment for students with different levels of literacy as well as of different age groups. The inclusion of audiobooks in teaching could support learners with special needs, such as visual impairments, or dyslexia (Marchetti & Valente, 2018, p. 258). As audiobooks are often narrated by professional actors, they can convey the emotions of the literary piece in their narration, and the reading experience can be more enjoyable and comparable to listening to music (Marchetti & Valente, 2018, p. 261).

Marchetti and Valente (2018) acknowledge some downsides that are often associated with audiobooks in education; the main issue is that audiobooks tend to result in passive reading experiences. In their study, McGeown et al. (2020) reported that children turned

to reading audiobooks when they are tired, or when the text is challenging (p. 603). This can be looked at from many perspectives. Audiobooks require less effort than printed books or E-books; however, audiobooks can act as an alternative form of reading that maintains reading motivation when books in a text form feel disinteresting for a reader. On one hand, audiobooks allow the reader to mobilize during the reading experience and offer flexibility to the time and place where one is able to read an audiobook (Have & Pedersen, 2011, p. 67-72). On the other hand, traditional books allow the reader to read at their own pace and return to places in the text as they wish. Therefore, traditional books and audiobooks each have their benefits and appropriate uses in reading practices.

Koskinen et al. (1999) discuss the different starting points of native English-speaking students and ESL students in the context of learning to read. In their study, they state that the diversity of students in a classroom requires efforts from teachers to cater to each student's literacy learning needs (Koskinen et al., 1999, p. 431). In the study, it was discovered that listening to audiotapes of the book they are reading helped children understand the text better. Koskinen et al. (1999, pp. 439-441) found that the usage of audiotapes alongside printed books resulted in increased motivation to read, and students reported to have enjoyed reading. While this study does not touch upon professionally produced audiobooks, it offers information that supports the idea that audio content is beneficial for literacy learning. Similarly, in Larson's (2015) study, students were equipped with electronic books (E-books) and audiobooks. Students were introduced to the opportunity to listen to professionally narrated audio while reading the E-book. It was reported that students adapted to the digital devices quickly and found these new reading experiences motivating and engaging. Additionally, Larson (2015) found that the possibility of simultaneous reading and listening "improved their reading stamina, enabling them to read more and for longer periods of time" (p. 176).

As comprehension of the content is the main goal of literacy, by removing the challenge of word recognition and decoding that traditional books pose, the focus can be shifted to understanding the meaning behind an author's words (Wolfson, 2008, p. 107). Listening comprehension and motivation affect each other reciprocally; better comprehension creates motivation, and motivation leads to the development of listening comprehension (Jafari, 2010, p. 38). Another aspect that affects comprehension is concentration. Wolfgramm et al. (2016) define concentration as sustained attention towards something lasting a long period of time. Concentration requires intention and willingness from students. According to

Wolfgramm et al. (2016), concentration is crucial for the development of both reading and listening comprehension, but especially listening comprehension (p. 40). The effects of audiobooks on the development of reading comprehension among adolescents has shown varying results; for people learning a second language, comprehension is likely to improve with the use of audiobooks while for individuals with a higher literacy level, the use of audiobooks may result in a decrease in comprehension (Moore & Cahill, 2016, p. 8).

2.3 Approaches on creating positive perceptions about reading

Research shows that there are many factors that affect how students perceive reading and the choices they make when choosing what to read. Ivey and Broaddus (2001) conducted their research on what makes students want to read. Their study concluded that for students, having time for independent reading, listening to texts read aloud and access to personally interesting materials were crucial for engagement in reading (p. 370). Teachers can have an influence with their educational approaches, and one aspect is the inclusion of students when choosing literary material. Many studies have shown that students feel most engaged with reading when they are provided with material that is interesting to them (Ivey & Broaddus, 2001; Lerkkanen, 2018). Creating a sense of autonomy among students and giving them the opportunity to make choices of their own, such as choosing the book they are reading, is essential in maintaining the students' interest in class activities (Lerkkanen, 2018, p. 75). Conventional literary pieces typically do not appeal to young learners, children and teenagers, which is why new, different forms of multimodal texts may work better and help them form positive reading habits (Hall, 2015, pp. 21-22).

In addition to considering students' opinions on materials, it is essential to support the abilities of different students. Reading competence and skills contribute to how students perceive foreign language reading. In their study, Ivey and Broaddus (2001) found that from the students' point of view, reading and listening tasks done in class help them understand the text at hand better, while teachers see reading practices as a long-term tool to progress the students' reading competence and skills (p. 367). Previous research also indicates that comprehension and motivation are important for the development of reading skills (Jafari, 2010; Lerkkanen, 2018). Furthermore, the ability to concentrate in the task of reading, or listening affects how effectively students comprehend texts (Wolfgramm et al., 2016). Lerkkanen (2018) emphasizes that there is no right answer to what develops first; skills or motivation.

Therefore, supporting the different aspects of learning according to the needs of individual students is relevant for making reading a successful and positive activity. Individuality should be emphasized even more when it comes to learners with special needs. According to Arango (2018), by adapting their teaching practices to fit the needs of students with difficulties and special needs, teachers can help them have positive learning experiences and recognize their own abilities (p. 15).

3 THE PRESENT STUDY

In this section, the aims and the research questions of the present study will be presented. In addition, I discuss the data collection process and the methods of analysis used in this study.

3.1 Aim and research questions

The aim of this study is to find out Finnish upper secondary students' experiences and perceptions of English-language books and audiobooks, discuss the benefits of audiobooks in EFL learning and reading, and learn what factors affect students' reading choices and experiences from the perspective of the students. The study answers the following research questions:

1. What kind of perceptions do Finnish upper secondary students have about English-language audiobooks?
2. According to Finnish upper secondary students, what benefits do audiobooks have in terms of learning English?
3. According to Finnish upper secondary students, what factors affect the reading choices they make and the experiences they have with reading in English?

3.2 Data

The data for the present study was acquired through a questionnaire. A questionnaire is one way to gather information from a large group of people, and it is a straightforward method to find out what people think about different subjects. Questionnaires enable the easy examination of opinions and attitudes of the target group. A questionnaire is an appropriate method of study considering the target group; the respondents are expected to be able to read and comprehend the questions and answer them (Denscombe, 2014, p. 166-167).

The questionnaire in this study consisted of 10 questions. The first four questions focused on the respondents' habits of reading and listening to English-language literature. The next two questions were regarding the respondents' perceptions of the benefits of audiobooks as well as their preferences when comparing audiobooks and traditional books. The last four questions focused on the respondents' perceptions about audiobooks in EFL learning and teaching. The questionnaire included both closed multiple choice questions as well as open-ended questions. Closed questions provide respondents a set of answers to choose from, which therefore produces quantitative data, while open-ended questions permit respondents to answer questions in their own words, hence producing qualitative data (Kircher, 2022, p. 129). The focus of the close-ended questions was to find out background information about the subjects, such as their reading habits, while the open-ended questions concentrated on gathering more specific information, for example, why the students like listening to audiobooks.

The data was collected by sharing the questionnaire to students in a Finnish upper secondary school with the cooperation of two English teachers. The questionnaire received 34 responses. Upper secondary school students studying English as a foreign language were the target group. The reason behind the target group is that previous studies of a similar subject and approach have majorly been done with primary school students. For example, the study by Koskinen et al. (1999) focused on the effects of the use of audiotapes with reading among 1st grade students studying English as a first language (L1) and ESL students. Upper secondary school students already have a decent grasp of the English language as they have studied it as a mandatory subject for years which is why I found this age group of subjects to be appropriate. In addition, students of this age group should be able to understand the questions in the questionnaire and give coherent answers.

The questionnaire was conducted anonymously without gathering personal information about the subjects, and answering the questionnaire was voluntary. The participants were informed about the processing of their responses both verbally as well as through a written privacy notice. In the analysis section of this study, the respondents will be referred to generally as "respondents", or "students", and in singular form as "a/one student", or "a/one respondent". The analysis will include some translated quotes from the responses.

3.3 Method of analysis

Since the data gathered in this research includes both open-ended question answers and closed question answers, the data will be analyzed combining content analysis which is a method used in both qualitative and quantitative research, and statistical analysis methods.

Neuendorf (2018) defines content analysis as a method in which message characteristics are systemically, objectively and quantitatively analyzed. Content analysis is a way to quantify qualitative data (Denscombe, 2014, p. 283). It is a method used in analyzing written texts, for example, interview answers, or open-ended questionnaire answers. The themes that arose in the questionnaire answers to the open-ended questions were classified and analyzed in this study. Classification is a form of data sorting that focuses on the number of instances of certain classes, while assorting by themes puts less significance on the amount of times a theme reoccurs and is more focused on interpreting meanings behind the themes (Tuomi & Sarajärvi, 2018, p. 105). The present study uses both.

In statistical analysis, quantitative data is presented in a visual form. There are multiple scales used in statistical analysis; the ordinal scale is often used with 5-point Likert items. According to Nemoto and Beglar (2014), a Likert scale is a psychometric scale that includes multiple categories from which respondents choose to indicate their opinions, attitudes, or feelings about a specific topic. Some of the closed questions were based on the 5-point Likert scale (1=strongly disagree, 2=somewhat disagree, 3=unsure, 4=somewhat agree, 5=strongly agree). The data provided by Likert scale questions can be effectively combined and compared in analysis with the qualitative data produced by open-ended questions (Nemoto & Beglar, 2014, p. 2).

4 RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

In this section, the results of the present study will be discussed to answer the research questions. The discussion will be divided into three subsections that are based on themes that arose from the survey results. Firstly, I will preface the analysis by discussing the students' use of English-language literature as part of their studies and in their free time. Secondly, the perceptions and attitudes that students expressed towards audiobooks will be analyzed. The last subsection will focus on common themes that arose from the open-ended questions of the survey, and how these themes relate to factors that affect students' choices and experiences with reading.

4.1 Consumption of English-language literature at school and in free time

To establish the habits and experiences with English-language literature that students have on a general level, the students were first asked about their use of English-language literature. The questionnaire included questions regarding both their use of literature as part of their studies as well as in their free time. In questions related to studying English, school books were stated as an example. The results showed that 65% of the students read books in English that were related to their studies at least once a week, and 26% of the students did so at least once a month. Only 6% reported reading every day, and only 3% reported reading yearly or less (Figure 1). 56% of the students listen to books related to their studies at least once a month, and 26% of them do so at least once a week.

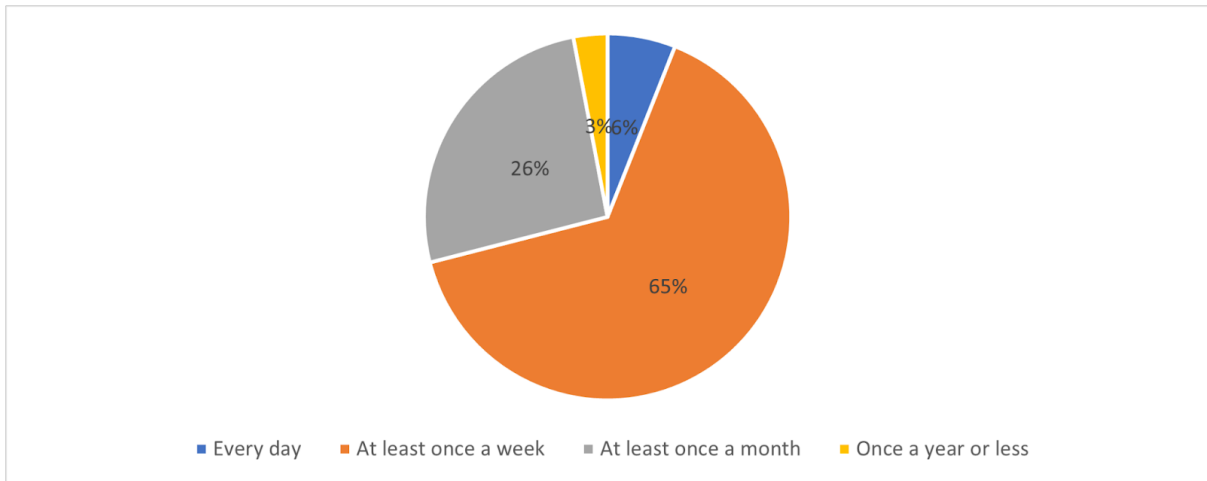


Figure 1: “I read English-language literature that is related to my studies”

The responses to the question on reading English literature in their free time had more dispersion in comparison to the other questions (Figure 3). To question 4 (“I listen to literature in English in my free time, for example, fiction and non-fiction books”), most of the students (62%) responded that they listen to books yearly or less often, implying that reading fiction or non-fiction books in English as a hobby in their free time is not common among the students.

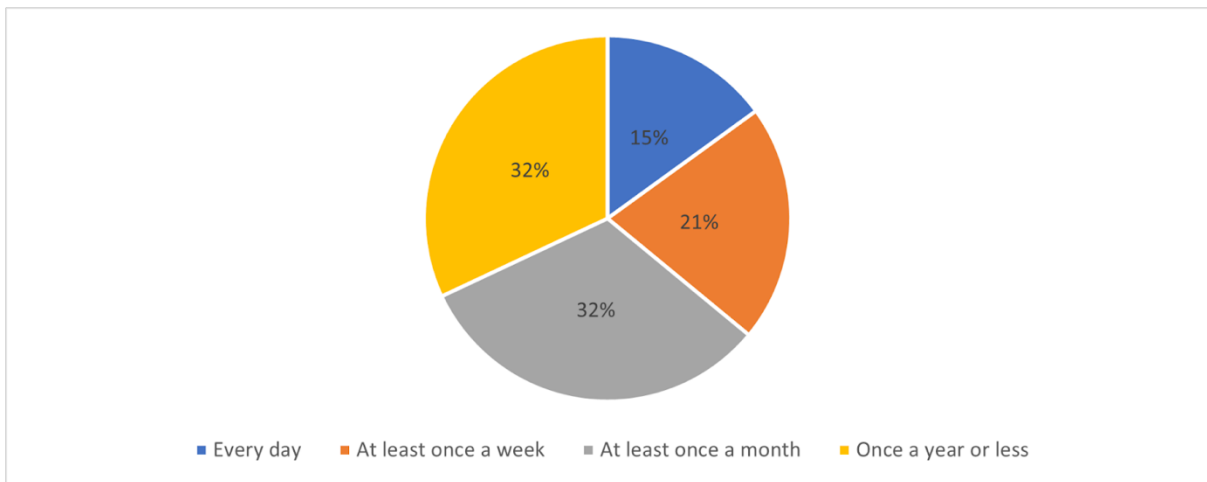


Figure 3: “I read English-language literature in my free time”

The results to questions 1-4 showcase that the study participants do consume some form of literature in English. Overall, reading books is more common than listening to them in audio form, and literature related to studies garners more habitual reading and/or listening.

4.2 Students' perceptions and attitudes about audiobooks

The questionnaire included two open-ended questions. Question 5 inquired the students about why they like to listen to audiobooks, while question 6 required the students to choose their preference between audiobooks and traditional books and explain the reason behind their choice. Q5 received 29 answers, two of which were left empty. Something that was repeated in the students' responses was that audiobooks allow the listener to do other activities while listening to the book. In total, 14 of the respondents mentioned the ability to combine other activities with listening as an appealing point. Audiobook reading is the kind of activity that can be done while engaged with other things (Have & Pedersen, 2016, p. 44). The results to question 6 show that the majority of the students prefer traditional books over audiobooks. As is shown in Figure 6, traditional books were preferred by 59% of the students. 15% of students preferred audiobooks, and 26% of them had no preference. According to Have and Pedersen (2015), one of the affordances that audiobooks offer is the flexibility and mobility they allow their user/reader to have while reading, however audiobooks simultaneously remove some affordances of traditional printed books, such as the reader's ability to control the pace and style of reading (pp. 67-68). The students' open responses to Q6 go in line with Have and Pedersen's study; some respondents who chose 'traditional book' as their preference stated that traditional books allow them to read at their own pace. Additionally, most of the respondents who preferred audiobooks, or chose the option 'both', repeated the point of appeal that arose in Q5; being able to do other things while listening to the book.

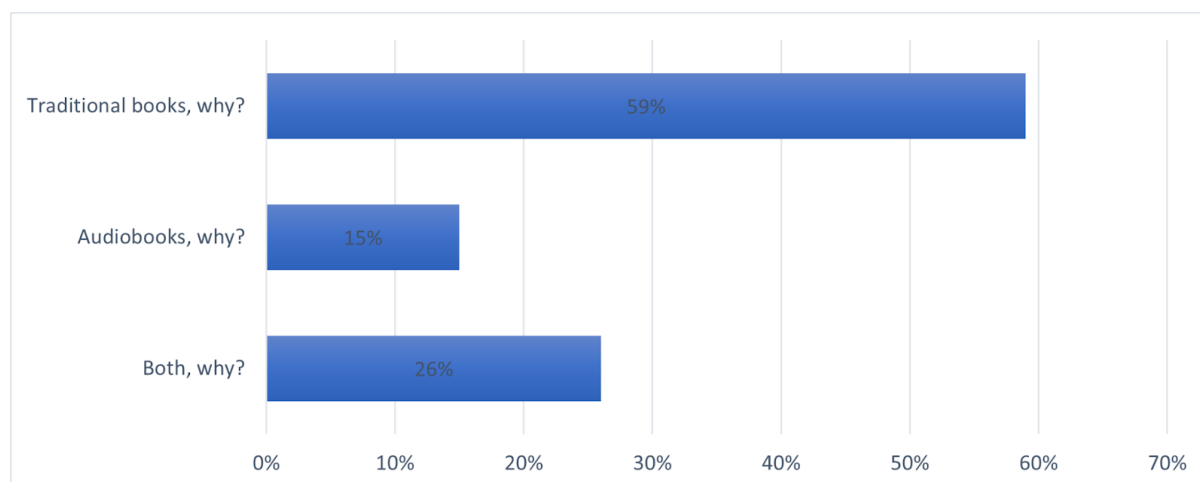


Figure 5: Choose your preference: traditional book, audiobook, or both

Research acknowledges the issue commonly associated with audiobooks; the passivity of the activity, and it is one of the reasons that English educators often turn away from the use of audiobooks (Marchetti & Valente, 2018, pp. 257-258). This detail is also present in the responses to questions 5 and 6. While students reported enjoying listening to books and found benefits to it, some of the respondents expressed that they like listening to books because it does not require the labor of actually reading. For example, one respondent who chose the option “both” in Q6, stated that “an audiobook is nicer if you just want some entertainment”. A few of the responses to Q5 mentioned that they watch movies, or videos in English, or listen to English audio content other than audiobooks. While the answers were off track in terms of what the question was inquiring about, it shows that the students consider audiobook reading as an experience comparable to other audiovisual entertainment. From this, it could be interpreted that to the students, listening to audiobooks is a passive experience which could mean active language acquisition is happening less. Regardless, this interpretation of audiobooks as light entertainment does not rule out the aspect that all exposure to English supports the development of language skills.

An important part of language acquisition is having ways to make it a fun and motivational process. One of the aims of the present study is to find out if students consider audiobooks to be beneficial in supporting learning and reading in English, and motivation is just one aspect that affects the language learning and reading experience. In the questionnaire, I took a more general approach to understand if listening to books creates excitement to learn a language. Therefore, the students were asked to answer if listening to books in English excites them to learn the language in general. 35% of the students had a neutral response to the statement. This could be due to the abstractness of the statement, as excitement can be interpreted in varying ways. Despite many neutral responses, the results indicate that most of the students (56%) consider listening to audiobooks to have a more positive than negative effect on language learning motivation (Figure 7).

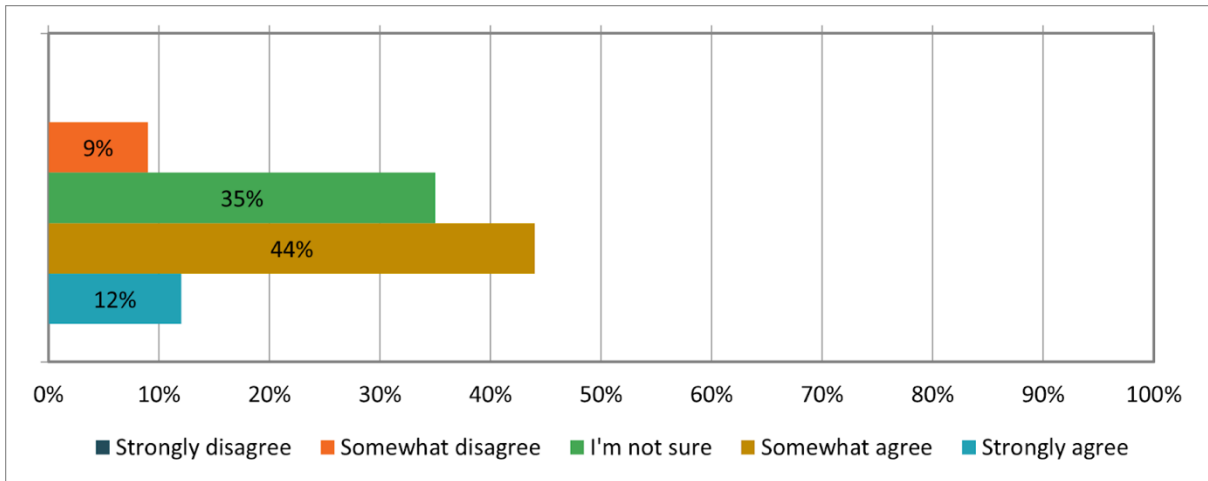


Figure 7: “Listening to books in English excites me to learn the language”

In order to see if the respondents have positive attitudes towards the use of audiobooks in English education, they were asked if they would like audiobooks to be used more in English teaching. The answers were divided quite evenly between the options, but none of the students responded to the statement with “strongly disagree”. However, in comparison to the other similarly structured questions (7-9), there were the most negative responses, as 29% were somewhat opposed to including more audiobooks in English teaching (Figure 10)

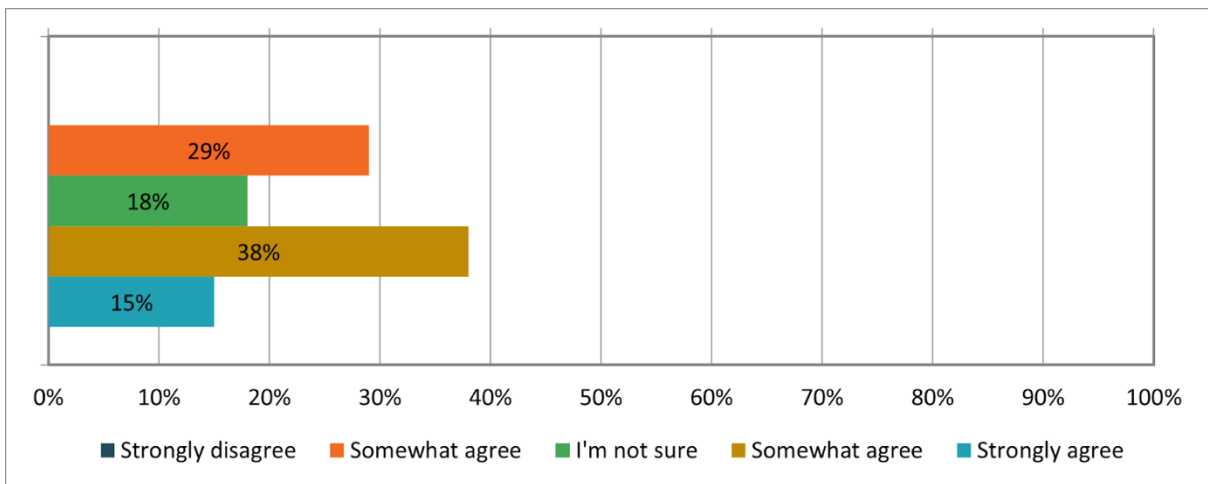


Figure 10: “I would like audiobooks to be used more in English teaching”

The results suggest that audiobooks do not generate an overwhelmingly positive reaction, but that some students see benefits to it and others do not. Teachers should know about their students, such as their topics of interest and their attitudes towards reading, in order to successfully promote motivation (Grabe & Stoller, 2011, p. 211).

4.3 Factors influencing students' reading choices and experiences

In this section, responses to the open-ended questions discussed in the previous subsection will be analyzed in more detail. This section will focus on the students' perceptions of what factors have an effect on their reading choices and reading experiences. Two themes that recurred in the responses to the open-ended questions were comprehension and concentration.

The survey responses show that the students have different experiences with their level of both reading and listening comprehension, and that the ease of understanding the contents of a book affects their reading choices. For example, one respondent explained that they do not listen to audiobooks in English because their listening comprehension is weak, while another stated that they struggle more with reading comprehension and therefore find traditional books more beneficial for their learning. The two examples showcase two different sides to comprehension as a factor in the choices that students make with materials they read; the other student avoids an activity because they find it difficult, meanwhile the other student avoids the activity because they want to challenge themselves in another activity they find more difficult. The respondents' experiences of their comprehension levels seem to be a driving force in what and how they choose to read. This indicates that there is a relation between the students' comprehension and their motivation. In terms of listening comprehension and motivation, research suggests that there is a connection between the two; Jafari's study (2010) on Iranian EFL learners found that listening comprehension and motivation affect each other, stating that higher motivation results in better comprehension and vice versa. Lerkkanen (2018) states that in the progress of reading and listening competence, skills and motivation affect each other reciprocally, and they develop jointly. The example of the two students' responses shows that for some individuals, skills, such as listening comprehension are needed as the foundation to evoke any motivation, while for other individuals, innate motivation is what drives them towards learning.

Questions 7 and 9 were in relation to how listening to books in English relates to the students' experiences in learning and understanding the language. In question 7, the students were asked to assess their experience of the ease of listening to books in English. In total, 76% of the students agreed with the statement. To see more precise results, see figure 7. The statement can be interpreted in different ways, but it can be assumed that the students considered the ease of understanding the audio content when answering.

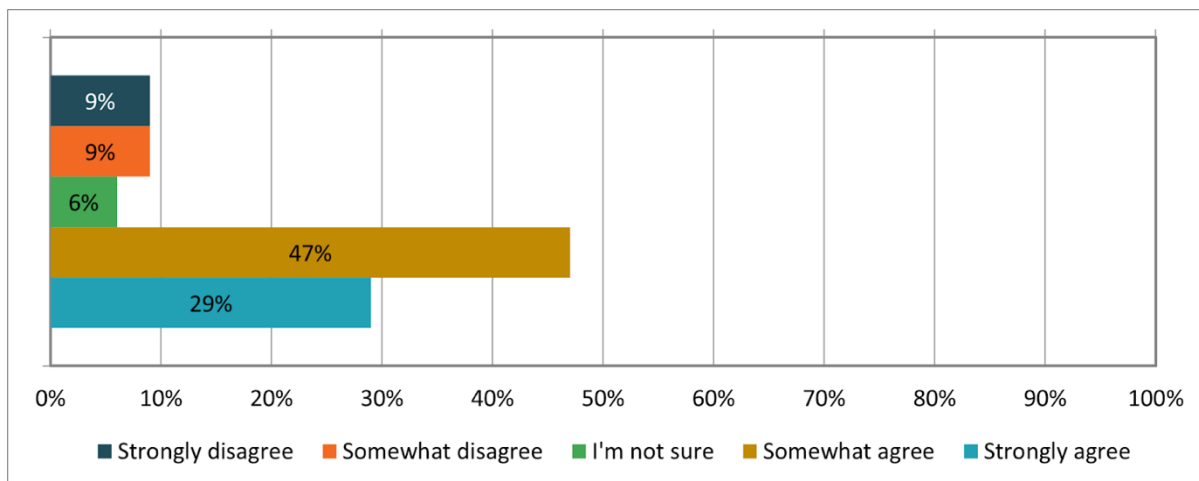


Figure 7: “I find listening to books in English easy”

Responses to previous questions of the questionnaire indicate that audiobooks pose a challenge to some students’ language comprehension abilities, and students report to understand traditional books better. However, as can be seen in Figure 7, most of the students experience that listening to (and understanding) audiobooks in English is easy.

Wolfgramm et al. (2016) studied the role of concentration in listening and reading comprehension. They state that the ability to concentrate has a great impact on students’ listening and reading comprehension and highlight that concentration is especially crucial for successful listening (p. 28). Many respondents’ answers indicated that the ability to concentrate impacted their choice of a book. 12 respondents reported that they prefer reading traditional books because they concentrate better on the text. Additionally, 3 respondents who had no preference between traditional books and audiobooks mentioned that sometimes it is easier to focus on a traditional book, other times an audiobook, and the choice of a book depends on what they feel is easier to concentrate on at the moment. One of them stated that “both have their advantages, sometimes audiobooks are easier to keep up with, other times traditional books (are easier to keep up with)”. Similarly, another respondent said that “sometimes I don’t have enough concentration for a paper book, sometimes it’s not enough for an audiobook”.

5 CONCLUDING DISCUSSION

As reading among children and adolescents has faced a decline, audiobooks are among the forms of media that have gained popularity (Moore & Cahill, 2016). Moreover, audiobooks have shown potential as both material that supports literacy, listening comprehension and reading comprehension in language teaching (Grover & Hannegan, 2011), as well as an alternative mode of reading that improves readers' engagement with the text (Larson, 2015). Young learners' personal experiences and opinions of audiobooks have received less attention in research, and there are few studies on the subject conducted specifically in Finland. Thus, the present study wished to explore students' own experiences with reading and their perceptions of the advantages of audiobooks in English.

Therefore, the main purpose of the present study was to shed light on audiobooks as a form of EFL reading from upper secondary students' point of view. Firstly, the study attempted to find out about the students' general experiences regarding the use of English-language books and audiobooks as a part of studying and during their free time. Secondly, the study aimed to learn what students' perceptions of the benefits of audiobooks are. In addition, the study strived to learn about the factors affecting the reading choices students make, and the experiences they have when reading in English.

The results show that there are differences between the use of books and audiobooks between the respondents; some respondents use English-language books very regularly, while others barely use them. Overall, reading books was more common than listening to audiobooks. The statement applies to both books related to the students' studies as well as reading in their free time. Reading books related to English studies was more frequent than reading books for fun in their free time. Listening to books related to English studies was more common than listening to books in their free time, as well. The results indicate that reading and listening to school-related books is an important part of the students' English studies. For example, 29 of the 34 respondents listen to English-language school-related books regularly (at least monthly), while only 13 listen to audiobooks regularly in their free time.

The results of the present study show that there is variation in how students perceive audiobooks, and what they consider as benefits. The responses to the survey showcase that there are students who find benefits in using audiobooks in the English classroom, with 28 of the 34 respondents agreeing that listening to books in English helps them learn contents taught at school. Previous studies have shown that increased reading motivation is one of the benefits using audiobooks produces (Koskinen et al., 1999; Marchetti & Valente, 2018). The present study suggests that reading and listening to books in English is not very popular among the study participants. The survey questions related to the respondents' use of English-language books had results showing that more participants read books related to their studies, and less read for fun in their free time. Among the 34 respondents, there were a number of respondents whose responses reflected that they read neither traditional books, nor audiobooks. Based on the answers of these respondents, it can be seen that reading motivation among the respondents is quite low, at least in terms of English-language books. Audiobooks seem to raise difficulties in terms of comprehension and concentration, which, according to many respondents, leads to disinterest. Nonetheless, the majority of the respondents reported that listening to audiobooks excites them to learn English which implies that the use of audiobooks raises positive emotions in the students. As MacIntyre et al., (2020) state, experiencing positive feelings can lead to better learning motivation (pp. 190-191). Therefore, in terms of benefits, better motivation can be considered one provided by audiobooks.

There were multiple factors which affected what kind of books the respondents preferred and what kind of experiences they had with reading. The results indicate that the majority of the respondents in this specific study find traditional books more enjoyable, either due to positive aspects of traditional books, or due to the challenges that audiobooks pose in comparison. The present study did not focus on whether the participants experience learning difficulties, however there was one instance of a respondent stating that audiobooks work better for them due to their concentration difficulties. This is in line with previous research which has shown that audiobooks can be a good alternative to traditional books for readers with dyslexia, vision impairments, concentration issues, or other difficulties (Grover & Hannagan, 2011; Marchetti & Valente, 2018). The ability to combine listening with other activities was the main point mentioned by respondents who reported enjoying listening to audiobooks. Difficulty of comprehending the text and lowered level of concentration were major reasons why the respondents reported to not listen to audiobooks. As Have and Pedersen

(2015) have already established, one of the properties lost in audiobooks is the reader's ability to control the reading experience, such as the pace of reading (pp. 67-68). The responses of the survey also show that one of the reasons why traditional books are preferred is that then one can dictate the speed at which they are reading. In conclusion, the factors the students felt that influenced their reading experiences and choices were the ability to comprehend and the ability to concentrate.

The present study produced information about Finnish upper secondary students' perceptions of audiobooks, their benefits in EFL learning, and factors influencing students' reading choices and reading experiences. The study can act as guidance for English teachers; the results show that audiobooks work better for other students, and traditional books work better for others. Therefore, teachers could be encouraged to mix up their materials and provide texts in both visual and audial form. In addition, the results of the study could be useful in figuring out how to encourage students to read in English.

Due to the small sample size, the results of this study cannot be generalized. However, the data collection of the present study can be easily replicated with a larger number of participants which means that acquiring generalizable results can be achieved if the study were to be done on a larger scale. Future research could alternatively concentrate on gathering more specific information from students through, for example, interviews. Through interviews, future research could dive deeper into the kind of literary materials students find motivating, such as book genres, and this could help teachers find materials that help in encouraging students to read in English both at school and in their free time.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1: THE SURVEY

Arvoisa osallistuja,

Olen luonut tämän kyselyn kandidaatintutkielmaani varten, jonka aiheena on lukiolaisten kokemukset ja mielipiteet englanninkielisestä äänikirjallisuudesta opetuksessa ja vapaa-ajalla. Tarkempaa tietoa löytyy tiedotteesta.

Kysely on vapaaehtoinen ja anonyymi, eikä vastauksia voida yhdistää sinuun. Kyselystä saatua dataa tullaan käyttämään vain tässä Jyväskylän yliopistolle tehdyssä kandidaatintutkielmassa, ja vastaukset tulevat olemaan vain minun ja tutkielman ohjaajan nähtävissä. Tutkimuksen valmistuttua tiedot tullaan hävittämään asianmukaisesti. Lisää tietoa antamiesi tietojen käsittelystä löydät tietosuojailmoituksesta

Kyselyssä on yhteensä 10 kysymystä, joista yhdeksän on toteamuksia tai väittämiä, joihin valitset sinua parhaiten kuvaavan vaihtoehdon sekä 1 avoin kysymys.

Mikäli sinulla on kysyttävää tähän kyselyyn tai tutkielmaan liittyen, voit ottaa minuun yhteyttä sähköpostitse (saara.em.lavonen@student.jyu.fi)

Iso kiitos osallistumisesta!

1. Luen opintoihini liittyvää englanninkielistä kirjallisuutta (esim. oppikirjatekstit)
 - a) Joka päivä
 - b) Vähintään kerran viikossa
 - c) Vähintään kerran kuussa
 - d) Kerran vuodessa tai harvemmin

2. Kuuntelen opintoihini liittyvää englanninkielistä kirjallisuutta (esim. oppikirjatekstit)
 - a) Joka päivä
 - b) Vähintään kerran viikossa
 - c) Vähintään kerran kuussa
 - d) Kerran vuodessa tai harvemmin

3. Luen englanninkielistä kirjallisuutta vapaa-ajalla (esim. kaunokirjallisuus, tietokirjallisuus)
 - a) Joka päivä
 - b) Vähintään kerran viikossa
 - c) Vähintään kerran kuussa
 - d) Kerran vuodessa tai harvemmin

4. Kuuntelen englanninkielistä kirjallisuutta vapaa-ajalla (esim. kaunokirjallisuus, tietokirjallisuus)
 - a) Joka päivä
 - b) Vähintään kerran viikossa
 - c) Vähintään kerran kuussa
 - d) Kerran vuodessa tai harvemmin

5. Kerro, miksi tykkäät kuunnella äänikirjallisuutta.

6. Valitse mieluisin vaihtoehto ja kerro miksi valitsit sen
 - a) Perinteinen kirja, miksi?
 - b) Äänikirja, miksi?
 - c) Molemmat, miksi?

7. Kirjojen kuuntelu englanniksi on mielestäni helppoa. Arvioi asteikolla 1-5.
 - 1) Täysin eri mieltä
 - 2) Jokseenkin eri mieltä
 - 3) En osaa sanoa
 - 4) Jokseenkin samaa mieltä
 - 5) Täysin samaa mieltä

8. Kirjojen kuuntelu englanniksi innostaa oppimaan kieltä. Arvioi asteikolla 1-5.
 - 1) Täysin eri mieltä
 - 2) Jokseenkin eri mieltä
 - 3) En osaa sanoa

- 4) Jokseenkin samaa mieltä
- 5) Täysin samaa mieltä

9. Kirjojen kuuntelu englanniksi auttaa ymmärtämään koulussa opittavia sisältöjä. Arvioi asteikolla 1-5.

- 1) Täysin eri mieltä
- 2) Jokseenkin eri mieltä
- 3) En osaa sanoa
- 4) Jokseenkin samaa mieltä
- 5) Täysin samaa mieltä

10. Haluaisin, että englanninopetuksessa hyödynnettäisiin enemmän äänikirjoja. Arvioi asteikolla 1-5.

- 1) Täysin eri mieltä
- 2) Jokseenkin eri mieltä
- 3) En osaa sanoa
- 4) Jokseenkin samaa mieltä
- 5) Täysin samaa mieltä