

**PLEASURE READING IN ENGLISH AND IN FINNISH :  
THE EXPERIENCES OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE  
UNIVERSITY STUDENTS IN FINLAND**

Bachelor's thesis

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| <p>Tiivistelmä – Abstract</p> <p>Vieraalla kielellä vapaa-ajan lukemisella on todettu olevan positiivisia vaikutuksia kielen oppimisen kannalta. On todettu, että se voi parantaa esimerkiksi vieraan kielen luetun ymmärtämistä, lukunopeutta, kielioppia, sanastoa, oikeinkirjoitusta, asennetta lukemista ja kielenoppimista kohtaan, sekä yleistä vieraan kielen osaamista.</p> <p>Tämä tutkimus käsittelee Jyväskylän yliopiston englannin kielen opiskelijoiden vapaa-ajan lukemista englanniksi ja suomeksi. Tutkimus pyrkii selvittämään miten opiskelijat itse kokevat vapaa-ajan lukemisen englanniksi vaikuttavan heidän englannin kielen taitoihinsa, miksi he lukevat mieluummin englanniksi tai suomeksi ja onko eri kielillä lukemisessa heidän mukaansa eroavaisuuksia.</p> <p>Tutkimuksen tulokset viittaavat siihen, että tutkimukseen osallistuneet lukevat useammin ja mieluummin englannin kielellä vapaa-ajallaan. He eivät kuitenkaan välttämättä lue vain ja ainoastaan oppiakseen tai ylläpitääkseen englannin kielen taitojaan. He silti kokevat tällaista oppimista tapahtuvan lukiessaan erilaisissa kielitaidon osa-alueissa, vähiten kuitenkin kieliopin osalta. Osallistujilla on tiedetysti korkea englannin kielen taitotaso ja tämä voi vaikuttaa heidän kokemuksiinsa. Suurimpia syitä kielenvalintaan lukiessa löytyi olevan kirjallisuuden alkuperäiskieli, saatavuus, genre ja yksilön sen hetkinen olotila.</p> <p>Tämä tutkimus tuottaa arvokasta tietoa kieltenopettajille, jotka voivat hyötyä vapaa-ajan lukemiseen kannustamisesta osana kieltenopintoja, sekä myös kääntäjille ja kustantamoille, jotka voivat nähdä laadukkaiden käännöstöiden ja monipuolisen tarjonnan merkityksen lukijakunnan kasvattamisessa. Myös aiheesta kiinnostuneet tutkijat voivat hyötyä tästä tutkimuksesta.</p> |  |
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# 1. INTRODUCTION

Reading has been an important, pleasurable, and useful activity for people all around the world for a long time. Holden (2004) sees reading as a creative process, debunking the thought of reading simply being an act of passive consumption of the material. Holden (2004, p. 21) corroborates his statement by stating that “no two people read the same text in the same way”. There are always values, views, and expectations that each reader brings with them to the act of reading and all of these aspects will affect the creative process of reading. The reader takes what the writer gives and then makes it their own with what they already have (Holden, 2004, p. 22).

Reading can also be a way to learn a language through comprehensible input. This receives support from theories such as Krashen’s (e.g. 1989) input hypothesis that prioritises the importance of comprehensible input (Yamashita 2013). Yamashita (2013, p. 249) suggests that Krashen’s theory is a strong argument for the importance of comprehensible input, which reading is, to improve various aspects of foreign language acquisition, such as vocabulary, grammar, spelling, and other linguistic skills. Krashen’s (e.g. 1989) input hypothesis assumes that language can be acquired through understanding messages. According to Krashen (e.g. 1989), comprehensible input is a crucial part of language acquisition. Kazemi (2021, p. 125) also agrees that pleasure reading is a useful way to acquire a language via a stress-free activity where language is acquired subconsciously without needing to specifically focus on the act of learning.

The present thesis explores the interwoven phenomena of pleasure reading, language choices, and language competence improvement. This study sheds light on the little explored area of pleasure reading in a foreign language that occurs outside of an academic context and is not necessarily specifically done for language acquisition purposes. The target group is a group of university students who have a high level of English proficiency and thus this study enlightens the area of experienced benefits of pleasure reading in a foreign language that one is already highly proficient in. Another aspect of the present study that is rarely studied are the reasons behind choosing to read in a foreign language as opposed to in one’s native language and what the experienced differences are between reading in English and in Finnish. Such a study has also not been executed in Finland and with Finnish university English students, thus the current study is aiming to bring more knowledge to the area of foreign language pleasure reading from another part of the world.

The overall aim of this study is to examine the experiences of English language university students regarding pleasure reading in English and in Finnish. The study also aims to discover in what ways

the students find pleasure reading to be beneficial for language competence improvement, what the differences are between pleasure reading in English as opposed to Finnish, and what the reasons are behind the students' choices to read in English and in Finnish.

The present thesis is divided into five sections. The following section, section 2, of the thesis introduces the background, previous research, and relevant concepts related to the study at hand. In section 3, the present study is discussed in more detail. The research aims, research questions, data, and methods are presented in that section. Section 4 comprises of the analysis and the discussion. There the results of the questionnaire are presented and analysed, and the findings are connected to previously existing research. Lastly, section 5 of the thesis is the conclusion where final conclusions are made, and possible future research is discussed.

## 2. BACKGROUND

This section discusses the previous research and literature on the topic of the present study. The section explores the relevant concepts of pleasure reading, pleasure reading and language acquisition, reading motivation, and making language choices for reading.

### 2.1 Pleasure reading

Clark and Rumbold (2006, p. 6) define pleasure reading as reading that one does on their own volition, typically with materials of their own choice at a preferable time and place, anticipating the satisfaction that they get from the act of reading itself. It is also possible that one is requested to read something for a certain purpose but if the reader wants to continue reading the material because they are personally interested and enjoy it, it becomes pleasure reading (Clark & Rumbold, 2006, p. 6). Pleasure reading is sometimes also referred to as extensive reading, reading for enjoyment, book flood, leisure reading, sustained silent reading, independent reading, lucid reading, or free voluntary reading (Yamashita, 2013, p. 248; Clark & Rumbold, 2006; Cullinan, 2000; Nell, 1988).

At this point in time, it is widely accepted that pleasure reading and reading in general are beneficial for improving one's language skills. Reading has also been proven to be beneficial for people in general. For example, Beglar et al. (2012, p. 696) conducted a study on the impact of pleasure reading on 19–20-year-old Japanese English as a Foreign language (EFL) learners' reading rates, and their main findings were that "self-selected pleasure reading that is roughly tuned to the learners' current reading proficiency level is an effective means for developing higher reading rates with high levels of comprehension". In addition, there is a plethora of research to suggest that pleasure reading is beneficial for foreign language reading comprehension (e.g. Bell, 2001; Yamashita, 2008; Kazemi, 2021), reading rate (e.g. Beglar et al., 2012; Bell, 2001), grammar (e.g. Pigada & Schmitt, 2006; Yang, 2001), general second language proficiency (e.g. Iwahori, 2008; Mason & Krashen, 1997), and vocabulary acquisition (e.g. Lao & Krashen, 2000; Horst, 2005). In Cho and Krashen's (1994) study on four immigrants in the United States, who were asked to read for pleasure in their free time for several months, it is also found that pleasure reading can increase oral proficiency as well as interest and positive attitudes towards reading. In addition, Whitten et al. (2019, p. 50) suggest that pleasure reading has a positive influence on grammar, vocabulary, and reading competence. According to Krashen (1989), reading is beneficial in improving one's competence in vocabulary and spelling. They also find that, in addition to first language learners, second language learners can acquire vocabulary by reading as well. Krashen also emphasises that this can be done with so called

“authentic” texts. Thus, it is evident that pleasure reading has been proven to be beneficial for language learning as well as other literacy skills.

Another beneficial aspect of pleasure reading is the aspect of choice and autonomy, which makes it motivating and encouraging for learners. Yamashita (2013, p. 257) states that the voluntary choice of books can be helpful in using the learner’s personal interests to combat the linguistic difficulties involved in foreign language reading. This means that if the learner is interested enough in the book, which one could assume could be the case with a freely chosen book, it would make it so that the interest in the topic of the book would be higher than the worry about it being too challenging to read in a foreign language, thus resulting in the act of reading, despite the foreign language. Judge (2011) conducted a study on Japanese high school students who were avid readers and, in their study, they found the readers to have some common characteristics, one of which was the appreciation of reading autonomy, meaning the free choice of books. Clark and Rumbold (2006, p. 21) also emphasise the positive impact of free choice in their article. Krashen (1993, as cited in Clark and Rumbold, 2006, p. 21) suggests that free choice in pleasure reading can lead to more reading, greater language and literacy development, and an increase in effort and learning. Holden (2004, p. 40) also suggests that “motivation can be improved through people feeling in control of things and from their gaining a sense of achievement”. This statement supports the idea that having free choice and being in full control of one’s reading material, as well as the time and place of reading, has a positive impact on reading motivation.

## **2.2 Pleasure reading and language acquisition**

Even though the benefits of pleasure reading have been widely discussed and accepted, a lot of the previous research on pleasure reading has focused on the attitudes and motivation for reading and language learning and the context of pleasure reading in a classroom environment as opposed to in one’s free time. For example, Daskalovska and Dimova (2012) mainly discussed the importance of literature in a language learning classroom from an educational point of view. Beglar et al.’s (2012) study on the other hand focused merely on the effects of pleasure reading on English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students’ reading rate development. The pleasure reading in their study took place in dedicated reading classes but they point out that in addition to the in-class reading, the participants in the pleasure reading groups also read for pleasure outside of class. However, this out-of-class reading was monitored and the participants had to submit mandatory reports on all the books they had read, which could take away from the pleasure aspect of this reading experience. Krashen (1989)

also states that light, stress-free pleasure reading of large quantities, for which the learners are not held accountable for, results in vocabulary growth and overall language competence improvement. This would suggest that having to write reports for school on every book one reads might not be quite as pleasurable and constructive. Yamashita's (2013) study on Japanese EFL university students focused on the effect of pleasure reading on second language reading attitudes and motivation. The reading in their study happened also both in-class and out-of-class. Furthermore, in this study as well, the participants had to submit a report for each book they had read and that was a requirement for the students to obtain their credits.

Daskalovska and Dimova (2012) advocate for the use of authentic texts and materials in language learning classrooms. They discuss the importance of literature in particular, as opposed to other forms of authentic texts. Daskalovska and Dimova (2012, p. 1182) state that communication competence has long been the goal in English language learning because the learners are supposed to primarily learn how to communicate through the language. They suggest that communication competence consists of grammatical, sociolinguistic, and strategic competence. This kind of language learning, however, will result in the learners having only a limited competence of language. The learners are only able to convey meanings in a simple form with barely any ability to include expressive language with attitude, different shades of meaning, a variety of synonyms, and varying amounts of intensity (Daskalovska & Dimova, 2012, pp. 1182-1183). Daskalovska and Dimova (2012, pp. 1182-1183) find that learners are usually given content that mainly includes language for transactional purposes, such as newspaper articles, letters, or advertisements. Even though they are authentic materials, they only have simple, explicit meanings, with nothing to creatively decipher. They suggest that learners should instead be given interesting, meaningful, and exciting content that they can get emotionally and creatively involved with, that includes figurative language and implicit meanings. With this latter description they are referring to literature.

In classrooms, learners are given content, such as foreign language textbooks, in which the language is referential which means "language which communicates on only one level, usually in terms of information being sought or given, or of a social situation being handled" (McRae, 1991, p. 3, as cited in Daskalovska & Dimova, 2012, p. 1183). Thus, they gain a limited competence of language by only knowing the referential function of language and barely at all the expressive function of language (Donnerstag 1996, as cited in Daskalovska & Dimova, 2012, p. 1182). The expressive function, as well as the referential function, are two of the language functions according to Jakobson's functions of language model (Manoliu, 2017, p. 58). The expressive function refers to the way in which the reader understands and interprets the writer's emotions through the text and the ways in which the



writer chooses to express these emotions. The reader may or may not interpret these emotions in the way that the writer intended. (Manoliu, 2017, p. 58). This is the aspect, which Daskalovska and Dimova (2012) suggest is missing in other kinds of texts outside of literature, and this is why they advocate for literature to be used in the language classrooms to help the learners get a more comprehensive understanding of the language.

Ro and Chen (2014) are one of the fewer people to have studied second language reading and language learning in a non-academic context with a group of adults. They discuss second language reading and how, in addition to motivation, a positive attitude is another important factor in learners wanting to implement reading literature to their language learning. In Ro and Chen's (2014) study on a group of non-academic 21–63-year-old English as a Second Language (ESL) students on their attitudes towards pleasure reading in English, they found that the most common reasons for the participants' pleasure reading in English were that they found it useful and personally rewarding. The most common reason to not read for the participants was lack of time. Only a few people in the study indicated "no desire to read in English" as a reason limiting their pleasure reading. Ro and Chen's (2014) study is the most similar to the present study from all the studies researched for this thesis. This is because they too examined adult students' pleasure reading in a non-academic context and looked for reasons for the students' pleasure reading in English.

## **2.3 Motivation and choice of reading language**

Motivation is an important aspect to consider when thinking about the use of pleasure reading in language learning. Ro and Chen (2014) agree that motivation is possibly the most important aspect to language learning and to reading in a foreign language to better one's language competence. As Daskalovska and Dimova (2012) mentioned, literature is something that the learners can better get motivated by to learn the language as opposed to content such as newspaper articles, letters, or advertisements. Beglar et al. (2012, p. 692) assume that motivation is a requirement for learners to read large amounts of text, which is typical in pleasure reading. Previous research has also illustrated that foreign language learners often perceive pleasure reading to be motivating (e.g. Al-Homoud & Schmitt, 2009; Takase, 2007). This reveals a great reason to implement literature in language learning: maintaining and possibly increasing motivation towards language learning. It seems as though motivation is important in order to read in a foreign language but at the same time foreign language reading increases motivation for more reading and foreign language learning. Yamashita (2013, p.

258) supports this idea by hypothesising that the positive feelings as a result of pleasure reading may lead to the decision to read more and thus possibly creating “a virtuous circle of reading”.

Motivation can be divided into two different kinds of motivation: intrinsic motivation and extrinsic motivation. According to Ryan and Deci (2000, pp. 69-71), intrinsic motivation refers to engaging in an activity for the pleasure and satisfaction one gains from the activity itself. An example of intrinsic motivation could thus be reading for the sake of gaining enjoyment from the act of reading. They also define extrinsic motivation as doing something in order to gain something external or as a response to external pressure. For example, if a language learner was to engage in pleasure reading because they feel like it will help them better their language skills and thus get better grades on their language course, getting better grades would be the extrinsic motivator.

It has been shown in previous studies that the impact of intrinsic motivation seems to often be a stronger indicator for reading, and specifically pleasure reading, than extrinsic motivation (e.g. Wigfield & Guthrie, 1997; Wang & Guthrie, 2004). In Clark and Rumbold (2006, p. 19), it is also suggested that reading for extrinsic reasons may less likely produce enjoyment for the reader. This would suggest that pleasure reading could be more probable when one has intrinsic motivation for reading. However, neither type of motivation can be regarded as good or bad. As a matter of fact, according to Lepper and Henderlong (2000, as cited in Clark and Rumbold, 2006, p. 19) as well as Guthrie and Alvermann (1999, as cited in Clark and Rumbold, 2006, p. 19) it is showcased that reading can often be motivated by both intrinsic and extrinsic aspects, rather than merely one or the other. Clark and Rumbold (2006, p. 19) also further suggest that extrinsic motivation could be used to garner intrinsic motivation.

As has now been established, there are multiple benefits in reading in a foreign language regarding language learning, motivation, and literacy skills. One point remains to be discussed in regard to the present study: the reasons people choose to read in English as opposed to one’s native language. In Ro and Chen’s (2014) study, they studied the motivation and attitudes of ESL students regarding pleasure reading in English. In this study, multiple reasons for reading in English came up. The most frequently occurring reason was “finding reading in English useful” which had been chosen by 29,8% of the participants and had been categorised by Ro and Chen as an extrinsically motivated reason. The second most frequently occurring reason was “finding reading in English personally rewarding” which had been chosen by 26,4% of the participants and had been categorised as an intrinsically motivated reason. The reason next in line was “finding reading in English fun” (17,8%) categorised as an intrinsic reason. The next reason was “easy access to English books” (12,7%) categorised as an extrinsic reason, and the last specifically recognised reason was “confidence in reading English”

(10,4%) which was categorised as an intrinsic reason. Other reasons that came up in their study outside of the ones given, included reasons such as: “I read because I want to learn English”, “because I want to improve my reading comprehension”, and “because my husband reads”. In the study, lack of time was the most common reason for the participants to not engage in pleasure reading. Another one that also came up was “no access to English books”. This should not necessarily be an issue in Finland, since Finland tends to get, increasingly so nowadays, many books in English before the Finnish translations get out into the bookstores and libraries.

Lieska (2022, p. 1) also found that at least in the circles of the Bookstagram community, which is a community of users on Instagram whose accounts are centred around literature and reading, the preferred language to read in is English instead of one’s native language. Lieska’s (2022) study was about native Finnish speakers’ perceptions of learning English through literature and participation in the Bookstagram community. Their study also found some reasons for why the participants wanted to read in English as opposed to their native language. These reasons included the lack of a Finnish translation of a book and wanting to read a book in its original language to get a more accurate understanding of it.

It is now established that pleasure reading is highly beneficial in second language acquisition, and aspects such as choice and autonomy make pleasure reading motivating and pleasurable. Additionally, motivation is important in language acquisition and reading in a foreign language. It is also found that literature as a form of authentic text is an important addition to more traditional language learning textbooks. It is known now that there can be multiple varying reasons for language learners to want to read in a foreign language such as English. Furthermore, the present study examines these themes from a more concrete point of view by presenting and analysing the personal experiences of English language university students.

### **3. PRESENT STUDY**

This section of the thesis focuses on the aims and foci of the present study, as well as introducing the data, the research questions, and the target group. This section also goes through the data collection method and the data analysis method chosen, as well as the ethical considerations of the present study.

#### **3.1 Research aims**

The present study examines the experiences of English language university students regarding pleasure reading in English and in Finnish. The study also aims to discover in what ways the students find pleasure reading to be beneficial for language competence improvement, and what the differences are between pleasure reading in English as opposed to in Finnish.

The research questions of the present study are:

1. According to the experiences and views of English language students, how do they find pleasure reading in English as opposed to in Finnish?
2. In what ways do the students perceive pleasure reading to affect their language competence?
3. According to the English students, what reasons are behind the choice of language they decide to read literature in?

These are the research questions because with these questions, the most amount of information about the phenomenon of pleasure reading in English and in Finnish within English language students can be gathered. The study focuses on the experiences and views of the target group to gain applicable answers to the research questions.

#### **3.2 Data**

The target group of the study is English students, both major students and minor students, from the University of Jyväskylä. As a prerequisite to taking part in this study, the respondents were asked to confirm that Finnish is their native language or one of their native languages. The final number of respondents that took part in the questionnaire is 51.

The data gathered for this study report on the experiences and views of the participants in the target group. The data were gathered via an online questionnaire made using Webropol. This specific data collection method was chosen for various reasons. First of all, by using a questionnaire, it is possible

to get answers from a larger number of respondents than by doing face-to-face interviews, and face-to-face interaction is not necessary for the purposes of this study (Denscombe, 2014, p. 167). The respondents can also be expected to be able to read and understand the questions in the questionnaire on their own from the instructions in the questionnaire alone (Denscombe, 2014, p. 167). This method was chosen also because the information, that is required for the present study, is considered fairly straightforward and the topic of the study is uncontroversial, which allows for full and honest answers from the respondents (Denscombe, 2014, pp. 166-167). Thus, a questionnaire is a more suitable data collection method for the study instead of an interview or other similar methods. In this way, it is possible to gain standardized data from the identical questions in the questionnaire, and thus it makes it possible to spot potential similarities, differences, and trends in the research data. This way it is also feasible to make some more generalized assessments and conclusions about the topic in the end.

The questionnaire consisted in its entirety of 11 Likert scale closed questions and three open ended questions. The questions in the questionnaire included many aspects of the phenomenon at hand such as the importance of factors such as the original language of a piece of literature or the genre of it on the students' choice of language, the potential preference of using one's native language in pleasure reading, the reasons behind liking to read in a specific language as opposed to the other, and if the respondents find pleasure reading to be helpful in improving various different language skills.

### **3.3 Method of analysis**

The present study is a qualitative one. The data analysis method for this thesis is qualitative content analysis. Content analysis is a scientific research technique that provides new insights and increases a researcher's comprehension of a particular phenomenon (Krippendorff, 2019, p. 24). The text or other meaningful matter that can be used as data for content analysis has to "speak to someone about phenomena outside of what can be sensed or observed" (Krippendorff, 2019, pp. 24-25). In the case of the present study, the gathered data are in the form of text that describes the phenomenon of English students' pleasure reading, thus showcasing that the study benefits from the use of content analysis as the analysis method. Content analysis has an important quality of allowing the researcher to analyse the data in a systematic manner by emphasising the importance of categorisation (Denscombe, 2014, pp. 283-284). This sort of categorisation can be seen in the analysis section of the thesis where categorisation is used to help present and analyse the results of the questionnaire.

### **3.4 Ethical considerations**

The questionnaire for the present study was made completely anonymous, and even the researcher is not able to know the identities of any of the respondents. This is to ensure the anonymity and privacy of the respondents so that they can feel confident in answering the questions honestly and not having to worry about being recognised by anyone. The questionnaire did not ask for any personal information from the respondents, since this was not necessary for the present study. Some direct quotes from the open-ended answers are used in this thesis, which has been mentioned in the privacy notice that all participants have had access to prior to agreeing to participate in this study.

## 4. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents and examines the results of the questionnaire. The section is organised into three subsections according to the three research questions of the study. The answers of the respondents are analysed and used to answer the research questions. Discussion between the findings and previous research is also presented in this section.

### 4.1 English students' experiences and views on pleasure reading in English and in Finnish

To find out the general views of the target group regarding pleasure reading in English and in Finnish, the students were first asked about their preferences to reading in each language and the frequency that they read in each language in their free time.

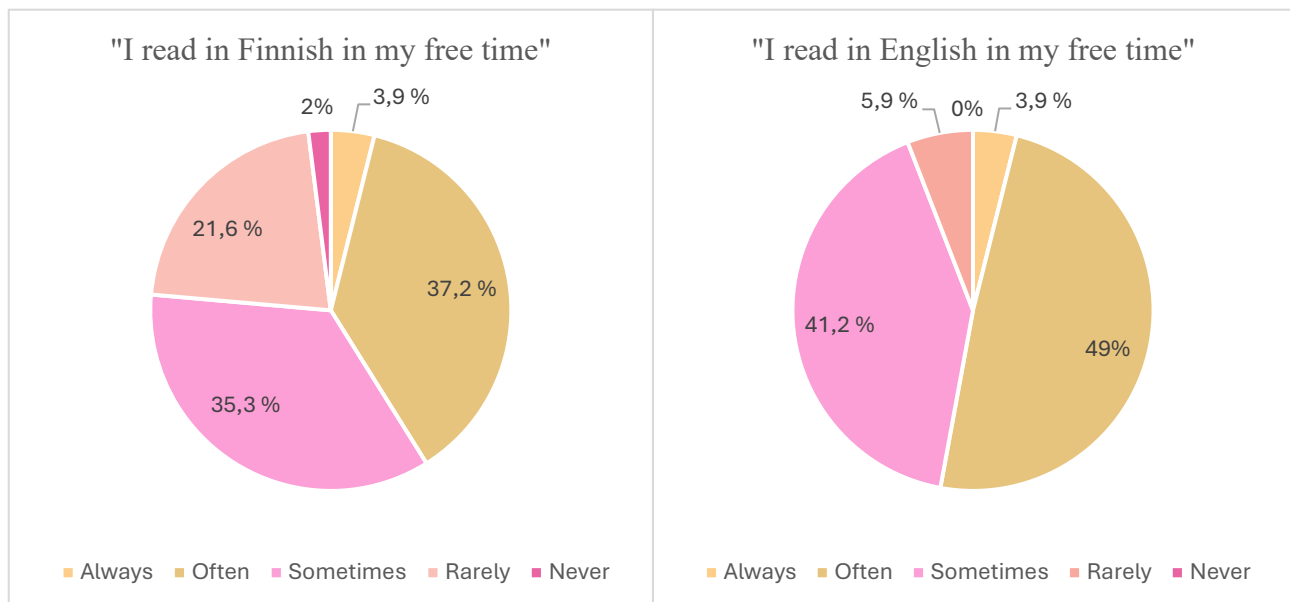


Figure 2: Questionnaire statement "I read in Finnish in my free time"

Figure 1: Questionnaire statement "I read in English in my free time"

The data show that the respondents read both in Finnish and in English, but English is chosen as the reading language more often. This can be seen from two of the closed questions in the questionnaire (see Figures 1 and 2). To the statement "I read in Finnish in my free time", 41,1% of the respondents answered either often or always, 35,3% answered sometimes, and 23,6% answered rarely or never. Whereas to the statement "I read in English in my free time", 52,9% of the respondents answered often or always, 41,2% answered sometimes, and only 5,9% of the respondents answered rarely whereas there were no responses for never. In addition, English is the majority's preferred language

to read in. This can be seen from two other closed questions in the questionnaire (see Figures 3 and 4). To the statement “I prefer to read in Finnish in my free time the most”, 23,5% of the respondents answered agree or strongly agree, 25,5% of the respondents answered neither agree nor disagree, and more than half of the respondents (51%) answered either disagree or strongly disagree. To the statement “I prefer to read in English in my free time the most”, 60,8% of the respondents answered agree or strongly agree, 23,5% of them answered neither agree nor disagree, and only 15,7% of them answered that they disagree or strongly disagree. This shows that a majority of the target group prefers to read in English over reading in Finnish when they have the choice.

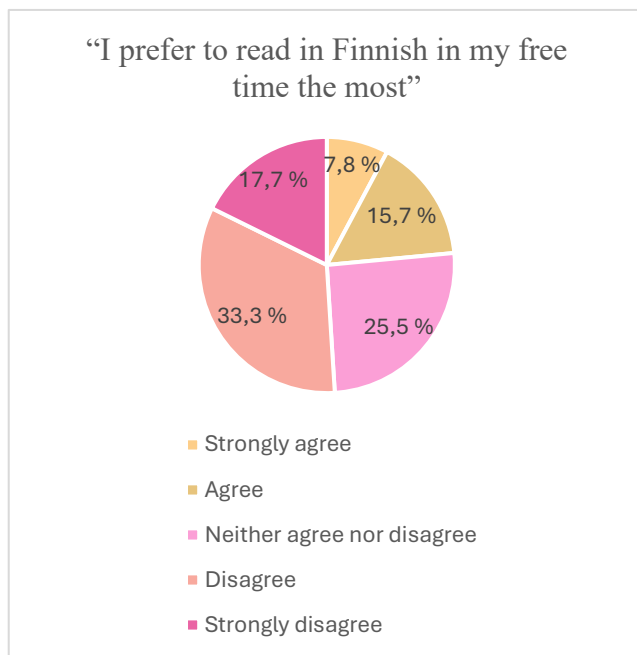


Figure 4: Questionnaire statement “I prefer to read in Finnish in my free time the most”

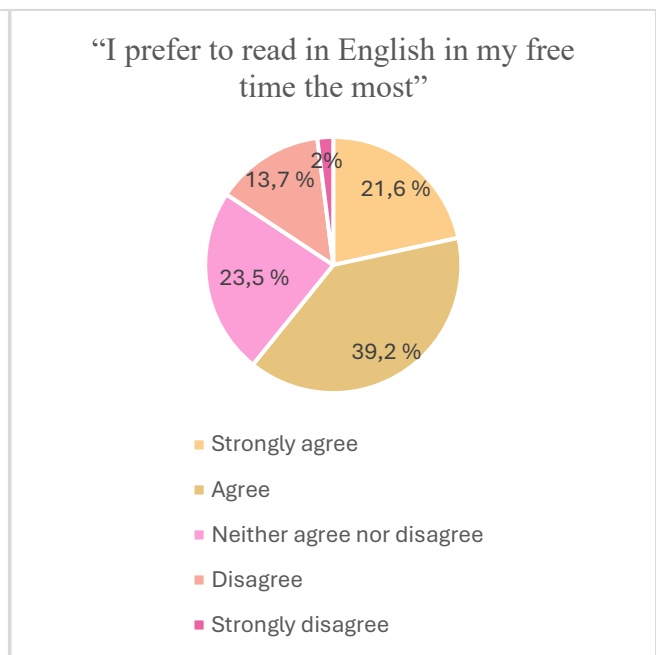


Figure 3: Questionnaire statement “I prefer to read in English in my free time the most”

This is an interesting finding, and it is probable that the high level of English of the participants, that would be expected from university level English students, could have an effect on this result. Lieska (2022) also had a similar finding within the Bookstagram community in which the English language was considered a more preferable language to read in instead of one’s native language. In Lieska (2022, p. 11) it is also pointed out that a participant in their study found that since becoming more proficient in the English language, the experience of reading does not differ as much anymore between English and the native language Finnish. This would also support the answers in the study as it indicates that a higher level of English fluency makes it so that reading in English is not much more difficult or a worse option than reading in one’s native language. In Beglar et al. (2012) it is expressed that reading in an arduous and slow manner can reduce motivation to read, since reading



then requires a lot of effort. This also supports the idea that a reader may be more motivated to read in whichever language feels easy and comfortable enough. Thus, if one has a high level of fluency in English as a foreign language, they are more likely to read in English as opposed to someone not as proficient in it. However, this does not completely explain why the students of the present study so strongly prefer to read in English as opposed to Finnish.

In an open-ended question, the students were asked to tell why they like to read in English and why in Finnish. The most common aspect that occurred the most across all the open-ended answers to liking to read in English was preferring to read in the original language of the book, wanting to avoid clumsy or rigid translations and not wanting to miss the original authentic meanings of the English language text. These are grouped together, since the same sentiment came up in dozens of answers in all these ways. Ultimately, they all refer to the same thing. Other frequent answers in favour of reading in English were wanting to maintain or better one's English language skills, one's personal preference towards the English language or towards reading in a foreign language, better availability of English literature as well as finding the English language to be beautiful, more descriptive, and fluent. It was surprising that maintaining or bettering one's English skills was not quite as frequently mentioned as one could have thought. It is possible that this could also be explained partly because of the high level of English of the participants. An interesting intrinsically motivated reason for reading in English that also arose a couple of times in the questionnaire answers was feeling proud and happy that one has acquired such competence in a foreign language that one is able to read literature in it. It is possible to identify this reason as intrinsic because Ryan and Deci (2000, pp. 69-71) defined intrinsic motivation as doing an activity because one gets enjoyment or pleasure from doing the act itself and not for example to gain something separate, such as better grades or a prize (1).

(1) "Reading in English and in other foreign languages gives a pleasant feeling of being able to be proud about having learned another language so well, that one can read and understand it fluently."

*"Englanniksi ja muilla vierailta kielillä lukemisesta tulee mukava tunne, että voi olla ylpeä siitä, että on oppinut toista kieltä niin hyvin, että voi lukea ja ymmärtää sitä sujuvasti."*

On the other hand, the most common and frequently occurring reason for liking to read in Finnish was that reading in Finnish is slightly easier and faster, and it does not require quite as much brainpower or effort to read in. This is understandable, since Finnish is their native language after all. Another semi-frequently mentioned reason was that the Finnish language is beautiful and nuanced. Nevertheless, it is clear that the participants of the study seem to generally have more reasons to want

to read in English as opposed to Finnish, thus giving a plausible explanation for why it is apparent in this study that a larger part of the participants prefer to pleasure read in English (2).

(2) “Reading in Finnish is sort of a ‘switch off your brain’ kind of activity and that is why it is nice”

*”Suomeksi lukeminen on sellaista ‘aivot narikkaan’ tekemistä, ja se on siksi mukavaa.”*

In another open-ended question, the respondents were asked to explain what differences they find or experience reading in English compared to reading in Finnish and vice versa. The most common difference that the students stated was that reading in English is often slightly slower and more challenging or that reading in Finnish is slightly faster and easier. This corresponds with the answers in the previous paragraph. Furthermore, almost a similar number of answers stated that there simply is not that much of a difference. This was quite an interesting finding but it corresponds with the high level of English of the participants. Thus, they would not necessarily find it much different to read in a highly proficient foreign language as opposed to their native language.

The next most frequently occurring point that arose was encountering more unknown vocabulary when reading in English as opposed to knowing all the words when reading in Finnish. Another fairly frequent one was feeling different about certain word choices, phrases, and expressions in the different languages or having different expectations of the language use in general in the languages. A couple of answers relating to this stated that they feel as though they have higher expectations from the language used in Finnish language texts, and they feel a bit more lenient and not as critical about the language when the text is in English. Final common answer that arose was finding it easier or harder to get immersed in the story in a language. With this one, others found it easier to get immersed when reading in English and others when reading in Finnish. Something that is also worth noting in the answers was that different points were made regarding genres of literature and how the difference in reading between one language and the other for some might simply be the genre that they read in. However, there did not seem to be a general consensus on which genres were preferred in which language, since this seemed to be more of a personal preference and for example, one person specifically reads fantasy in English whereas another, on the contrary, reads fantasy in Finnish (3).

(3) “In Finnish, I like to read e.g. fantasy literature because they often feel more challenging to read in English because of the vocabulary.”

*”Suomeksi tykkään lukea esim. Fantasiakirjallisuutta, koska ne tuntuvat usein haastavammilta lukea englanniksi sanaston vuoksi.”*

## 4.2 Pleasure reading in a foreign language as a means of improving language competence

To examine the potential benefits of pleasure reading to language competence, the respondents were asked in the questionnaire if they find pleasure reading to help improve their English language skills and if they intentionally use pleasure reading as a tool for bettering their language competence.

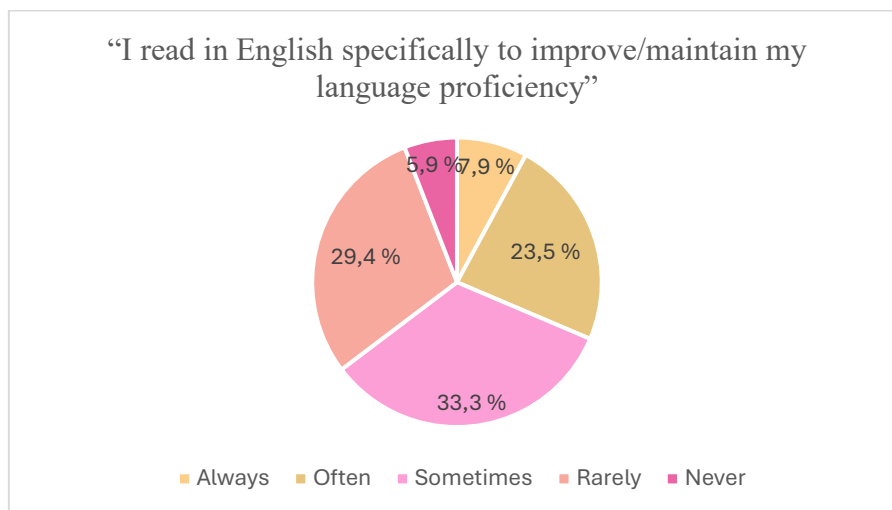


Figure 5: Questionnaire statement: “I read in English specifically to improve/maintain my language proficiency”

According to the data, the respondents are not too often reading to specifically improve or better their language skills (see Figure 5). 7,9% of the respondents answered always to the statement “I read in English specifically to improve/maintain my language proficiency”. 23,5% answered often, 33,3% answered sometimes, 29,4% answered rarely, and 5,9% answered never. It is worth noting, however, that in some of the open-ended question answers, the participants mentioned that they do appreciate how reading in English can help uphold their language competence. Thus, it is possible that while the participants do not read specifically to improve or maintain their English language skills, they still recognise it as a positive perk (4).

(4) “Reading in English sort of passively improves one’s language proficiency; it kind of feels like one is doing something for the benefit of the English studies”

*”Englanniksi lukeminen myös ikään kuin passiivisesti kehittää kielitaitoa; tuntuu tavallaan, että tekee jotain englannin opintojen hyväksi.”*

Something interesting that came up in a couple of answers to an open-ended question was wanting to read more in Finnish as well to uphold one’s Finnish language, get familiar with Finnish literature and also appreciating the fact that reading in Finnish would also help maintain one’s Finnish language skills. This also came up as contemplation if one’s Finnish language could suffer from mostly reading

in English. This is an understandable sentiment coming from a couple of the students, since a large number of them prefer to read in English in their free time, and as English language students, their studies tend to be in English a lot of the times as well. Thus, the use of Finnish, especially reading extensively in it, can be rare and thus some of the respondents might at least have to consider upholding one's broad native vocabulary or reading fluency by pleasure reading in Finnish. However, this is clearly still a minority of the participants who share this sentiment (5).

(5) "I like to maintain (my) language proficiency by reading in English, although sometimes I contemplate if my Finnish language suffers from it."

*"Tykkään ylläpitää kielitaitoa lukemalla englanniksi, vaikka välillä mietin kärsiikö suomenkieleni siitä."*

Out of all the different language skills, the respondents find that their reading comprehension, vocabulary, and reading fluency are improved most of the time when they read in English. Thus, meaning that even when the respondents are not necessarily reading solely or specifically to improve their language skills, they still feel like these language skills are improving while reading. The consensus is that grammar is not as much improved by reading. However, grammar is mentioned in various studies to also benefit from pleasure reading (e.g. Pigada & Schmitt, 2006; Yang, 2001). It is possible, as Halliday-Wynes and Beddie (2009, p. 3) suggest that informal learning, such as learning happening when pleasure reading, might not always be recognised by the individual themselves. Lieska (2022, p. 13, citing Benson, 2011; Livingstone, 2006) also corroborates this by stating that "as informal learning is seldom measured due to its elusive nature, one might find it challenging to verbalize what one has learned based solely on one's personal perceptions". Grammar knowledge could be something that is more difficult to recognise happening when one is not learning grammar rules from a grammar book and checking a box each time they feel a certain grammar rule has been learned. Thus, it is possible that one might easily notice the effects of knowing the meaning of a new word or being able to read faster and easier while still understanding the meaning of everything. However, it might not be as easy for the students to notice if they have learned some grammatical aspects of the English language while simply reading.

### **4.3 Reasons for the students' language choices**

To understand how the respondents make the decisions on which language to read in in their free time, the respondents were asked to evaluate what factors play a role in the language choices that they

make and to list out any other factors that they consider before choosing the language of the literature they are about to consume.

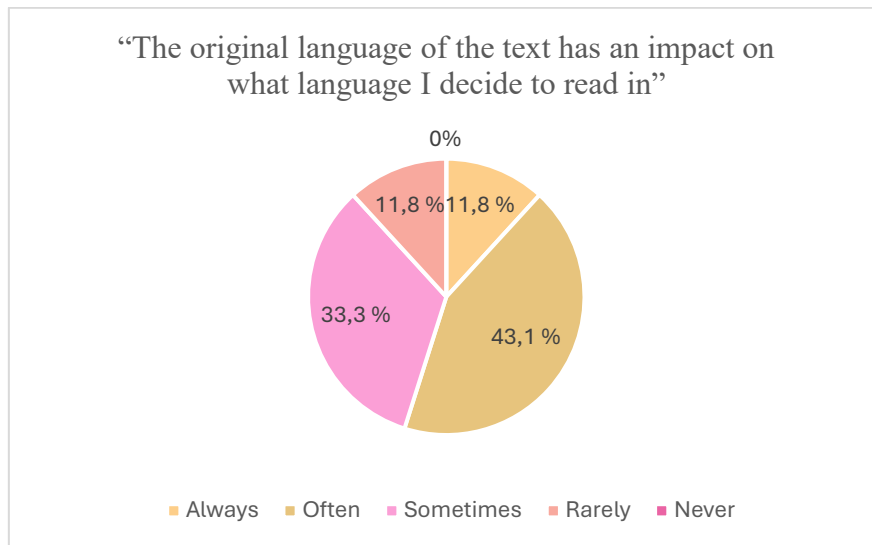


Figure 6: Questionnaire statement “The original language of the text has an impact on what language I decide to read in”  
As seen from the data, the majority of the respondents seem to think that the original language of what they are reading has an impact on how they choose the language they read in. This can be seen from a closed question in the present questionnaire (see Figure 6). 11,8% of the respondents answered always to the statement “The original language of the text has an impact on what language I decide to read in”, 43,1% of the respondents answered often, 33,3% of them answered sometimes, 11,8% of them answered rarely and not one person answered never. This shows that the respondents care about the original language of the text. A considerably smaller number of people consider the genre of the text to be a factor in choosing the language they read in; however, it is still a factor to many (see Figure 7). Only 5,9% of the respondents answered always to the statement “The genre of the text has an impact on what language I decide to read in”. 29,4% answered often, 35,3% answered sometimes, 17,6% of them answered rarely, and 11,8% of them answered never.

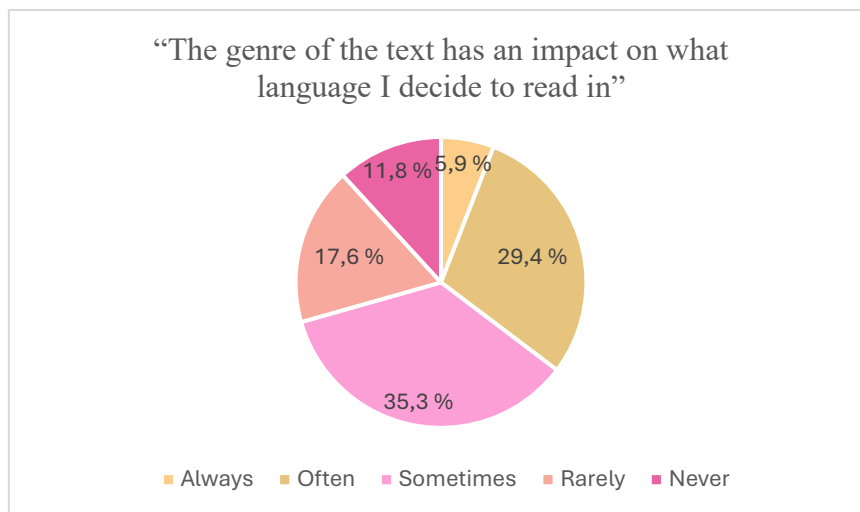


Figure 7: Questionnaire statement “The genre of the text has an impact on what language I decide to read in”

In the final open-ended question of the questionnaire, the respondents were asked to list the aspects that impact their decision making when they decide what language to read in in their free time. The most frequently occurring answer to this open-ended question was the original language of the book. The reasoning behind this answer tended to be not wanting to read a translation with the sentiment that the original version is better and does not involve the possibility of clunky or inauthentic translations. However, it also seems to be important to some that if they are able to read in the original language, they want to do so. The second almost as frequent of an answer was availability. This one is solely an extrinsic motivator for the students as can be seen from Ro and Chen’s (2014) categorisation of “easy access to English books” as an extrinsic reason for reading in English. As mentioned in Clark and Rumbold (2006), extrinsic reasons are not as often or strongly related to enjoyment in pleasure reading, and it is plausible that if one would like to read a certain book in Finnish for intrinsically motivated reasons, they would not necessarily be as happy to be having to read the book in English simply because the Finnish translation is not available. This is even apparent in one of the open-ended answers to the present questionnaire (6):

(6) “For example, I just “had to” borrow a book in Finnish from the library because that particular book could not be found in English.”

*”Esimerkiksi ”jouduin” juuri lainaamaan kirjastosta suomenkielisen kirjan, koska kyseistä kirjaa ei löytynyt englanniksi.”*

Even though in this case, the student did not necessarily seem to mind too much that their only option was to loan the book in Finnish, it is still something to consider and something that as an extrinsic motivational reason can affect in which language one reads in. Furthermore, this might result in one getting less enjoyment out of the pleasure reading as opposed to if the reason behind the language

choice was intrinsic. It is also possible that in such a case, one might feel as though they do not have the freedom of choice or autonomy over their reading experience which, as illustrated by Yamashita (2013) and Clark and Rumbold (2006), is an important factor in reading motivation.

From the answers, the overwhelming consensus was that the aspect of availability is in favour of reading in English. It was fairly surprising that this was such a prominent reason for choosing which language to read in. This would further show that many of the students feel as though their level of reading in both languages are fairly equal, since one of the biggest reasons behind one's language choice is an aspect completely removed from the language issue and is merely about whichever language the preferred book is available in the easiest and fastest or at all. In Ro and Chen (2014), it was found that one of the reasons for not pleasure reading in English, although only for a small percentage of the participants in their study, was "no access to English books". This is clearly not a problem whatsoever for the participants in the present study as a large number of the participants feel as though they have better, easier, and faster access to the original English books as opposed to the Finnish translations that tend to come about much later if at all (7 and 8).

(7) "Finland is a small country and a lot of books only get published if they are commercial enough. You can access more marginalised literature in English."

*"Suomi on pieni maa, ja monet kirjat kustannetaan vain jos ne ovat tarpeeksi kaupallisia. Englanninkielisenä on saatavilla marginaalisempaa kirjallisuutta."*

(8) "There is considerably more literature available in English, so it is easier to find works that interest me."

*"Englanniksi kirjallisuutta on saatavilla huomattavasti enemmän, joten on helpompi löytää teoksia, jotka kiinnostavat minua."*

Another reason behind choosing the reading language is the genre of the text. The participants have varying opinions on which genre they prefer to read in which language but as mentioned before, some of them prefer to for example read fantasy in English, some in Finnish. In the same way, there were mixed views on reading non-fiction, some prefer to read it in English and some in Finnish. Other reasons behind choosing which language to read in that came up multiple times were the feeling or "vibe" at that moment, one's personal preference to a language in general, and the level of difficulty of the book or the language in it. The last one was often in reference to the language being too complicated, old, or the book being extremely lengthy. In these cases, the participants preferred to read in Finnish, as has been established, many of the participants find reading in Finnish to be slightly easier and faster.

## 5. CONCLUSION

The aim of the present study was to investigate the views and experiences of English language students at the University of Jyväskylä regarding pleasure reading in English and in Finnish. The data for this study were collected by conducting a questionnaire, in which the respondents answered both multiple-choice questions and open-ended questions. The analysis method used to analyse the answers to the questionnaire in this study was qualitative content analysis.

The study sought answers to three research questions, of which the first one aimed to find out the general views of the respondents regarding pleasure reading in English and in Finnish. As a response to this research question, the study showed that the respondents read in both English and Finnish in their free time, but English is chosen as the language for reading more often, and it is also the preferred language for the respondents to read in when they have the choice. The study also revealed various reasons behind their preference in reading in English and in Finnish. The most common factors for liking to read in English were wanting to read in the original language of the book or avoiding translated works, one's personal preference towards the English language or towards reading in a foreign language, better availability of English literature, as well as finding the English language to be beautiful, more descriptive, and fluent. On the other hand, the factors that commonly came up when asked for the reasons for liking to read in Finnish were that reading in Finnish is slightly easier and faster, it does not require quite as much brainpower or effort to read in, and that Finnish is a beautiful and nuanced language. When asked about the differences between reading in these two languages, the most common answer was that reading in English can be slower and more challenging or that reading in Finnish is slightly faster and easier. Another frequent answer was that there is not much of a difference according to the students.

The second research question of the present study aimed to find out how the respondents feel that pleasure reading in English aids in improving their English language competence. The answers from the respondents regarding if they read in English specifically to improve their language skills were quite varied. The views of the respondents regarding this question were fairly equally divided. However, most respondents agreed to statements regarding different skills that reading in English in their free time improves. Out of all the different language skills, the respondents found that their reading comprehension, vocabulary, and reading fluency are improved most of the time when they read in English. The consensus is that grammar is not as much improved with pleasure reading.

The third and final research question of the present study set out to find out the factors behind the students' language choices in pleasure reading. A majority of the respondents think that the original



language of what they are reading has an impact on their choice of language to read in. Less respondents consider the genre of the text to be a factor in choosing the language they read in; however, it is still a factor to many. Other factors that affect the language choice came up from the answers to an open-ended question. These factors include the availability of literature in the languages, the feeling of the reader at that moment, general preference for a certain language, and the level of challenge or ease of the text.

The present study offers valuable insight into the English language students' pleasure reading habits, language choices, preferences, and the improvement of their language competence by reading. As language teaching evolves, pleasure reading could be something to look into in order to encourage the learners to learn the language even in their free time by reading literature that they actually enjoy. Translators and book publishers can also see here the importance of a great translation, and they could focus on producing quality translations with natural sounding and descriptive language to get more people to steer towards and consume the translated works and shift away from the idea that translated works would be somehow inherently bad or clumsy.

The present study may have limitations due to the smaller sample size and also the high level of English that the participants have. However, it is still important to have research on the experiences of higher-level English as a foreign language users as well, even if it can be expected that they can have more positive experiences with the language. For future research, something interesting to examine could be the relationship between one's perceived level of English and how one sees reading in English as opposed to one's native language. It could be possible that there are differences in the perceived level of language competence between the participants who find reading in Finnish easier and faster as opposed to the participants who for example do not find it any different to read in one language or the other. It could be possible that the people who do not see a difference could personally perceive having a higher level of English skills as opposed to the other group. Furthermore, it could be interesting to know how and why exactly does the genre of literature effect on the choice of reading language. Finally, the present study shows that the students did not experience as much learning regarding grammar as opposed to the other aspects of language competence. Thus, it would be interesting to examine why this is and how difficult it is for an individual to perceive informally acquired grammar knowledge.

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