THE EFFECT OF TEACHER'S ORAL LANGUAGE SKILLS ON HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS' VIEWS OF THE TEACHER'S AUTHORITY AND PROFESSIONALISM

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Abstract

Globalisaation ja englannin kielen" lingua franca"-roolin myötä keskustelu aksenteista ja tavoiteltavasta suullisesta kielitaidosta on lisääntynyt. Suomalainen koulutusjärjestelmä ja valtakunnallinen opetussuunnitelma korostavat kommunikaatiotaitoja ja merkityksen välittämistä osana kieltenopiskelua (ks. esim. NCCHS, 2019: 181; NCCBE, 2014: 220). Lisäksi maailmalla kasvaa ajatus aksentin vapauttamisesta (ks. esim. Tsang, 2019), jolloin Englantia voitaisiin puhua jokainen omalla aksentillaan. Se, onko englannin opettajilla samanlaiset mahdollisuudet valita oma aksenttinsa tai ääntämismallinsa kuin opiskelijoilla, on täten ajankohtainen kysymys.

Aiempi tutkimus on puutteellista, sillä tutkimusta aiheesta on tällä hetkellä vain Aasiasta (ks. esim. Tsang, 2020, 2019). Opiskelijoiden asenteita opettajien suullista kielitaitoa, esimerkiksi aksenttia ja ääntämystä, kohtaan on tutkittu (ks. esim. Ilola, 2018; Vaarala, 2013). Sen sijaan näiden osa-alueiden vaikutusta auktoriteettiin tai ammattitaitoon ei ole juurikaan tutkittu. Siksi tämä tutkimus pyrkii ymmärtämään lukio-opiskelijoiden näkemyksiä aiheesta. Tutkimuksen keskiössä ovat lukio-opintoja tutkimushetkellä suorittavat opiskelijat (n=183) Keski-Suomen alueelta. Tutkimus toteutettiin suomenkielisenä Webropol-kyselynä, ja se sisälsi sekä laadullista että määrällistä dataa tuottavia kysymyksiä. Määrällinen data analysoitiin käyttämällä SPSS-tilasto-ohjelmaa ristiintaulukointiin sekä kuvailevaa tilastoanalyysia. Laadullinen data analysoitiin hyödyntämällä temaattista analyysia.

Tutkimuksen tulokset osoittivat, että lukio-opiskelijat näkivät yhteyden opettajan suullisella kielitaidolla ja opettajan auktoriteetilla ja ammattitaidolla. Vaikka nykyinen kieltenopetus onkin painottanut merkityksen välittämistä ja kommunikaatiotaitoja kieltenopetuksessa, opiskelijat silti tavoittelevat vahvasti natiivinkaltaista suullista kielitaitoa. Toisaalta opiskelijat eivät varsinaisesti vaadi natiivintasoista suullista kielitaitoa opettajalta tai täydellisyyttä. Sen sijaan tärkeintä oli, että opettajan suullinen kielitaito vastasi työnkuvaa eli opettaja pystyi mallintamaan kieltä ja opettamaan mm. ääntämään oikein. Opiskelijan omalla suullisen kielitaidon tasolla oli joissakin tapauksissa vaikusta siihen, millaisia vastauksia kysymyksiin annettiin. Selkeää eroa eri taitotasojen välillä ei kuitenkaan löytynyt. Tutkimuksen tuloksia voidaan hyödyntää muun muassa opettajankoulutuksen kehittämiseen sekä tuomaan esille vähemmän tutkittuja auktoriteettiin ja ammattitaitoon vaikuttavia tekijöitä. Lisätutkimusta aiheesta tulisi tehdä esimerkiksi monikulttuurillisemmalla alueella Suomessa tai eri koulutusasteilla.

Keywords – oral language skills, pronunciation, accent, fluency, professionalism, authority

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1   INTRODUCTION

A continuous debate on English oral language skills is present in today's world, specifically in the sense of what is considered to be an admirable level of oral proficiency. Students in Finland, as well as in other parts of the world, are still considering oral skills and pronunciation as an important quality, which makes them an interesting topic for research. The term, oral language skills, is argued to be hard to define, but it generally entails elements, such as fluency and coherence, lexical resources, pronunciation, grammatical range, and accuracy (Institutional English Language Testing System, 2007). Still, students can perceive it differently, as well as its importance, depending on the context and the speaker.

During my teacher training (2022-2023), I got feedback from students explaining how my oral language skills affected their learning and their perception of me positively. Terminology, such as "professionalism" and "authority", were present in the feedback. Consequently, I began to think whether students generally connect oral language skills to the aforementioned terms. However, when going through previous research, I noticed that the research in Finland has focused mainly on views of oral language skills among students and teachers (see e.g. Ilola, 2018), but not in how they might affect students' perceptions of the teacher's authority or professionalism. On the other hand, in the context of Asia, Tsang (2020, 2019) has conducted research on the topic. Tsang's (2020) research found a link between students' aims regarding oral proficiency and their requirements for their teacher's oral skills. Moreover, English teacher's poor oral skills were connected to feelings or shame for learning incorrect pronunciation and decreased authority (Tsang, 2020). Consequently, heavily accented speech was stated to make paying attention to teaching more difficult, thus affecting students' learning negatively. Since similar studies have not been conducted in the context of Finland, it is fair to say that a research gap was found, and the present study's purpose is to fill it.

The present study will focus on high school students' views of English teacher's oral language skills and how and if the oral skills have further effect on students' perceptions of the teacher's authority and professionalism. Another object of the present study is to better understand students' views and, whether they line with present phenomenon, such as "accent liberation" (Tsang, 2019), that is currently discussed in the context of language learning but not in language teaching. Further, students' oral proficiency level is examined to figure out if oral proficiency can explain the division of students' views regarding the matter. The present study has potential to explain students' needs, when it comes to teaching English language skills, and whether the teacher's abilities have an impact on these views. Further, the study provides data that can be beneficial for developing the teacher education in Finland.

The present study was conducted in the beginning of 2024, and the data was collected through an online questionnaire. All the participants (n=183) were currently high school students in the Central Finland area, and they came from three different high schools. The questionnaire consisted of both open- and closed-ended questions. As the questionnaire yielded both qualitative and quantitative data, the data was analysed using various methods. For the quantitative data, descriptive statistics were run, as well as crosstabulations. The qualitative data was analysed through thematic analysis.

This master's thesis consists of six sections. Sections two and three will focus on previous research on the topic and explain the chosen key terminology. In these sections, the argumentation for the present study is further explored. Section four presents the current study, its aims, data, and methodologies, whereas the results of the present study are presented in section five. Finally, the results are discussed in relation to previous research on section six. Further implications or shortcomings, and conclusions can be found in the same section.

2   ORAL LANGUAGE SKILLS

2.1   Oral language skills

The term *oral language skills* can be defined in various ways (Tergujeff & Kautonen, 2019) and thus, people's understanding of it can be rather different, and the same applies to the research field. Generally speaking, oral language skills are one of the subdivisions of language skills, and they include, for instance, linguistic features regarding speaking and spoken language. For example, the Institutional English Language Testing System (2007), hereafter IELTS, recognises *fluency* and *coherence, lexical resources, pronunciation, grammatical range,* and *accuracy* as part of their speech testing, recognising the diversity behind good oral language skills. Overall, oral language skills are a very important part of language learning and teaching.

According to Tergujeff and Kautonen (2019), whenever people talk about oral language skills, they tend to refer to Canale and Swain's (1980) model of communicative competence. According to this model, communicative competence consists of three different aspects: linguistic, sociolinguistic, and strategic abilities. In addition to linguistic abilities that IELTS uses, Canale and Swain (1980) also recognise the sociolinguistic and strategist abilities' role in communication, meaning that aspects, such as conversation norms and ways of conveying meaning without knowing some words, are as important as being able to speak grammatically correctly. Even though Canale's and Swain's (1980) model cannot be referred to as a "definition" of oral language skills, but rather an approach to describe communication, it explains well the diverse sides of what is needed in order to communicate. In addition, the model is suitable for the present study in language learning and education. Communicative language teaching, which emerged as the predominant pedagogical approach since the 1970s, has significantly influenced aspects like the role of pronunciation in language education (Tergujeff & Kautonen, 2019: 17).

As a third and last definition, or rather a way of looking at language, I will introduce the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR, 2020), as it is used as a base for language assessment in Europe, including Finland. Therefore, its understanding of oral language proficiency is relevant for the present study. First, CEFR acknowledges oral production (e.g. speeches, formal discourse etc.) and interaction (e.g. conversations, information exchange etc.) as part of the assessment of oral language skills or talking in general (CEFR, 2020). What are considered to be indicators of good oral production or interaction, can be seen from the assessment of it; for example, *fluency, articulateness, and clarity* are the aspects that are being judged. However, CEFR (2020) also recognises the relation between oral language skills and

language skill components, such as conversational skills or listening comprehension, which are crucial for spoken communication.

The importance of oral skills in language learning and teaching is non-negotiable. As Tergujeff and Kautonen (2019) explain, spoken language is the primary means of communication people use daily. They then continue to specify that written language is fundamentally a way to describe spoken language in a situation where a face-to-face interaction is not possible. This is in an agreement with CEFR (2020), which refers to spoken interaction as "the origin of language". Furthermore, as English is recognised as *lingua franca,* a global language, its role in education and amongst students has grown.

When it comes to oral language skills, it is important to be able to draw a line between what is understandable spoken communication and what affects the comprehensibility of the language. Previous research has been able to name several linguistic elements of spoken language that affect the comprehensibility of a language (see e.g. Tergujeff, 2022; Ilola, 2018). For instance, prosodic features of a language, fluency, and intonation all have their effect on comprehensibility of a speaker (Tergujeff, 2022). The guidelines of the National Core Curriculum for Basic (2014) and High school education (2019) together with the CEFR (2020) recognise that oral skills consist of different abilities and elements. Therefore, it is important to have proficiency in all of them to some extent, in order to be competent enough in a language and, thus, be understood by others. Simply getting the message across can be seen as the "limit" for required comprehensibility if language skills are looked through the communicative approach. Moreover, the trend towards Euro-English has changed views of what is understood to be successful communication towards getting the message through than getting it though by using the right "code" (Alexander, 1999). However, it is good to recognise that the forementioned "limit" is different for students and teachers, as language skills are part of language teacher's professionalism, which I will discuss more in sections 3.2 and 3.3.

In the following subsections, I will present three linguistic features of spoken language that are relevant to the present study, that is *fluency, pronunciation,* and *accent.* These linguistic features were chosen because they can be relatively easy for high school students to recognise and understand. In addition, pronunciation, and accents, for example, are frequently discussed in the context of language teaching and learning, thus making them worth studying. Finally, I will discuss more in detail their importance in the context of the present study, and how they are viewed in the current education system.

2.1.1 Fluency

Fluency is one of the key features of spoken language and communication, and a great deal of research has been conducted on fluency in language teaching and learning. Especially after the forementioned predominance of the communicative approach, fluency has taken the role as the more important criterion for oral language skills over accuracy (Lintunen et al., 2022). Furthermore, fluency was chosen as one of the three features of spoken language in the present study, as it was considered as one of features of "good" oral skills amongst the students in Ilola's (2018) study.

Similarly, to oral language skills, the definition of fluency varies a lot based on what is being studied (Lintunen et al., 2022; Lintunen, Mutta & Peltonen, 2020). For instance, the definition of fluency is very different when fluency is studied qualitatively or quantitatively. Lintunen, Mutta, and Peltonen (2020) clarify that fluency can be understood as broadly as just general language proficiency, but also very strictly put it can be restricted to specific momentary features of spoken language, such as articulation rate or pauses in speech (see e.g. Kallio e. al., 2017; Tavakoli & Hunter, 2017). The Institutional English Language Testing System's (2007: 12) definition is a good example of a definition that is at the same time broad and specific. It regards fluency together with coherence, as the ability to communicate with a consistent flow, proper pace, and appropriate effort, while connecting ideas and language to create coherent and connected speech. As it is important to understand the aspects that affect individual's fluency, I will next introduce Skehan's (2009) framework utterance fluency in more depth and expand our understanding of which different aspects affect our fluency.

According to Skehan (2009: 512-513), utterance fluency consists of three elements: breakdown, repair, and speech fluency. All these forementioned elements are widely examined in the research field. In fact, breakdown and speech fluency appear to be good indicators separating beginners and advanced learners of second language (Lintunen et al., 2022). However, Lintunen et al. (2022) continue to explain that results regarding repair fluency are not as clear as with the other two elements. Number of repairs such as repetitions or reformulations, are not in linear relationship with fluency or disfluency according to research, but rather a matter of individual differences. In addition to utterance fluency, fluency is affected by one's cognitive processing capacities (see. e.g. Segalowitz, 2010) and the speech situation one is in (Lintunen et al., 2022). Principally, the fluency of a speaker is affected by one's overall level of language abilities, since elements, such as size of vocabulary, support the conveyance of meaning. To summarise, the reasons for fluency or the lack thereof are therefore ambiguous.

Since the present study focuses on high school students and their views, it is important to investigate how students perceive fluency. It was briefly mentioned earlier that fluency is considered to be one of the indicators for good oral skills and,

consequently, the lack of fluency indicates poor oral skills (Ilola, 2018: 116). In Ilola's doctoral dissertation, the aim was to find out about 9th graders (n=9) views on oral proficiency. The data was collected through semi-structured interviews as well as self- and peer feedback. According to the results of Ilola's study, students' definitions of fluency agree with the research field, meaning that the answers also vary a lot. When asked about disfluency, the participants described the speech as hesitant, having breakdowns and pauses, unclear and not knowing how to pronounce something (Ilola, 2018: 116). However, the views on breakdowns and pauses were not convergent between all the participants, since they can be part of one's natural way of speaking. Regarding fluency, the students in Ilola's (2018: 119-120) study described fluency as "clear", "natural", "spontaneous", "flowing", and "effortless".

For the purpose of the present study, I will define fluency based on Skehan's framework and how the participants viewed fluency in Ilola's study. This decision can be rationalized by the present study's target group, which is high school students. Participants in Ilola's study were ninth graders, thus the present study's target group is not that different. Therefore, the present study recognises fluency as "effortless, flowing, and clear."

2.1.1 Pronunciation and accents

Pronunciation of English, more specifically whether it should be native-like, has been the centre of discussion for a long time now, as English's role as *lingua franca* and *English as an international language* has grown and as native speakers are nowadays a minority (Lintunen, 2014: 135). Moreover, the discussion includes some debate on whether variations and Euro-English pose a threat to the integrity of English (Alexander, 1999). Inspired by this topic and the knowledge that oral language skills, pronunciation amongst others, is still considered important and valued by students (see e.g. Ilola, 2018; Kaski-Akhawan, 2013), I wanted to take pronunciation as part of the present study. Furthermore, the decision to include accent is justifiable because it is part of the pronunciation discussion.

Defining pronunciation is once again a challenging task. Pronunciation can be defined very broadly as phonology, utterance and word stress, intonation et cetera, and narrowly to solely producing phonemes (Tergujeff & Kautonen, 2019: 19). Moreover, the "good" pronunciation of English generally refers to a native style pronunciation or a standard of pronunciation, such as British English or more precisely Received Pronunciation accent (RP), even though the American accent has become maybe even more popular nowadays. As Received Pronunciation is referred to as an accent, accents cannot be closed out from the present study. Moreover, accents are strongly related to pronunciation, as they can be noticed easily from one's speech. According to Halonen (2019: 75), accents can be defined as a word or utterance stress or

as a specific way of speaking by a certain group of people. However, Halonen (2019) further points out that nowadays accents can be seen as distinct features of pronunciation that tend to change based on how strong or what type the accent is. In conclusion, the relationship between pronunciation and accent is deniable. I will now move on to discuss pronunciation and accents from the point of view of learning and teaching.

According to Lintunen (2014), the criterion for good pronunciation is comprehensible speech that is accurate and fluent in different circumstances. Even though phonetically flawless pronunciation is quite impossible to achieve, Lintunen (2014) argues on behalf of a "neutral" pronunciation. They state that pronunciation provokes subjective thoughts on the listener, which can further affect their views of the speaker. Therefore, the choice of pronunciation model of both teachers and students is important, and usually the choice comes to either British or American English since they are considered as standards but also easy to comprehend (Lintunen, 2014). Similarly, to Lintunen's thoughts on the importance of comprehensibility of pronunciation, Tergujeff (2012: 139) mentions that foreign accents should not be regulated much in teaching, unless they affect the comprehensibility. Regarding pronunciation learning, it is crucial that the learner both hears and uses the language (Lintunen, 2014), thus, practicing pronunciation in class is important and teachers have a great role in incorporating it. Moreover, learning is best achieved when language teaching takes into consideration both pronunciation accuracy and fluency (Lintunen, 2014). Overall, even though pronunciation is without a doubt an important aspect of oral language and valued by many people, the comprehensibility appears to be the main goal for teaching and learning. However, the reason behind providing standard pronunciation models for students at school, might be due to the forementioned prejudice towards accents, not maybe on the behalf of educators but rather of anyone listening.

The present study focused on conducting research on views and attitudes of students about teachers' oral language skills, more specifically pronunciation, accent, and fluency and their effect on teachers' professionalism and authority. Therefore, it is beneficial to look more closely into what students and teachers think about pronunciation and accents in general.

2.1.1.1 Teachers' and teacher students' attitudes towards English pronunciation and accents

More studies have been conducted on students' views on pronunciation than on the teachers' or teacher students' views. In addition, many of them have addressed strictly linguistic features of pronunciation, not their teaching. Even though the present study also focuses on students' perceptions, it is important to understand how teachers view similar issues according to previous research. In Tergujeff's (2012) study, 103 English

teachers from Finland responded to questions regarding their views of the state of pronunciation teaching. They acknowledged that pronunciation is an important feature of oral skills (see also Kaski-Akhawan, 2013), but once again not enough time was put on teaching it. The study also revealed that teachers would like to spend more time on teaching pronunciation, which is an indicator of the significance of pronunciation skills. Furthermore, the teachers appeared to believe that close to or native like pronunciation is what Finnish students are working towards (Tergujeff, 2012).

In the forementioned large scale survey (Tergujeff, 2012), the answers from the participants indicated that younger teachers consider their teacher training regarding pronunciation teaching more lacking than older teachers (Tergujeff, 2012: 33). Furthermore, the answers proved that the amount of training in one's own pronunciation was great, but little focus was put on how to teach it. In Tergujeff's (2012) survey, pronunciation was rated as a relatively important feature in comparison to other language features. However, Tergujeff's (2012) study concluded that teachers in the survey would like to spend even more time on teaching pronunciation. This could indicate that even though pronunciation is considered to be important, it is still not taught enough.

As native-like pronunciation is something students are striving to achieve, it is no surprise that teachers in Tergujeff's (2012) study share a similar perspective. According to these teachers, students' aspiration to have a near-native like pronunciation was 3.17 on an average (Likert-scale from 1 to 5). Moreover, the majority of the teachers reported using the traditional pronunciation models, such as Received Pronunciation or General American, as their classroom language. However, "a type of International English" was the third used pronunciation model, which according to Tergujeff (2012) was an interesting finding. Whether that model has become even more popular in the last decade, would be a fascinating topic for research. Even though it was not directly stated by the participants in the study, the responses regarding pronunciation models could indicate that the teachers shared a positive attitude towards traditional pronunciation models and accents, thus the attitude towards them is more approbative.

Whereas Tergujeff's (2012) study provided careful insight on the current condition of English teaching in Finland, from the teachers' point of view, Vaarala's (2013) master's thesis generated more detailed information about teachers' (n=4) and students' (n=4) perceptions of oral competence in English teaching. Unlike the participating teachers in Tergujeff's (2012) study, the teachers in Vaarala's (2013) study did not believe that other teachers should possess a native variety of English. Moreover, communicative competence was found to be the most significant aspect of oral proficiency among the teachers. Even though the participating teachers agreed that the level of oral proficiency of an English teachers should be B2.1 or higher, they did not recognise

their role as model providers for oral language skills to no longer be the most important one, rather one of the many (Vaarala, 2013). How students see these issues will be dealt with in the following section.

2.1.1.2   Students' attitudes towards English pronunciation and accents

As explained earlier, students still tend to appreciate good oral skills and pronunciation and thrive towards near native like pronunciation (see e.g. Ilola, 2018; Kaski-Akhawan, 2013). However, this appreciation does not simply include one's oral skills but also teachers', especially accents (see e.g. Tsang, 2020; Tsang, 2019). In a study conducted in Hong Kong, Tsang (2019: 3) studied participants' (n=97) perceptions of accent in relation to six variables: "attention, favourability, model for learning, nativeness, suitability as ELT (in terms of accents and comprehensibility)". The participants were English bilinguals with English as either their L1 or L2, and they studied at the tertiary-level. Tsang's (2019) study consisted of two distinct parts: First, an experiment, where the participants listened to 10 different accent samples and answered a questionnaire about their views, was conducted. It was followed by a semi-structured interview with twenty randomly chosen participants out of the 97, during which they were asked about their opinions regarding their teachers with L1- and L2-accented speech. Tsang's (2019) study prevailed that even though the role of English has changed towards 'accent liberation' in ESL/EFL learning, the results indicated a contrary trend. Students reported L1 accents, such as GA, RP, Canadian and South African accent as popular models for learning, favourable, the most suitable models for ELT and as something they tend to pay attention to (Tsang, 2019). On the contrary, students found heavily accented L2 speech and sometimes even L1, here Scottish, to impact their perceptions of teachers' qualifications and professionalism negatively. Students even explained having experienced feelings of shame for learning wrong pronunciation from their English teachers and expressed concern of who is learning from who, in situations where the students spoke better English than the teacher (Tsang, 2019: 12). Moreover, the comprehensibility was affected by the heavy accents, causing lowered motivation for students to follow the teaching. Even though Tsang's (2019) study discovered that comprehensibility correlated strongly with ELT suitability (r= -.57), perceived nativeness was found to exhibit a more pronounced correlation (r= .78).

Tsang (2020: 2) speculates in the beginning of their article, whether teachers "can enjoy the same liberty as learners for speaking in whatever accent they like", which is a relevant question for the present study as well. As Tsang's (2019) study revealed, L1 accents are generally considered to be the most suitable models for both learning and teaching English. In Tsang's (2020) study, the perspective was to look more carefully

to the variables affecting students' perceptions and if students "are ready" for varieties of English in class. The data for the study was collected through a two-parted questionnaire. The first part included questions about one's age, genre, and self-rated proficiency (pronunciation and listening) and exposure to accents and the second part consisted of seven sets of 5-point Likert-scale type questions. The participants (n=1300) were all EFL secondary level students in Hong Kong, and their L1 was Chinese. What Tsang (2020) discovered was that even though the participants felt quite neutral about their EFL teachers' accents, they still favoured GA and RP in learning and teaching, similarly to Tsang's (2019) previous research. However, in this study, the participants did not see other accents to be unacceptable for ELTs. The participants' level of proficiency in listening and pronunciation was connected to their ambitions to work towards RP or GA accents. Furthermore, those participants who favoured these accents in teaching, wanted to achieve a similar accent themselves (Tsang, 2020). Tsang explains this causation with the thought that teachers are expected to function as the main models for their students. Even though both Tsang's studies (2020, 2019) were conducted in the context of Asia, which differs a lot from the Finnish context, they enable comparison between them and the present study. Furthermore, Tsang's (2019) study proved a need for more research on student perceptions on teachers' accents, as they have an effect on their learning.

In the context of Finland, not many studies have been conducted regarding students' perceptions about teachers' pronunciation and accents. Consequently, the discussion in this section will mainly focus on Finnish students' overall attitudes towards pronunciation and accents, and the present study is attempting to fill the research gap. However, Vaarala (2013) studied both high school teachers' and students' perceptions of oral competence teaching through thematic interviews. The results indicated that communicative competence was considered the most important general aspect of oral competence among both teachers and students. Most of the students also concluded that teachers' oral proficiency needed to be higher than B2.1, which is what is required from the students (Vaarala, 2013: 75). Further, pronunciation was argued to be the most essential part of teacher's oral proficiency, since improper pronunciation was not considered a model to take seriously. These results, together with teachers' views that were introduced earlier, are providing a good comparison for the results of the present study.

Students recognised the diversity of pronunciation, as in Ilola's study (2018), students focused on several aspects of pronunciation, such as comprehensibility, clarity, different challenges in pronunciation and what is considered as pleasant of desirable pronunciation. The opinions of the participating students varied a lot depending on the topic (Ilola, 2018). Some participants argued that pronunciation should be clear in order to be understandable, but at the same time they did not require perfect

pronunciation (Ilola, 2018: 106-107). Comprehensibility was also discussed in the context of mastering words with similar pronunciation, that is minimal pairs (Ilola, 2018: 109). As discussed before in the context of fluency, native like pronunciation was also seen as an indication of "good" oral proficiency (Ilola, 2018: 109). However, a couple of the participants argued on behalf of comprehensibility and conveying a message, rather than being judged by their background's effect on the accent. These perceptions are agreeing with the idea of *international English,* English being a *lingua franca* (Ilola, 2018), and *accent liberation* Tsang (2019), as well as the national curricula. As these ideas encourage students to focus on getting the message across, rather than focusing on native-like pronunciation, and phenomena, such as rally-English, are present in social media, it is no surprise if students are more open to non-standard pronunciations. Therefore, it is exciting to investigate, whether students think it applies to English teachers as well, especially as "the new generation" of language teachers have gone through a very similar education system as the participants, regarding the curriculum et cetera.

2.2 Oral skills of the English language in the Finnish education system

In this section, I will shortly introduce a few key elements of oral language learning and teaching in the Finnish education system, more specifically, in the English language. In addition, I will discuss the current state of English language education and testing from the view of both students and teachers.

In Finland, English is regarded as a foreign language (EFL), whereas Swedish as the second domestic language. The reason behind English being a popular subject for all, may lie in the EU Language Policy. It suggests learning three languages in total: one's native language and two foreign or second languages (Leppänen et al., 2011: 20). Even though English is not a mandatory language, rarely other foreign language options are available since the municipalities usually decide the language options. Another reason for choosing English is the need for an internationally meaningful language, as Finnish and Swedish languages are not broadly used (Leppänen et al., 2011). Learning English in the Finnish basic education system starts, since 2020, from the first grade at the age of 7 and continues until the end of ninth grade. In high school, six mandatory modules of English exist, after which learning is voluntary and usually continued by individuals, who would like to take the English test in the matriculation exam.

The importance of oral proficiency in both daily and school/work life, has projected to the National Core Curriculums (Tergujeff & Kautonen, 2019). The most

crucial guidelines for teaching, learning and assessment in general in the Finnish education system are provided by the Finnish National Agency for Education (FNAE) and the guidelines apply to basic and high school education and in all subjects taught in schools. The FNAE has separate National Core Curriculums for Basic Education (NCCBE) and for high school (NCCHS) and these curriculums are the "only" mandatory guidelines that teachers must take into consideration. However, municipalities usually have their implementations of the curriculums, and sometimes they are even school-specific. When it comes to language education, English and Swedish have their separate instructions, whereas foreign languages have shared instructions. They consist of different learning objectives, instructions of how to support, guide, and differentiate learning, and how to assess. These guidelines are known to be quite vague, but a careful look into them can give quite a clear idea what is expected from the students and teachers in a broader sense. Therefore, I will next introduce the National Core Curriculums of basic and high school education, and what they mention about oral language skills in the English subject.

The national core curriculum of basic education (2014) approaches teaching and learning by dividing the process into teaching objectives (T1-T11), related content areas (S1-S3) and to transversal competence (L1-L9). According to the teaching objectives T7-T9 (NCCBE, 2014: 220), the main objective of the teaching is to support, guide, and encourage students to practice their interaction skills and learn cultural appropriateness in communicating. Oral language skills are mentioned in more detail in the section T11, where the teaching objectives include offering students possibilities to produce spoken language, whilst also focusing on the basic principles of pronunciation. In addition to the teaching objectives, the content areas related to the objectives, include some instructions for learning oral language skills (NCCBE, 2014: 220):

> "Havainnoidaan ja harjoitellaan runsaasti ääntämistä sekä sana- ja lausepainoa, puherytmiä ja intonaatiota. Harjoitellaan tunnistamaan englannin kielen foneettisen tarkekirjoituksen merkkejä."

> Observing and practicing abundantly pronunciation and word and sentence stress, speech rhythm and intonation. Practicing recognising the phonetic transcription symbols in the English language.

On sixth grade, the guidelines are more specific and consist of definitions of teaching objectives, content areas, assessment targets and descriptions of requirements for a good/8 grade (In Finland grades in basic and high school education are from 4 to 10, 4 being fail and 10 being the best).

When it comes to high school education, the teaching and learning process is guided by the NCCHS (2019). In high school the fundamentals are vaguer than in basic education and focus on describing the contents and learning objects of each

module. Topics related to oral language skills in the mandatory modules section are development of interaction strategies, exchanging everyday knowledge, and strengthening interaction competence through conversations (NCCHS, 2019: 181). One national voluntary module that solely focuses on spoken communication and interaction exists. In this module, the learning objectives focus on providing the students with practices and tools to develop their oral language skills diversly. To complete the module, students must take part in an oral language test governed by the FNAE or complete multiple other tests. Furthermore, for those students doing their matriculation exam in English or any language in the future, there will be a test regarding spoken communication. It is not yet a reality, but it has been planned for a quite a long time. In addition to the NCCHS, students' oral language skills are assessed based on the adaptation made of CEFR called *"Scale for describing the levels of developing language skills"*. This scale, together with the fundamentals from NCCHS, guide the teaching, learning, and assessment of English and languages.

As the present study focuses on the teacher's oral language skills and how they are seen to affect their authority and professionalism in the eyes of students, it is beneficial to look briefly into the teacher education as well. Studying to become an English teacher in the Finnish higher education is possible in six universities: In Helsinki, Turku, Tampere, Jyväskylä, Oulu, and Joensuu. Generally, the teacher education is arranged in the English language by the Faculty of Education, and the education includes 60 credits of pedagogical studies directed to subject teachers. Students apply to the subject teacher program and the pedagogical studies separately based on their interests, except in one university (JYU), where the degree of language teacher is already applied to before getting in university. All six universities have a separate suitability test for the applicants, which evaluates their suitability, motivation, and educability for the teacher profession. Certain number of credits of the subject, here English, need to be completed before starting the pedagogical studies. However, only one out of the six universities require a specific level of oral proficiency of its applicants, which is based on an obligatory oral language skill course grade. In other words, English language teachers are not assessed on their oral language proficiency or required specific level of skills, except in the university of Turku. This means that even people with strong accents or poor oral skills can get into the language teacher program and became language teachers. Of course, language is much more than just oral proficiency, but as it has been mentioned before, spoken language is what language is about. Therefore, it is important to remember that language teachers are still professionals and provide the model for the pronunciation of the language.

3 TEACHER AUTHORITY, PROFESSIONALISM AND SPEAKER CREDIBILITY

3.1 Authority

Defining authority is a difficult task and consequently, also teachers struggle with defining it and applying it on a daily basis. Moreover, authority in school environments vary significantly from, for example, a work environment and employer-employee relationship, making the individual differences between understanding authority even greater. For the purpose of the present study, it is beneficial to look into two different models of authority and consider what factors of authority are present in class. According to Bochenski (1974, in Tirri & Puolimatka, 2000: 159), the basic structure of authority includes three components: the holder of authority, its subject, and the pertinent field. They then continue to explain that the relation of authority is not asymmetrical, meaning that people can be authorities to each other if they are authorities in different fields. Another way of looking at authority, is by dividing it to deontic and epistemic authority (Tirri & Puolimatka, 2000). According to Tirri and Puolimatka (2000), deontic authority comprehends authority order giving, whereas epistemic authority is based on one's knowledge of the field. They then continue to argue that both types of authority are needed in the teacher profession.

The nature of authority, and its significance at school, especially in classroom, tends to be difficult for the Finnish teachers to understand (Tirri & Puolimatka, 2000: 158). One of the reasons for this might be the lack of concrete practice on the matter, as Tirri and Puolimatka (2000) explain the teacher education in Finland is dominated by research-based academic studies. Furthermore, in the Finnish education context, the ideal of future teacher is built around mature personality and strong content-based understanding of the subjects one teaches. In addition to the problems of the teacher education, the increase of the idea of autonomy and replacing authority with freedom, the ideal of progressive education (Tirri & Puolimatka, 2000), can cause issues with understanding authority in classroom context. As stated by Tirri and Puolimatka (2000), the concern of lack of authority comes from the lack of deontic authority, rather than epistemic, which could be a result of the more research-based academic study approach of teacher education.

When it comes to the present study, I recognise that authority and professionalism are impacted by each other and, therefore, should not be examined without one another. Räsänen (2021) interviewed primary school classroom and English teachers and substitute teachers with no formal training (n=6) on their views of teacher authority in class. Based on the interviews, three categories for authority were constructed,

even though the teachers seemed to have varying perceptions of authority. According to these categories, authority could be affected by the teacher's personality, the teacher-learner relationship, and the responsibilities coming from the profession and expertise, that is the epistemic authority. In Räsänen's (2021) study, professionalism and expertise were bundled together by the participants, which sounds logical, as professionalism in the teaching context, and in general, includes the knowledge of the field to its definitions (see e.g. Jansem, 2020; Leung, 2009).

3.2 Professionalism

As mentioned before, professionalism and authority are strongly related to educational institutions and to the teacher profession. Therefore, it is important to look more closely at professionalism and what it entails. Further, I will discuss few previous research relevant to the present study.

In a more traditional sense, a "professional" is an expert with the required training and qualifications to competently conduct in their practice (Leung, 2009: 49). Moreover, "professionalism" is usually referred to when talking about the combination of the practitioner's skills, knowledge, and conduct. However, in a more detailed understanding of language teaching profession, professionalism consists of two different factors, which are sponsored professionalism and independent professionalism (Leung, 2009). Sponsored professionalism is the definition of the teacher's professionalism that is more publicly "accepted" and therefore endorsed by institutions. Independent professionalism, on the other hand, is more individual and includes viewing professionalism from a socially and politically sensitive perspectives. Because of the sponsored professionalism, guided by various of institutions all around the world, the definition of language teacher professionalism can be framed differently in the field of English language teaching (ELT) (Leung, 2009). Additionally, changes in the way we use the English language, due to, for example digitalisation and globalisation, affect the language teacher profession and the qualities that are incorporated in it (Leung, 2009; Pasternak & Bailey, 2004). Although sponsored professionalism controls the teacher profession and is considered as obligation for someone wishing to work in the field, Leung (2009: 55) argues that independent professionalism is what is required to keep the vitality of the teacher profession. They continue to explain that it is important to "reflect critically" whilst looking at the bigger picture, such as related educational and social issues, and eventually modifying one's values and practices accordingly. Next, I will present previous research on language teachers and professionalism in the context of teaching English as a second language (ESL) and English as a

foreign language (EFL), whilst also considering the profession from the point of view of non-native teachers of English.

In their study, Jansem (2020) found that all participants, here Thai teachers (n=20) of primary or secondary school English, perceived the meanings of English teacher professionalism quite similarly. Having integrated value, aptitude, and dedication to carrying out many instructional responsibilities, were considered to be the fundamentals of English teacher professionalism. Furthermore, things that attributed to this professionalism, were "knowledge of English language, lesson planning skills, lesson delivery techniques, and commitment to student learning" from which knowledge of the English language was the initial factor of professionalism (Jansem, 2020: 4). This was further argued by one of the participants by saying that the English knowledge of the teacher needs to be enough for teaching pupils how to utilize it as well as modelling its use. Consequently, oral communication skills rose to be the most emphasised area of the English language, which does not come as a surprise. As explained earlier, the change in the use of the English language, has changed the needs of the students towards more communicative driven teaching.

In a world with increasing number of learners of ESL or EFL, it is necessary to discuss non-native teachers and their experiences on professionalism. Moreover, the present study will be conducted in a setting, where the teachers are most likely non-native speakers of English, so the views of the students will be consequently on non-native teachers and their oral skills. Pasternak and Bailey (2004) explain than non-native English-speaking teachers usually feel inferior and unqualified compared to native English-speaking teachers, specifically regarding fluency and communication. Even though Pasternak and Baily (2004) agree that unrealistic expectations regarding teachers' speaking skills can cause feelings of overwhelming, it is not unjust to expect exceptional speaking skills from language teachers, as language skills are one of the key areas of language teacher professionalism. This is interestingly in contrast to something they said earlier in their article, which was that "a teacher's language proficiency is only one element of professionalism" (Pasternak & Bailey, 2004: 161). In the context of Finland, however, nativeness is not "enough" for someone to be an English teacher, but rather the qualifications are permitted through bachelor's and master's degrees in the English language, as well as 60 credits worth of pedagogical studies. Therefore, Finnish English teachers should have a deep understanding of both the language they are going to teach and the pedagogical and educational aspects, which results in high quality teaching.

In addition to the previous discussion, Pasternak and Bailey (2004: 157-158) introduce two types of knowledge that an effective teacher needs, which I believe also indicate professionalism well. Declarative knowledge entails one's knowledge about something, such as the target language and culture, whereas procedural knowledge

is about "how to" do something, such as to use the language. Pasternak and Bailey (2004: 158) introduced three key areas of declarative and procedural knowledge, which are important for ESL and EFL teacher and teacher trainees: (1) understanding the target language and how to use it, (2) understanding how to educate in a way that is culturally suitable, and (3) understanding how to behave correctly in the target culture (Pasternak & Bailey, 2004: 158). These appeared to be in an agreement with Jansem's (2020) study, as different aspects of knowledge of the target language and the how to use them in practice, were considered as important features of a "good" or an "effective" teacher. Therefore, it could be suggested that these abilities are strongly connected to the teacher profession, and further to professionalism. Additionally, both studies (Jansem, 2020; Pasternak & Bailey, 2004) mentioned oral language skills to be one important element, which justifies my decision to study specifically oral language skills in relation to views of professionalism.

3.3   Speaker credibility and non-nativeness

Speaker credibility is a particularly important aspect in communication and persuasion; thus, it is usually examined in the context of politics and business. The relevancy of speaker credibility for the present study strives from the idea of the teacher is a professional that communicates with the students. If the students perceive that communication as credible, this could affect the outcome of the teaching or the teacher-student relationship.

Even though several theories, such as structural and functionalist (see e.g., Mbennah & Shutte, 2000) exist about speaker credibility, the holistic theory well explains the multidimensions of it. According to Mbennah and Shutte and the holistic theory (2000: 56), speaker credibility, based on the audience's active role and context, is in fact the audience's assessment of the speaker's possessed or projected qualities, whether it is approval or disapproval. Moreover, the holistic theory recognises four dimensions: the relational dimension, the content-related competence, performance qualities, and moral dimension (Mbennah & Schutte, 2000: 56). Relational dimension covers the speaker's inclination towards the listener, content-related competence includes specialized understanding or appropriate authorization needed to present a certain piece of material. Moreover, it is usually associated with speaker qualifications, performance qualities consist of liveliness in both the speaker's physical attributes and spoken delivery, and moral dimensions recognise the reliability and prestige of the speaker. In the context of education and teaching, all these forementioned dimensions of speaker credibility can be seen as essential for a teacher.

As the majority of Finnish English-teachers are non-native speakers (NNS), it is valuable to look briefly into NNS and their speaker credibility. For instance, Lev-Ari and Keysar (2010) found in their study that accent affects speaker's credibility. They explain that one can find two explanations for why accents affect the non-native speaker's credibility. Accents act as signals of non-nativeness and can promote prejudice amongst the listeners, causing lowered speaker credibility. Moreover, accents can make the speech processing more difficult, thus affecting the speaker credibility negatively. In the two-part study, Lev-Ari and Keysar (2010) studied native participants' perceptions of accented speech, namely non-native, and its credibility. In the first experiment, the participants (n=28) were asked to rate trivia statements based on truthfulness. The statements were read aloud either by native or non-native speakers. The results showed that accented speech was considered as less truthful compered to native. The second experiment investigated the same basic idea, but the difficulty to process speech was highlighted to the participants (n=27), in believing that it could change the results. However, the results indicated that the harder it was to understand the speaker, the less credible they were rated, meaning that with mild accent one was more credible than with a strong accent. Lev-Ari and Keysar (2010) concluded that even though people were aware of possible speech processing difficulties when listening to accented speech, accented speech was perceived as less trustworthy rather than just harder to understand.

Emphasizing these former results in the context of teaching English as a NNS, heavy accent can cause lower speech credibility and trustworthiness. However, I believe that the results of Lev-Ari and Keysar's (2010) study do not directly apply to all areas of speaker credibility mentioned by Mbennah and Schutte (2000), but rather to the moral dimension, and in the teacher context, maybe also to the content-related competence, as pronunciation and oral language skills are seen as part of the language teaching profession. Moreover, the results of the study are not fully comparable in the Finnish context since Lev-Ari and Keysar's (2010) study included native participants' rating accented speech, whereas not many Finnish people are native speakers of English, but rather have an accent themselves. However, one could assume that similar results would be possible if the study would be organised in Finnish setting and with Finnish as the studied language. Nevertheless, it is important to understand that accented speech can be perceived differently, and it can influence speaker credibility. Thus, it is beneficial for the present study to include this term and the holistic theory when looking at students' perceptions of teachers' oral language skills and the effects of it to professionalism and authority.

4   THE PRESENT STUDY

4.1   Research aim and questions

In this section, I will present the research aim and questions of the present study. As the purpose of the present study is to conduct research on high school students' views on oral language skills and how they affect their views of the teacher's authority and professionalism, the main focus will be on producing both quantitative and qualitative data to get a broader picture of the matter. However, due to there being no requirements of oral proficiency for teacher, it is also justifiable to study if students think the present requirements are enough or should be changed. Finally, it is noteworthy that students' level of oral language skills can affect their reflections on the matter, thus addressing the matter is necessary. Overall, the aim is to better understand, how students experience the language teaching position and how other abilities than for example pedagogical, here oral skills, affect the classroom. The research questions are following:

> 1. How does the English teacher's oral language skills (fluency, pronunciation, and accent) influence students' views of the teacher's authority and professionalism?

> 2. What level oral proficiency should be required from English language teachers in students' views and why?

> 3. How does the learner's level of oral language skills affect their views?

The present study will provide important information on students' attitudes and perceptions of the teacher profession in relation to oral language skills. The results might help to develop the teacher education in Finland for the better and help teachers to understand the impact of their own oral language skills on students' perceptions and learning. Moreover, the present study can shed light on whether accent liberation applies to teachers, as it does to students nowadays. Finally, the results can provide necessary information on how to better meet the students' needs, when it comes to language teaching.

4.2   Data and methods

In this section, I will present the participants and justify the selected data collection methodology. Additionally, I will delve into the execution of data collection and elaborate on the analytical methods employed.

4.2.1   Participants

The aim of the present study was to better understand the views of high school students (age 15-19) regarding their English teachers' oral language skills and their effect on perceived professionalism and authority. The factual information of the participants, namely their high school, year of studies, and gender, was acquired through multiple choice questions. All participants (n=183) of the present study were high school students, and they were completing their studies in three different high schools in the Central Finland area. The schools were represented quite equally: high school 1 (27.9%), high school 2 (42.5%), and high school 3 (29.5%). The participants were mostly first (n=63) and second (n=69) year students but also included third year students (n=46), that is seniors, and fourth (n=5) year students, namely those who graduate either in three and half years or in 4 years. Most of the participants (n=142) were women, which might be explained by the higher statistical tendency of women in Finnish high school system.

The participants reported their average English grade (8.5) and self-assessed their level of English oral language proficiency (8.5) by using Finnish grading system from 4 (fail) to 10 (excellent), including half-points. The students were later divided into three groups based on their self-rated oral proficiency (see Table 1). The self-assessment cannot be considered a highly reliable source of data, but it enabled examining the connection between students' idea of their proficiency and their views on teachers' oral proficiency. The target group was chosen based on the assumption that high school students have the required reflection skills to complete the questionnaire, and they should have more experience on various English teachers compared to younger students. No personal information was collected from the participants, so taking part in the study was completely anonymous.

Table 1. Group division based on self-assessment on oral skills.

Group division based on "self-assessment on oral language skill".

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Group 1: 4-7	29	15.8	15.8	15.8
	Group 2: 7.5-8.5	69	37.7	37.7	53.6
	Group 3: 9-10	85	46.4	46.4	100.0
	Total	183	100.0	100.0	

4.2.2 Data and data collection

To meet the research aims of the present study and gather data, three (3) high schools in the Central Finland area were contacted. The data was collected by using Webropol, and it was designed to be a self-completion online questionnaire. The questionnaire was available only in Finnish, and completing it was completely anonymous and required around 15 minutes of participants' time. The questionnaire was piloted by one high school student outside the Central Finland area, and some of the questions were rephrased again after getting the feedback from the pilot phase. After the research permits were granted from schools, the link to the questionnaire was shared with the students by the school personnel, and they had nearly a month to answer.

The decision to use questionnaires instead of interviews was based on the desire to get as much information as possible from a large group of people, thus the results would be more generalizable. Moreover, using questionnaires is frequently used in second language research (Dörnyei & Tatsuya 2010: xiii), and they are convenient for both the participants and the researcher, as they can be answered almost whenever and wherever. Another key factor was ethics; the questionnaire enabled anonymity of the participants, which would have been hard to accomplish through interviews. The questionnaire was based on Tsang's (2020) questionnaire but modified to better fit the Finnish education context and the research aim. Similarly to Tsang's questionnaire, the present questionnaire included Likert-scales and questions about participants' background and English proficiency self-assessment. To understand the phenomenon better, open questions were added to the present questionnaire. The data was collected in February 2024, and it generated both quantitative and qualitative data. The data yielded three categories, similarly to Dörnyei and Tatsuya's (2010: 5) division. Initially, factual information such as age, name of their current high school, and gender was acquired through multiple-choice questions, yielding quantitative data. Subsequently, behavioural data focusing on self-assessment, oral language skill level, and desires to acquire native-like pronunciation was obtained through ordinal scales and a yes-no question. Lastly, attitudinal insights regarding participants' experiences and perspectives on teachers' oral language skills in relation to perceived professionalism and authority were gathered via predominantly open-ended queries or responses on a Likert-scale. All questions, except for the last "free word"-question, were obligatory. For the analysis presented in this thesis, the questions were translated to English. All participants completed the whole questionnaire, and none of the answers were omitted from the results. The questionnaire can be found under the appendix-section.

4.2.3 Methods of analysis

Given that the present study incorporated both quantitative and qualitative data, it was necessary to analyse the data using both quantitative and qualitative methodologies. The qualitative and quantitative data of this mix-method approach was first analysed separately and then integrated in section 6. This is a typical process for research where qualitative and quantitative data are concurrent (Guest et al., 2011). Consequently, the questionnaire yielded nominal and numeric data, which were transformed into percentages and averages, along with qualitative data in the form of written opinions. In addition to percentages and averages, the quantitative data was further analysed using descriptive statistics, namely crosstabs, to compare different groups' views. As Guest et al. (2011) state, quantitative data is confirmative, that is hypothesis-driven in order to either prove the hypothesis right or wrong, whereas qualitative data functions as explorative, and drives from content. Therefore, it was reasonable to use both in the present study.

The quantitative data was analysed using crosstabs in SPSS. To achieve more statistically significant results, the variables in statements 1-8 (see Appendix 1) were changed from five categories to three. This means that answers "strongly agree" and "agree to some extent" were embedded to "agree" and consequently, "strongly disagree" and "disagree to some extent" where embedded to "disagree. Therefore, the new three categories were "disagreed," "neutral, and "agree. Moreover, the participants were divided into three forementioned groups (Table 1) to determine if different proficiency groups generated similar or different results regarding the quantitative data. The comparison between the three groups was executed through crosstabulation. In addition to the crosstabs, Chi-squares were included to discover Pearson's p-value, and when necessary, Fisher's exact test was run.

The qualitative data was analysed by using thematic analysis (Guest et al., 2011). First, the data was carefully read through twice, after which three themes were chosen based on the frequency of their reoccurrence and the research questions. The themes were following: teacher profession and what it entails, teacher's accent, and what students consider "good oral skills" to be regarding their teachers. As the responses included data that fitted more than one of the themes, the themes could not be analysed completely separately. Eight examples were chosen from the data to provide concrete affirmation for the analysis and to the conclusions made based on the data. The qualitative data was not transferred to match the three groups in quantitative data, since that would have exceeded the master's thesis requirements and extended the thesis too much.

5 AN OVERWIEW OF STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF ENGLISH TEACHERS' ORAL LANGUAGE SKILLS

In this section, I will present the results of the questionnaire. First, I will focus on the closed-ended questions, namely quantitative data. The data is presented in relation to the questionnaire questions. Then, I will address the open-ended questions and the qualitative data it provided. This data set is introduced based on the themes generated by the thematic analysis.

5.1 Closed-ended questions

In this section, I will introduce the results of the closed-ended questions. The results were acquired through descriptive analysis using SPSS and include percentages and crosstabs together with Pearson Chi-squares to indicate statistical significance.

5.1.1 Student's attitudes towards their own learning

The factual information of the participants, namely their high school, year of studies, and gender, was acquired through multiple choice questions. When it comes to the behavioural data, students rated their English course average and self-assessed their English oral skills based on the Finnish grading scale 4-10, including half points. The participants reached an average of 8.5 regarding their self-assessed course average, and the lowest grade was five, highest 10 (see Table 2).

Table 2. Grade distribution of self-assessment.

Grade (course)	N	%	Grade (oral skills)	N	%
5	1	0.50%	5	0	0.00%
5.5	1	0.50%	5.5	1	0.50%
6	9	4.90%	6	8	4.40%
6.5	1	0.50%	6.5	5	2.70%
7	11	6.00%	7	15	8.20%
7.5	7	3.80%	7.5	2	1.10%
8	37	20.20%	8	40	21.90%
8.5	20	10.90%	8.5	27	14.80%
9	62	33.90%	9	50	27.30%
9.5	15	8.20%	9.5	14	7.70%
10	19	10.40%	10	21	11.50%

The median was 9. Regarding similar self-assessment on oral language skills, students reached the same average (8.5). However, the lowest grade was 5.5, the highest 10, a the median 8.5. These results indicate that even though the average of these two variables was the same, students in the present study rate their oral language skills with more variety regarding lower grades compared to their course average.

In addition to self-assessment questions, students were asked about their ambitions to acquire pronunciation in their studies that resembles the speech of a native English speaker. 151 (82.5%) of the students answered "yes". To better understand if these self-set ambitions connect to one's self-assessment of oral skills, a crosstab was performed (Table 3). The crosstab demonstrated an association between students' aims to acquire native-like pronunciation and their self-rated oral skill proficiency, and that it was statistically highly significant (p= <.001). Since the crosstabulation was analysed using the group division, it is possible to conclude that a statistically highly significant difference between the three oral proficiency groups was found.

Table 3. Crosstabulation of students' aims regarding pronunciation and their self-assessment on oral language skills (groups).

In my own studies, I aim for oral language proficiency that resembles the speech of a native English speaker. * Self-assessment of oral skills: 3 groups Crosstabulation

| | | | Self-assessment of oral skills: 3 groups | | | Total |
			Group 1: 4-7	Group 2: 7.5-8.5	Group 3: 9-10	
In my own studies, I aim for oral language proficiency that resembles the speech of a native English speaker.	yes	Count	17	55	79	151
		% Self-assessment of oral skills: 3 groups	58.6%	79.7%	92.9%	82.5%
	no	Count	12	14	6	32
		% Self-assessment of oral skills: 3 groups	41.4%	20.3%	7.1%	17.5%
Total		Count	29	69	85	183
		% Self-assessment of oral skills: 3 groups	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (1-sided)	Point Probability
Pearson Chi-Square	18.255[a]	2	<.001	<.001		
Likelihood Ratio	17.327	2	<.001	<.001		
Fisher-Freeman-Halton Exact Test	17.225			<.001		
Linear-by-Linear Association	17.747[b]	1	<.001	<.001	<.001	.000
N of Valid Cases	183					

a. 0 cells (0.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 5.07.

b. The standardized statistic is -4.213.

5.1.2   Students' views on teacher's oral language skills

The attitudinal data that included participants' experiences and perspectives on teachers' oral language skills in relation to perceived professionalism and authority were

gathered via predominantly open-ended queries or responses on a Likert-scale. Here, I will present the results that derived from the Likert-scales and focus on the open-ended questions in section 5.2. The results from the Likert-scales are introduced in two different ways: from a general point of view (Table 4) and from the viewpoint of the group division.

Regarding the general views of the participating students, the answers demonstrated that most of the students (92.3%) agreed that teachers' oral language skills matter to them (Statement 1). Only four students disagreed with the statement and ten of them remained neutral. Statement 2 generated the least variation amongst the answers, as 98.9% of the respondents agreed oral language skills to be part of the professional skillset of an English teacher. Only 1.1%, that is two participants, disagreed with the statement. Related to the professional skills, 92.4% of the participants considered professional skills to impact their view of the teacher's authority, and only 1.6% disagreed (Statement 3). Eleven percent reported neutrality towards the statement. Statement 4 provided a little more variation amongst the participants, but still over 90% agreed that correct pronunciation of an English teacher was important to them. Even though correct pronunciation was seen as a prominent issue, not all students stated that it affects their learning (Statement 5). 11.5% of the participants disagreed with the statement, and 13.7% remained neutral, leaving the percentage of agreeing participants to 74.8%. Students views about teachers' accents also generated increased variety, as almost 15% of the students agreed that the teacher can have any type of an accent, and 13.1% showed neutrality. Still, the majority did not agree with accent liberation when it came to their English teachers (72.2%). Statement 7 caused the most variety in the answers, as only a little over half of the participants (55.2%) did not consider comprehensibility to be enough for them in the teachers' speech, whereas over 20% did. Neutrality regarding this statement was the highest compared to other statements (21.3%). The majority (77.1%) disagreed with the statement, stating hesitant speech to be acceptable for an English teacher (Statement 8). What is noteworthy about these results, is that only in statements 1, 2, 3, and 4, the highest percentage was in the "highly agree/disagree" sections.

Table 4. General answers to the statements about students' views on a Likert-scale.

Statement	Strongly Disagree	Disagree to Some Extent	Neutral	Agree to Some Extent	Strongly Agree	Total
1.The teacher's oral language skills matter to me.	1 (0.6%)	3 (1.6%)	10 (5.5%)	82 (44.8%)	87 (47.5%)	183
2. Oral language proficiency is part of an English teacher's professional skillset.	1 (0.6%)	1 (0.5%)	-	47 (25.7%)	134 (73.2%)	183

Statement	Strongly Disagree	Disagree to Some Extent	Neutral	Agree to Some Extent	Strongly Agree	Total
3. In my opinion, professional skills have an impact on the teacher's authority.	2 (1.1%)	1 (0.5%)	11 (6.0%)	71 (38.8%)	98 (53.6%)	183
4. The correct pronunciation of an English teacher is important to me.	1 (0.5%)	4 (2.2%)	12 (6.6%)	77 (42.1%)	89 (48.6%)	183
5. The oral language proficiency of an English teacher affects how I myself learn oral language skills.	4 (2.2%)	17 (9.3%)	25 (13.7%)	72 (39.3%)	65 (35.5%)	183
6. The accent of an English teacher can be anything, for example, rally English.	47 (25.7%)	85 (46.5%)	24 (13.1%)	20 (10.9%)	7 (3.8%)	183
7. The pronunciation or accent of the English teacher doesn't matter, as long as I understand what they mean.	25 (13.7%)	76 (41.5%)	39 (21.3%)	36 (19.7%)	7 (3.8%)	183
8. Hesitant speech of an English teacher is acceptable.	53 (29.0%)	88 (48.1%)	29 (15.8%)	12 (6.6%)	1 (0.5%)	183

Another important aspect to look at, was the relation between the statements. To see if two statements had a correlation, crosstabulations were completed. It is important to note, however, that these crosstabulations do not indicate the direction of the correlation, but rather that there is one. From the crosstabulation, quite many associations were found (see Table 5). Six statistic significant (p=<.05 *) correlations were present, one moderate significance (p=<.01 **), and six statistically highly significant (p=<.001 ***) associations. The significance derives from the Fisher's exact test in all cases, except for the crosstabulation of statement 6 and 7, where Fisher's test was not needed, as the a-clause was valid. Some of these correlations are analysed in more detail during the discussion in section 6.

Table 5. Table of the crosstabulations of the statements.

Crosstabulation	Pearson's p-value	Fishers-exact test p-value	Statistic significance
Statement 1 / Statement 2	<.001	.046	*
Statement 1 / Statement 3	<.001	.019	*
Statement 1 / Statement 4	<.001	<.001	***
Statement 1 / Statement 7	.002	<.001	***
Statement 2 / Statement 3	<.001	.036	*
Statement 2 / Statement 5	<.001	.013	*

Statement 3 / Statement 4	<.001	.003	**
Statement 3 / Statement 6	.015	.028	*
Statement 4 / Statement 5	.012	.040	*
Statement 4 / Statement 6	<.001	<.001	***
Statement 4 / Statement 7	.002	<.001	***
Statement 6 / Statement 7	<.001	not needed	***
Statement 6 / Statement 8	<.001	<.001	***

When looking at these statements through the participants self-assessment on their oral language skills, only one statement, *The correct pronunciation of an English teacher is important to me,* was found to be connected to the self-assessment. This means that a difference between those who had high or low grade on the self-assessment of oral skills was discovered (Table 6). However, the scaling in this case was changed to three-parted, that is "disagree-neutral-agree". The p-value was .001, but the a.-clause indicated that running Fisher's exact-test was necessary, which resulted in value of .040, which is less than alfa (.05), making the results statistically significant.

Table 6. Crosstabulation of the importance of the teacher's correct pronunciation and self-assessment on oral skills (4-10).

The correct pronunciation of an English teacher is important to me. * My self-assessment of my oral language proficiency on a school grading scale would be from 4 to 10. Crosstabulation

			My self-assessment of my oral language proficiency on a school grading scale would be from 4 to 10.										
			5.50	6.00	6.50	7.00	7.50	8.00	8.50	9.00	9.50	10.00	Total
The correct pronunciation of an English teacher is important to me.	Disagree	Count	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	1	0	2	5
		% within My self-assessment of my oral language proficiency on a school grading scale would be from 4 to 10.	0.0%	0.0%	40.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	2.0%	0.0%	9.5%	2.7%
	Neutral	Count	0	1	0	2	0	2	2	2	3	0	12
		% within My self-assessment of my oral language proficiency on a school grading scale would be from 4 to 10.	0.0%	12.5%	0.0%	13.3%	0.0%	5.0%	7.4%	4.0%	21.4%	0.0%	6.6%
	Agree	Count	1	7	3	13	2	38	25	47	11	19	166
		% within My self-assessment of my oral language proficiency on a school grading scale would be from 4 to 10.	100.0%	87.5%	60.0%	86.7%	100.0%	95.0%	92.6%	94.0%	78.6%	90.5%	90.7%
Total		Count	1	8	5	15	2	40	27	50	14	21	183
		% within My self-assessment of my oral language proficiency on a school grading scale would be from 4 to 10.	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (1-sided)	Point Probability
Pearson Chi-Square	41.728[a]	18	.001	[b]		
Likelihood Ratio	24.808	18	.130	.060		
Fisher-Freeman-Halton Exact Test	26.271			.040		
Linear-by-Linear Association	.221[c]	1	.638	.661	.327	.030
N of Valid Cases	183					

a. 23 cells (76.7%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .03.

b. Cannot be computed because there is insufficient memory.

c. The standardized statistic is .470.

To examine the differences between the three different self-assessment groups (Table 1) and the statements, crosstabulations were conducted. None of the crosstabulations indicated statistically significant differences between the chosen groups, implying that those groups cannot explain the general results regarding the statements. That does not exclude the statistically significant differences between the groups when it came to students' ambitions. However, since the statements provided attitudinal data, it was relevant to run crosstabs on the statements and students' ambitions to see if an association could be found. The crosstab on students' ambitions and statement 1 was 3-partedly scaled and led to statistically significant results (Table 7). The p-value was .018 and Fisher's exact test .021.

Table 7. Crosstabulation of students' aims and if teacher's oral skills matter.

In my own studies, I aim for oral language proficiency that resembles the speech of a native English speaker. * The teacher's oral language skills matter to me. Crosstabulation

			The teacher's oral language skills matter to me.			
			Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Total
In my own studies, I aim for oral language proficiency that resembles the speech of a native English speaker.	yes	Count	3	5	143	151
		% within s1	75.0%	50.0%	84.6%	82.5%
	no	Count	1	5	26	32
		% within s1	25.0%	50.0%	15.4%	17.5%
Total		Count	4	10	169	183
		% within s1	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (1-sided)	Point Probability
Pearson Chi-Square	8.001[a]	2	.018	.033		
Likelihood Ratio	6.174	2	.046	.033		
Fisher-Freeman-Halton Exact Test	7.109			.021		
Linear-by-Linear Association	4.222[b]	1	.040	.049	.049	.030
N of Valid Cases	183					

a. 3 cells (50.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .70.

b. The standardized statistic is -2.055.

5.2 Students' expectations and perceptions of their English teacher's oral language skills

In this section, I will introduce the open-ended questions and their results. Since the data was qualitative, and its purpose was to better explain the results of the quantitative data and provide answers to students' views, it was analysed with help of thematic analysis. The results are presented in the same order as the questions in the questionnaire (see Appendix).

First, students were asked to reflect on their answers on the Likert-scales and explain what kind of oral skills English teachers should have in their view. Second, students were asked to describe situation or situations, where their English teachers' oral skills (especially pronunciation, accents, and fluency) affected their view of the teacher's authority and professionalism negatively and/or positively. Lastly, students were asked to state if adding an oral skill test to matriculation exams, would change their views on the importance of teacher's oral skills and why. From the answers of the forementioned questions, three different themes were discovered: teacher profession and what it entails, teacher's accent, and what students consider "good oral skills" to be regarding their teachers. These themes were interrelated; thus, the presentation of the themes will include overlap.

The participants shared quite strongly the same idea of what is "good oral skills" when their teachers were concerned. Good, fluent, comprehensible, clear, and correct speech were the most used words to describe good oral skills. These elements were further connected to students' learning. For example, students argued that the forementioned elements provide students not only good examples of language usage but also quality teaching that everyone can understand, regardless of their language skills. In addition, some of the students defined more clearly than others the level of oral skills they would like teachers to possess. In these circumstances, the definition of good oral language skills would include a better proficiency compared to the students, excellent or at least grade 8 (on a 4-10 scale) level, or on the CEFR-scale the proficiency of B2 to C1 (cf. Vaarala, 2013). However, it was discussed on several occasions that "perfection" was not required from the teachers. In addition to the most common descriptions, two other features were also noteworthy. It was mentioned a few times that the speech should be "natural" to the teacher, meaning that too forced accent or if English does not come naturally to the teacher at all, can be seen as negative elements. Also, it was stated by one participant that teacher's good oral skills are not a necessity, but rather something that can increase motivation.

The accent of the teacher generated more diverse answers, but still the results concluded that an easily understandable accent and correct pronunciation were the main requirements for English teachers. These findings related to the previous theme, which is the definition of good oral skills being connotated to, for instance, comprehensible and correct speech. This theme also comprehended answers that were very far from each other. For example, some participants stated that a Finnish accent, in this case Rally-English, was not acceptable for teachers, whereas one argued that Rally-English is fine to some extent. What "some extent" meant, was not explained further by the participant. Similar confrontation was present when some of the participants demanded close to or native-like accents from teachers to learn them themselves, whereas one stated too forced speech or accent to be slightly disturbing. This

might be related to previously mentioned "naturality" of one's speech, where the atypical pronunciation can result in phony or forced speech. Example 1 and Example 2 illustrate well the differences between two of the participants. In Example 1, the participant saw different accents as a good thing, when motivating students to speak up in class, whilst still recognising the importance of basic pronunciation regulations. On the contrary, Example 2 demonstrates how one of the participants associated non-native pronunciation to being unqualified regarding their oral skills.

Example 1: "Aksentilla ei kuitenkaan ole väliä ja on hyväkin, että englanninopettajat rohkaisevat omalla puheellaan oppilaita siihen, että aksentilla ei ole väliä, ja kaikkien kannattaa puhua. Toki perusääntämissännöt täytyy osata eikä voi lausua täysin suomalaisittain. Suomiaksentti saa kuitenkin kuulua." (Student 147)

The accent does not matter, and it is good that English teachers encourage students with their speech towards the idea that accent does not matter, and everyone should speak. Of course, one must know the basic pronunciation rules and one cannot pronounce entirely with Finnish accent. Still, it is okay to hear the Finnish accent.

Example 2: "…hänen suullinen kielitaito pitäisi olla suhteellisesti hyvää eli ainakin lähellä natiivipuhuja. Jos hänellä ei ole natiivipuhujan suulliset taidot, niin tunnilla täytyy tasapainottaa opettajan epäpätevä englannin suullinen taito lisäämällä natiivipuhujan videoiden tai äänitteiden kuuntelua." (Student 39)

Their (the teacher's) oral language skills should be relatively good so at least close to a native speaker. If they do not have the oral language skills of a native speaker, then their unqualified oral ´language skills need to be balanced out by adding listening to videos and voice recordings of native speakers in class.

The teacher profession, and what it entailed from the students' point of view, was the most frequently mentioned topic among the students. The vast majority of the answers to the first open-ended question included arguments regarding teacher profession, here the teachers' role as a "model" for students. The "modelling" was discussed from both negative and positive perspectives, like in Example 3.

Example 3: "Opettajasta tuli heti paljon asiantuntevampi ja positiivinen kuva kun suullinen kielitaito oli hyvä. Opettajasta tulee kuva, että hän osaa työnsä ja panostaa siihen, mikä taas motivoi myös oppilaita opiskelemaan. Toisaalta taas opettajan suullisen kielitaidon puuttimisesta tulee epäammattimainen kuva, koska lausuminen on kuitenkin niin keskeinen osa opetusta. Opettaja ei motivoi itse puhumaan koska ei tunnu kivalta olla toisen arvioitavana kun ei opettaja itse osaa sen paremmin. Opetus kuitenkin perustuu siihen, että se joka osaa asian opettaa sitä muille." (Student 162)

The teacher immediately gained much more knowledgeable and positive image when their oral language skills were good. It creates an impression of the teacher knowing their job and investing in it, which in turn motivates students to study. On the other hand, a lack of oral language skills by the teacher gives an unprofessional impression, as pronunciation is such a central part of teaching. The teacher does not motivate students to speak because it does

not feel nice to be evaluated by someone who does not seem to know any better themselves. After all, teaching is based on the premise that whoever knows the subject, teaches it to others.

It was argued that that the teacher's pronunciation impacts one's pronunciation, especially among those who learn by imitating. Some participants further stated that the teacher's oral language skills affect their overall learning. These comments were strongly connected to the comprehensibility of the teacher's speech, and whether students were able to understand basic instructions and such in class. Example 4 well demonstrates how teacher's role in language learning, especially regarding spoken language, is still considered to be great. The example states that it was believed to be hard to learn English from someone who lacks the skills themselves. Few of the students also mentioned that teacher's poor oral language skills can generate an idea of not having to even try to pronounce correctly, thus affecting learning negatively.

Example 4: "Uskon, että on vaikeaa opetella englantia jos itse opettajakin ei sitä osaa. Hänen on vaikea korjata muiden puhetta ja siitä on vaikea oppia opiskelijan näkökulmasta. Opettaja on tunnin ja aiheen idoli, jota opiskelijat voivat seurata hänen malliaan." (Student 57)

I believe that it is hard to learn English if the teacher does not know it. It is difficult for them to correct others' speech and it is difficult to learn from a student's perspective. The teacher is the idol of the lesson and the subject that students can follow their example.

The teacher profession and what in entails was further discussed form the point of view of authority and professionalism. As discussed earlier, students did not require perfection from their English teachers, but still good oral language skills were strongly connected to students' views of the teacher's professionalism and authority. Firstly, few of the students discussed the teacher profession related to oral language skills. For example, it was stated that to become a teacher one must go through a long educational path, including higher education, which should result in close to native like oral skills. Moreover, one of the participants explained that English teachers should aim to be the best they can and learn if they are not able to do something, since their job is to teach and to be a model for students. Secondly, many of the students connected oral language skills to be a matter of the teacher's career choice that include certain aims and requirements. In other words, an English teacher, who knows their subject and profession, must have good oral skills. One of the reasons given to argue on behalf of the previous comment, was that teachers assess the students, which requires that they can first teach the right way to pronounce and then assess. Similarly, teaching, for example correct pronunciation, was considered to be teacher's responsibility (Example 5).

Example 5: ”Englannin opiskeluun kuuluu olennaisena osana ääntäminen ja lausuminen, ja koen että opettajalla on velvollisuus opettaa opiskelijoita ääntämään asiat oikein ja toimia esimerkkinä sanojen oikein lausumisesta.” (Student 166)

A fundamental part of English studies is pronunciation and articulation, and I feel that it is the teacher's duty to teach students to pronounce correctly and act as an example of proper word pronunciation.

Lastly, oral language skills were viewed as an element that had the ability to either increase or decrease teacher's authority, credibility, and liability. For example, poor oral language skills were established as laughable (Example 6) or even stupid and stated to decrease the teacher's authority or feelings of distrust. In other examples given by the participants, credibility, liability, and authority were negatively affected in situations where, for example, the teacher had to always google how words were pronounced and they tended to pronounce easy words incorrectly. On the contrary, good oral language skills were mentioned to motivate and increase the teacher's authority, as well as their credibility. For example, good oral skills affected teacher's credibility and authority positively in situations, where the teacher was considered to be "better" than the students and that they have something to give to the students. According to one of the participants, fluent and teacher with good pronunciation made them feel that the teacher knew their subject and they were worth listening to. Increased credibility of the teacher was also explained to encourage students to ask for help. Moreover, an observation was made by one participant that students replied better to teachers with good oral skills.

Example 6: ”Englannin opettajan suullisen kielitaidon tulisi olla hyvä ja puheen tulisi olla sujuvaa. Oppilaiden on vaikeaa oppia oikeanlaista ääntämistä tai muutenkaan puhumaan jos opettaja puhuu huonoa englantia. Opettajan huono suullinen kielitaito voi tuntua opiskelijoista myös huvittavalta ja alentaa auktoriteettia. Pl. puheviat joihin ei voi tietenkään vaikuttaa.” (Student 23)

An English teacher's oral language skills should be good, and speech should be fluent. It is difficult for the students to learn correct pronunciation or to even speak if the teacher speaks poor English. Teacher's bad oral proficiency can also seem amusing to students and lower authority. Excluding speech impediments that cannot be influenced, of course.

Adding an oral skill test to the matriculation exam had an effect on the students views of teacher's oral proficiency. When asked about the matricular examination and adding an oral skill test to it in the future, almost all the students agreed that it would highlight the importance of good oral language skills of their English teachers. Consequently, the argumentation behind this was in an agreement with the three main themes that were already introduced. However, those who did not believe that adding

an oral skill test would impact their views on teacher's oral skills, explained that they acquired the necessary oral language skills also from other sources outside school, such as internet. Another reason for this view was that they already viewed good oral language skills of their English teacher to be important and part of the profession. Still, as can be seen from Example 7, even when the student themselves did not feel affected by teacher's oral skills, they recognised the needs that their peers might have. In some cases, the views were more specific. For example, one of the participants stated that their view would depend on what is being assessed in the test. Another participant emphasized that one needs to learn oral language skills regardless of the additional test, thus, it would not change their view. This was addressed also in another response, but it was used to criticise the educational system; aspects of the target language should not be omitted from teacher or left without equal attention just because they are not included in the matriculation exam.

> **Example 7:** "Mielestäni se ei vaikuttaisi hirveästi minun osaltani, mutta koen että on ole-massa monia joille se olisikin hyvin tärkeää. Sillä opettaja toimii hyvin mallina, joka oppilaat pystyvät kopioimaan ja joka on yleensä varma tietolähde. (Suomessa ainakin)" (Student 39)

> In my opinion, it would not affect me much, but I do see that there are many people, who would find it very important. This is because the teacher functions as well as a model that students can copy and, who usually is a credible source of information (at least in Finland).

> **Example 8:** "Selkeästi ääntävä ja sujuvasti, mutta rauhallisesti puhuva opettaja luo heti alussa kuvan asiantuntevasta ja mukavasta ihmisestä. Jos opettaja puhuu epäselvästi, tun-neilla asiaan keskittyminen voi olla vaikeaa. Keskittyminen voi mennä esim. puheen ym-märtämiseen tai vahvaan aksenttiin." (Student 182)

> A teacher, who pronounces clearly and speaks smoothly, yet calmly, creates an immediate impression of being knowledgeable and pleasant. If the teacher speaks unclearly, focusing on the subject matter in class can be difficult. Focus might get targeted, for example, to un-derstanding speech or a strong accent.

Example 8 demonstrates well that teacher's oral skills have a diverse impact on the students with both positive and negative outcomes. Further, it provided essential information on what students might face due to the English teacher's poor oral skills. These are important insights also from the point of view of developing the Finnish teacher education.

6 DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND CONCLUSION

In this section, I will introduce the results of the present study in relation to the research questions and to previous research. In addition, I will discuss the relevancy of the present study by explaining how the results may be implemented in the future. Lastly, I will address the limitations and strengths of the presents study and provide suggestions for future research.

6.1   Discussion

The results of the study are discussed in the order of the research questions, whilst integrating the results of the qualitative and quantitative data. Since the sample of the study was rather great, some generalisations were made.

The first research question *How does the English teacher's oral language skills (fluency, pronunciation, and accent) influence students' views of the teacher's authority and professionalism?* was studied using both qualitative and quantitative methodologies. The results from the Likert-scales indicated that many students share their views when it came to teachers' oral language skills. 92.3 percent of students stated that teachers' oral language skills matter to them, which could argue against teacher's accent liberation. Moreover, 98.9 percent affirm oral skills to be part of an English teacher's professional skillset. Consequently, professional skills were considered to impact over 90 percent of students' views about the teacher's authority. As oral skills were understood to be part of the teacher's professional skillset, as well as overall professional skills to influence authority, it is fair to say that majority of the students agree oral skills to influence their experience of the teacher's authority. This deduction was further supported by the crosstabulation (Table 5), where statistically significant association (p=<.05*) was found. Similar evidence was discovered from the open-ended questions. For example, Example 6 demonstrated that poor oral skills were associated in the worst-case scenario with amusement and lowered authority. However, it was also pointed out that speech impediments are a matter that should be excluded from this conversation. To be able to separate one's opinions and speech impediments from professional skillsets demonstrates thorough reflection. As explained in the previous section, situations where students experienced superiority towards teachers or felt that teachers needed google to be able to answer questions directed to them, lowered the perception of the teacher as an authority a credible source of information. Positive experiences were connected to good oral language skills, and how they created a feeling that the teacher had something to offer to the students, and that it affected how

students respond to the teacher. In other words, both positive and negative situations regarding teachers' oral skills, were experienced in class, namely the context of teaching and learning. These results clearly indicate that authority is connected to the teacher's oral language skills. The further connection to professionalism and the association of authority and professionalism is discussed next.

Statements 5-8 generated more division between the participants, and they related to students' perceptions and views of the teacher profession (see Table 4). Little over seventy percent of the participants considered teacher's oral language skills to affect their learning, did not speak on behalf of accent liberation, and did not accept hesitant speech. The remaining almost 30 percent either disagreed or had neutral views. The reasonings that these statements generated were strongly connected to the perceived teacher profession and authority. The argumentation for oral skills affecting teacher's authority in the present study was based on, for example, on finding poor oral language skills funny (Example 6) or that students do not try to pronounce correctly since the teacher cannot do that either. It was stated that it is hard to learn from someone not being able to model the language for the students (Example 4). This is in an agreement with Jansem's (2020) statement, according to which teacher's English knowledge should be good enough for teaching students how to utilize it and to model its use. Moreover, this resonates with Räsänen's (2021) explanation, according to which the authority of the teacher may be affected by the responsibilities and expertise of the teacher profession itself. Consequently, Leung (2009:55) statement that the sponsored professional, that is institutions, control the teacher profession as well as is considered as obligation for someone wanting to work in the profession, explain why students have certain expectations for their teachers.

Most of the time, authority was discussed hand in hand with terms, such as professionalism, credibility, and liability. Regarding students' experiences on learning English, teacher's role as a "model" was discussed by over sixty participants (see e.g. Example 5 and 7). This challenges Vaarala's (2013) study, according to which teachers did not consider themselves to no longer be the most important model providers. The present study proved that students' though the opposite. Modelling language use was considered as part of the language teacher profession and important factor in learning. However, one of the participants in the present study stated learning English mostly through other sources, such as the Internet. Example 3 demonstrated that good oral skills were associated with professionalism, and it created an image of the teacher putting effort to their profession as well as knowing their subject. Consequently, poor oral skills were associated with lowered perceived professionalism and motivation, as one could be assessed by a teacher with same level of oral proficiency. Furthermore, it was stated that teaching is based on the idea that the one with the abilities and knowledge teaches it to others, which is in line with Jansem's (2020) previously

mentioned argument. Moreover, oral language skills were explained to be a matter of career choice, meaning that good oral skills are necessary for an English teacher, since it is their subject and profession. Example 5 demonstrated the idea of teacher's being obligated to teach correct pronunciation and function as a model for language use. For example, credibility, liability, and authority were negatively affected in situations where the teacher was unable to pronounce easy words correctly. This is in line with Lintunen's (2014) statement, according to which pronunciation provokes subjective thoughts on a listener, thus affecting their views of the speaker. Moreover, having to google how words are pronounced, caused a negative effect on the authority and credibility of the teacher. In other words, the lack of knowledge of one's field, so called epistemic authority (Tirri & Puolimatka, 2000), resulted in lowered perceived authority among the students. This is contradicting to Tirri and Puolimatka's (2000) statement, according to which lack of authority in teaching is usually due to lack of deontic authority in Finland, not the lack of epistemic authority. It is fair to say that poor oral skills influence authority, credibility, and liability, as on the contrary, good oral skills were associated with increased perceived authority and credibility. It was stated that good oral skills made one of the participants consider the teacher as worth listening to or from which to ask help. Even though Tsang's (2019) study found that more attention was paid to teachers with native-like accent, the results of the present study confirm a similar trend regarding good oral language skills in general.

In addition to teachers' role as models, teachers' oral language skills were discussed from a more general point of view of learning. It was explained in Example 8 that poor oral language skills, especially unclear speech, was causing problems in concentration. Moreover, concentration was disturbed since one needed to focus more on comprehending or understanding the heavy accent of their teacher. These results are in line with Tergujeff's (2022) research, according to which fluency and intonation affect comprehensibility. Similarly, Tsang (2019) reported heavily accented speech to impact students' perceptions of the teacher's qualifications and professionalism in a negative manner. It was further explained that heavy accents affected comprehensibility, thus causing decreased motivation to follow teaching. Even though Example 8 did not directly indicate similar association to Tsang's (2019) study, it is fair to suggest that heavy accent and poor oral skills may lower perceived professionalism, as good oral skills were paired positively with professionalism. Moreover, Lev-Ari & Keysar (2010) found that accents can make speech processing more challenging, thus affecting the credibility of the speaker negatively, which could be the case in Example 8 as well.

The answer to the second research question *What level oral proficiency should be required from English language teachers in students' views and why?* generated quite similar answers between the participants and were either in an agreement with previous research or challenged them. Looking at the answers from the Likert-scales (Table 4),

it was possible to notice clear lean towards certain requirements for English teachers' oral language skill. For example, 92.3 percent of the participants stated that teacher's oral language skills matter to them, and further, over 90 percent considered correct pronunciation of an English teacher to be important to them. These results indicate that English teacher's oral skills are seen as a significant feature, which could further argue on behalf of requiring a specific level of oral proficiency. Interestingly, Statement 7 *The pronunciation or accent of the English teacher doesn't matter, as long as I understand what they mean.* caused a rather strict division of the views, as only little over 50 percent did not consider comprehensibility to be enough on its own. This could indicate an attitude towards accent liberation for those who did state neutral or agreeing views towards comprehensibility to be enough. Another reason for this particular result to be interesting is that still, over 90 percent had previously stated correct pronunciation of an English teacher to be important to them. The deduction formed from these results suggest that pronunciation of an English teacher is essential, but that view might change for some when comparing the importance to comprehensibility. Lintunen (2014) explained that the criterion for good pronunciation includes comprehensible speech that is accurate and fluent in various situations. This explanation demonstrates that pronunciation and comprehension are connected to each other, which supports the aforementioned deduction.

The participants associated good oral skills of an English teacher to be *good, fluent, comprehensible, clear,* and *correct*. Fluency, which was also described as "clear" speech, was also found to be an indicator of good oral skills in Ilola's (2018) research. Unlike in Ilola's (2018:109) study, native-like pronunciation was not considered to be an indicator of good oral skills by other than few participants (Example 1 vs. Example 2). Nevertheless, as correct speech was found to be an indicator and, in some cases, correctness was coupled with pronunciation, it was possible to assume that correct pronunciation could be connected to native pronunciation. This conclusion derives from the understanding that correct pronunciation usually is connected to L1 accents, and what is considered as correct pronunciation in these languages. This deduction supports Vaarala's (2013) study, which reported pronunciation as the most important part of teacher's oral skills due to negative effects that poor pronunciation can cause, such as not be taken seriously. However, these results are not in an agreement with previously mentioned results of Statement 7, where comprehensibility was considered more important by almost a quarter of the participants, and around twenty percent indicated neutrality. Tsang's (2020) study revealed that even though students had quite neutral feelings towards their EFL teacher's accents, RP and GA were still favoured in teaching and learning. The present study generated slightly contradicting results, as over 70 percent of the participants did not agree that the accent of an English teacher could be whichever variant (Table 4). Example 1, however, demonstrated

more liberal views towards accents, but still demanding knowledge of the basic pronunciation rules from the teacher. Moreover, only few of the participants specified requiring native-like pronunciation from their English teachers, whereas most of the participants used *good, fluent, comprehensible, clear,* and *correct* to indicate their views. Therefore, the findings indicate that most of the participants do not speak on behalf of accent liberation when it comes to their teacher's (see e.g. Tsang 2020), but they do not require native-like accents either.

Teachers' oral skills were also discussed from the point of view of specific requirement levels. In Vaarala's (2013) study, students reported that teachers should possess better oral language skills than their students have. Similar thoughts were present in Tsang's (2019: 12) study, where one participant was reacting to teacher's poor oral skills by asking who is learning from who. The present study generated comparable results. For example, students mentioned requiring excellent oral skills or on the CEFR-scale, proficiency levels B2 to C1, where B2.1 is the usual requirement for Finnish high school students at the end of their studies. As discussed before, the idea behind requiring a high level of oral proficiency from English teacher, was explained through various arguments, such as the teacher's role as a "model" or the educational path that is required from teachers. However, the results of the present study also proved that students do not require perfection from their teachers, which is in an agreement with Ilola's (2018) study. Interestingly, negative attitudes towards "forced" speech/accents were reported by one of the participants. Few other participants also addressed the importance of "natural" speech. Together, these comments form an understanding of teachers' speech needing to be natural to them and not seem like it is the result of seeking to sound native at the expense of authentic speech. The aforementioned is proving Ilola's (2018) results to apply still, as students' in Ilola's study argued on behalf of natural speech of a teacher.

Of all the participants, 82.5 percent reported ambitions to require native-like pronunciation, which agrees with Tergujeff's (2012) research. Moreover, students' aims were associated with the statement *Teacher's oral skills matter to me*, resulting in statistically significant values (Table 7, p=<.05). Regarding the third research question, *How does the learner's level of oral language skills affect their views?,* the results were in agreement with Tsang's (2020) study. Tsang's (2020) study revealed a connection between students' oral and listening proficiency and their ambition to require RP or GA accents. The crosstabulation of students' aims to acquire oral language skills resembling native English speaker's speech and their self-assessment of oral language skills (group division) in Table 3, produced statistically highly significant results (p=<.001***). In Tsang's (2020) study, the connection was further affiliated with students' expectations of teachers' accents, meaning that proficiency and aims towards RP and GA accents resulted in wanting the EFL teachers to use these accents in

teaching. In the present study, aforementioned further connection was not as apparent in the crosstabulations or in the qualitative data, but still students' oral proficiency (grades 4-10) was found to have a statistically significant association regarding Statement 4, *The correct pronunciation of an English teacher is important to me.* (Table 6). This indicated a difference between lower- and higher-grade students' views. However, it is noteworthy to state that the difference was not statistically different in the three groups that were formed for the present study. Overall, none of the crosstabulations indicated statistically significant differences between the groups, which means that it is safe to say that the three different proficiency groups cannot explain the general results of the present study.

6.2   Conclusion and implications

The present study proved that most Finnish high school students aim for good oral skills themselves, but also value the oral language skills of their English teachers. Oral language skills, especially fluency, pronunciation, and accent were found to impact students' perceptions of the teacher's authority and professionalism in several ways. Mostly, the discussion was centred around either positive or negative experiences, but some neutral views were present as well. The question, whether comprehensible speech of the teacher is enough, generated the most variation, as only a little over half did not agree with it. Moreover, comprehensibility or clear speech, were considered as indicators of good oral skills. Even if the comprehensibility by itself was not considered enough for all, it still was stated to be important or a requirement for teachers. Therefore, a conclusion that comprehensibility might be the most important aspect of the teacher's oral language skills, can be made. The participants often defined good oral skills of an English teacher to be good, fluent, comprehensible, clear, and correct. It was also discussed that perfection was not required, but the teacher should have a better oral proficiency and then the students have. As Pasternak and Baily (2004) put it, it is not unjust to expect exceptional speaking skills from language teacher, as language skills are indeed a crucial part of their profession. Furthermore, the present study revealed that learners' level of oral language skills has an impact on their views of the teacher's oral proficiency. However, the differences could not be found when the participants were divided to three different groups. Tsang (2020) speculated whether teachers can enjoy the same liberty for speaking in whatever accent they like, like students can do now that English is considered as an international language and a *lingua franca*. The present study proved that the language teacher profession comes with certain requirements, and those requirements dictate the level of oral language skills to some extent. Even though native like pronunciation was not most frequently

mentioned requirement by the students, it was still mentioned that Rally-English, namely heavily accented L2 speech, was not considered as propriate for an English teacher.

The study itself was not perfect even though the sample was rather large. The limitations of the present study were the chosen elements of the oral skills, namely fluency pronunciation, and accent, and that those were addressed in the questionnaire. Having mentioned the terms in the questionnaire must have influenced the given answers. However, the focus of the study was particularly on these elements of the oral language skills, thus not mentioning those could have also been problematic. Still, it is fair to assume that the results would have been different if the terms were not introduced in the questionnaire as separate features of oral language skills. Another aspect that was not considered in this study was the background or the native language off the participating students. It would have been beneficial to know if some of the answers where from native speakers of English. As a final note of the restrictions of the study, the definition of an English teacher was not presented to the participants during the questionnaire. Therefore, the students could have defined an English teacher to be someone who had taught them for a month or at least a half a year, which could lead to specific perceptions or views.

The strength of the present study comes from the rather large sample, which allows some generalisations, and the possibility to compare the results to previous studies in the context of Asia. Moreover, to my knowledge, the present study was, first of its kind in the context of Finland, which increases its importance and relevance for the development of the teacher education and for further research. It would be beneficial to conduct more thorough research on this specific field since the present study is the first study in the context of Finland to address the association between teachers or language skills and the students' perceptions of their authority and professionalism. For example, conducting a replica study in a more diverse area of Finland, like the metropolitan area, could alter the results. Moreover, how students' views change throughout the educational path could be a potential topic for research, as well as studying what other aspects teachers' oral skills could influence. Also, these results could be used to enhance the teacher education in Finland. Only one university in Finland requires a certain level of oral language skills from future English teachers. The participants indicated an importance of the teachers' oral language skills in relation to authority and professionalism, and it should be considered in the teacher education as well. That could mean implementing more courses regarding oral language to the curriculums and requiring a certain level of oral proficiency at the end of one's studies. Even though students have the possibility to hear and learn English outside of class and teachers might assume that it reduces the importance off their role as a

model, it is fair to expect a specific level of oral proficiency from someone who has specialised in that area.

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APPENDIX

1. SUOSTUMUS TIETEELLISEEN TUTKIMUKSEEN

Vastaamalla tähän kyselyyn vakuutat olevasi vähintään 15-vuotias ja annat luvan vastaustesi käyttämiseen yllä mainitussa maisterintutkielmassa. Vastaamalla myös myönnät perehtyneesi tutkimuksen kuvaukseen, kuuluvasi kohderyhmään ja vastaavasi kyselyyn vapaaehtoisesti sekä todenmukaisesti. Kyselyssä ei kerätä henkilötietoja ja tulokset raportoidaan siten, että yksilöä ei ole niiden perusteella mahdollista tunnistaa. Kyselyn voi keskeyttää missä vaiheessa tahansa. *

⭕ Hyväksyn

2. Lukiosi *

⭕ Lukio 1
⭕ Lukio 2
⭕ Lukio 3

3. Vuosikurssisi *

⭕ 1
⭕ 2
⭕ 3
⭕ 4

4. Sukupuoli *

⭕ nainen
⭕ mies
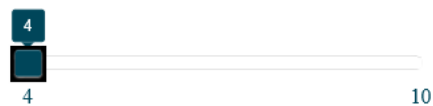⭕ joku muu
⭕ en halua sanoa

5. Arvio englannin kurssieni keskiarvosta kouluarvosanoin 4-10 *

4

4   10

6. Oma arvioini suullisesta kielitaidostani kouluarvosanoin 4-10 *

4

4   10

7. Tavoittelen omissa opinnoissani suullista kielitaitoa, joka muistuttaa äidinkielenään englantia puhuvan puhetta. *

○ kyllä
○ ei

8. Vastaa seuraaviin väittämiin valitsemalla vaihtoehto, joka parhaiten kuvaa omaa kokemustasi ENGLANNIN opettajista. *

	Täysiin eri mieltä	Jokseenkin eri mieltä	Ei eri eikä samaa mieltä	Jokseenkin samaa mieltä	Täysin samaa mieltä
Opettajan suullisella kielitaidolla on minulle väliä.	○	○	○	○	○
Suullinen kielitaito on osa englannin opettajan ammattitaitoa.	○	○	○	○	○
Ammattitaidolla on mielestäni vaikutus opettajan auktoriteettiin.	○	○	○	○	○
Englannin opettajan oikeaoppinen ääntäminen on minulle tärkeää.	○	○	○	○	○
Englannin opettajan suullinen kielitaito vaikuttaa siihen, miten itse opin suullista kielitaitoa.	○	○	○	○	○
Englannin opettajan aksentti voi olla mikä vain, esimerkiksi ralli-englanti.	○	○	○	○	○
Englannin opettajan ääntämisellä tai aksentilla ei ole väliä, kunhan ymmärrän, mitä hän tarkoittaa.	○	○	○	○	○
Englannin opettajan epäsujuva puhe on hyväksyttävää.	○	○	○	○	○

9. Pohdi edellisen kohdan vastauksiesi perusteella, millainen englannin opettajan suullinen kielitaito pitäisi mielestäsi olla ja perustele vastauksesi. *

10. Anna yksi tai useampi esimerkki tilanteesta, jossa englannin opettajan suullinen kielitaito (erityisesti ääntäminen, aksentti ja sujuvuus) ovat vaikuttaneet joko positiivisesti tai negatiivisesti kokemukseesi hänestä asiantuntijana ja/tai auktoriteettina. Voit myös kertoa sekä positiivisen että negatiivisen kokemuksen. *

11. Ylioppilaslaskokeisiin on tulossa suullista kielitaitoa mittaava osio tulevaisuudessa. Vaikka et itse ehtisi sitä kokemaan, koetko, että suullisen kielitaidon kokeen lisääminen kirjoituksiin vaikuttaa suhtautumiseesi opettajan suullisen kielitaidon tason tärkeydestä? Perustele. *

12. Haluatko lisätä vielä jotain? Vapaa sana tutkimuksen aiheeseen liittyen.