

**TEACHING ENGLISH IN FINNISH UPPER SECONDARY SCHOOLS:
How English is taught and what are the most effective ways of learning**

Bachelor's Thesis
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Tiivistelmä – Abstract <p>Tämän proseminaari-tutkielman tarkoituksena oli saada selville, millaisia opetusmenetelmiä opettajat käyttävät englannin tunneilla suomalaisissa lukioissa ja millainen opetus on oppilaiden mielestä hyödyllisintä englannin kielen oppimisessa. Lisäksi tutkimuksen tarkoituksena oli vertailla oppilaiden ja opettajien vastauksia näihin kysymyksiin. Englannin kielen käyttö on lisääntynyt paljon lyhyessä ajassa globalisoituvan yhteiskunnan seurauksena, minkä vuoksi on tärkeää saada selville, onko suomalaisissa lukioissa annettu opetus nimenomaan oppilaiden mielestä hyödyllistä ja tehokasta. Aihetta on tutkittu viimeksi Suomessa kaksikymmentä vuotta sitten ja tämän vuoksi uusi tutkimus oli tarpeellinen.</p> <p>Tutkimuksen viitekehyksenä käytettiin aiempia Suomessa tehtyjä tutkimuksia sekä muutamia ulkomailta samasta aiheesta tehtyjä tuoreempia tutkimuksia. Tämän lisäksi tukena käytettiin Lukion opetussuunnitelman perusteita sekä Eurooppalaista viitekehystä.</p> <p>Tutkimukseen osallistui 54 oppilasta ja 2 opettajaa kahdesta eri lukiosta. Aineisto kerättiin kyselylomakkeella, joka sisälsi 20 väittämää sekä yhden avoimen kysymyksen.</p> <p>Tulosten mukaan lukion englannin opettajat käyttävät opetuksessaan enemmän perinteisiä tapoja (kääntämisharjoitukset, sanakokeet, kieliopin korostus jne.) kuin innovatiivisempia ja kommunikatiivisuutta korostavia tapoja (keskusteluharjoitukset, käytännön kielitaito). Oppilaat kokivat opetuksen monipuolisuuden tärkeänä. Monet toivoivat tunneille enemmän keskusteluharjoituksia, mutta myös perinteiset tavat opettaa, kuten kääntämisharjoitukset, sanakokeet ja aineiden kirjoittaminen olivat oppilaiden mielestä hyödyllisiä englannin oppimisessa. Opettajien ja oppilaiden vastaukset erosivat hieman toisistaan. Opettajat vastasivat käyttävänsä enemmän innovatiivisia opetustapoja kun taas oppilaiden mielestä tunneilla käytettiin hieman enemmän perinteisiä tapoja opettaa englantia.</p>	
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. INTRODUCTION.....	1
2. PREVIOUS HISTORY OF THE MOST POPULAR LANGUAGE TEACHING METHODS.....	2
3. LANGUAGE TEACHING TODAY.....	4
3.1 National Core Curriculum.....	5
3.2 Common European Framework of Reference for Languages.....	6
4. PREVIOUS STUDIES ON THE POPULARITY AND USE OF DIFFERENT LANGUAGE TEACHING METHODS.....	7
5. THE PRESENT STUDY.....	9
6. METHODS.....	10
6.1 Participants.....	11
6.2 Data gathering.....	11
6.3 The method of analysis.....	12
7. RESULTS.....	13
7.1 The Likert-scale questionnaire.....	13
7.2 The open-ended question.....	17
8. DISCUSSION.....	19
8.1 The Likert-scale questionnaire.....	19
8.2 The open-ended question.....	20
9. CONCLUSION.....	21
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	24
APPENDIX: The questionnaire.....	25

1. INTRODUCTION

Languages have been taught in several different ways during the past decades. The teaching of English has been through many changes in methodology, from grammar-translation to audiolingualism and from humanistic approaches to communicative language teaching. Different strategies are used in different places and contexts and all of them have their defenders and opponents. Indeed, the demands of the outside world, the needs of the learners themselves and changing beliefs about the subject all affect the ways English is taught. (Davies 1996) However, common to all the various approaches has been the belief that the ways of teaching the method supports are better and more effective than the previous ones. Nevertheless, today language teaching methods are seen differently than earlier. Indeed, as Kumaravadivelu (1994, cited in Liu 2004) says, we are living in “the post-methods era”, in which the use of the word method is avoided and language teaching is seen more as a combination of many different strategies.

Indeed, language teaching is going through changes all the time: new strategies and techniques are invented and tested in order to find the most effective and motivative ways of teaching. The need for searching and changes in teaching styles is especially relevant in today’s global society where the role of English has become more important. Students use English in their everyday lives a lot more than they earlier used to - probably the most substantial reason for this change is the Internet. Because of this, teachers really need to think about their ways of teaching: is teaching effective and does it encourage and motivate students to actually use English outside the classroom? In addition, one question to think about is whether the skills taught in school correspond with the real needs of students or not.

The purpose of this study is to find out how English is taught in Finnish upper secondary schools. The focus is on finding out how much teachers still rely on traditional ways of teaching, which focus on writing, reading and grammar instead of communicativeness and more innovative approaches. In addition, the purpose is also to find out students’ opinions on the most effective ways of teaching English.

This paper will first define the theoretical framework of the study. First of all, the terms used in this study will be defined and the history of language teaching strategies will be shortly introduced. Secondly, the present day views on language teaching methodology are discussed by taking a closer

look on Finland's National Core Curriculum for Upper Secondary Schools and the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages. Thirdly, some previous foreign and Finnish studies made on this topic will be introduced. After this, I will move on to the present study. The research questions, participants, data and method of analysis are represented and the results will be introduced and discussed. Finally, I will conclude my study by summarizing the main findings, presenting final thoughts and giving suggestions for further study.

2. PREVIOUS HISTORY OF THE MOST POPULAR LANGUAGE TEACHING METHODS

The concept of methods has always been an essential part of language teaching: teachers and linguists have tried to find the best and most effective ways of teaching throughout the decades. Indeed, even though this study is not looking for any specific language teaching methods, it is important for language teachers to know about them. According to Richards and Rodgers (2001, cited in Liu 2004), the study of past and present teaching methods is important because:

- 1) it provides teachers with a view of how language teaching has evolved as a field; 2) teachers can adapt methods and approaches as sources of well used practice rather than prescriptions to suit their own teaching contexts and needs; and 3) they can provide teachers (especially novice teachers) with basic teaching skills with which they can expand their own teaching repertoire. (Richards and Rodgers 2001, cited in Liu 2004: 138)

Next I will briefly introduce the best known changes and innovations in language teaching in the 20th century.

One of the oldest methods used in language teaching is the Grammar-Translation Method, which has also been called the Classical Method since it was used in teaching Greek and Latin. The method was planned to help students read, translate and appreciate literary classics in the beginning of the 20th century – it was generally believed that the students would not actually need to use the language and learning languages was considered beneficial mainly because of the mental exercise. Even though times have changed, the Grammar-Translation method is still widely used in many places. The method emphasizes written texts and students' native language is normally the medium of instruction. In addition, students are to learn grammar rules and vocabulary by heart whereas communication is not considered that important. (Larsen-Freeman 2000: 11.)

Because the Grammar-Translation Method did not succeed in teaching students to communicate, the

Direct Method became popular. The main goal of this method is to learn to communicate with a foreign language: native language is not allowed and meanings are to be made clear for example by the use of visual aids. In addition, students and teachers are more equal in classroom. (Larsen-Freeman 2000: 23.)

The Audio-Lingual Method, which is similar to the Direct Method, became popular in the beginning of the second half of the 20th century. Like the Direct Method, it regards communication as the primary skill. However, whereas the Direct Method focuses on vocabulary learning through communicative situations, in audiolingualism the teacher tries to teach language or form habits through repetition and drills. It is believed that students need to “overlearn” the target language in order to be able to use it automatically without thinking. (Larsen-Freeman 2000: 35-45.)

The Audio-Lingual Method was widely used up to the 1960s (Johnson 2008: 167). However, according to Larsen-Freeman (2000: 53), new research showed its shortcomings: linguists began to acknowledge the fact that audiolingualism, concentrating mainly on surface forms, was not useful in learning to actually use the language. Noam Chomsky’s ideas about the importance of “deep structure” in language learning challenged the traditional methods. Instead of habit formation, he believed that people learn languages best by using their own thinking processes in order to understand the rules of the language they are learning. (Larsen-Freeman 2000: 53.) As Brown (1994: 95-100) wrote, researchers began to believe in the importance of both cognitive and affective factors in second language learning. These ideas gave birth to the “Designer” methods of the 1970s, such as Community Language Learning, Suggestopedia, The Silent Way, Total Physical Response and The Natural Approach. These methods emphasize the individual learner and the significance of self-discovery for learning. In addition, both personal and cognitive growth and the important role of feelings are some of the characteristics of these approaches. (Johnson 2008: 179-180.)

In the late 1970s educators began to notice that mastering linguistic structures does not necessarily mean that a person can communicate in foreign language. In other words, they realized that linguistic knowledge is not enough in being able to actually use the language in different social contexts: communicative competence was required. These observations caused a shift in the field from a linguistic structure-centered approach to Communicative Approaches. The main goal in communicative language teaching is to enable students to communicate in the target language. Teacher’s main responsibility is to provide situations which are likely to promote communication.

Indeed, the main idea of this method is that nearly everything that is done is done with a communicative intent. The role of the teacher in communicative language teaching is more like an adviser than an authority and students are seen as communicators. Their interaction during lessons should be purposeful and the use of authentic materials is strongly recommended. In addition, even though language functions might be emphasized over forms, students work on all four skills – speaking, listening, reading and writing. (Larsen-Freeman 2000: 121-136.)

In this part I have briefly discussed the history of language teaching methods. I have introduced the Grammar-Translation Method, the Direct Method, the Audio-Lingual Method, the “Designer” methods of the 1970s and the Communicative Method. As can be seen, the period from the 1950s to the 1980s has been characterized by a number of quite detailed prescriptions for language teaching. Indeed, it has often been referred to as “The Age of Methods”. (Rodgers, 2001.) Nevertheless, as mentioned earlier, language teaching methods are not seen and used similarly today as they were earlier. Depending on the situation and context, today teachers apply and combine different ways of teaching more regardless of common opinions and latest trends.

3. LANGUAGE TEACHING TODAY

As discussed above, language teaching has been through several changes during the twentieth century. But what is the situation today? Even though communicative competence is emphasized, other methods of language learning and teaching are still not forgotten. The different purposes and goals of learners have to be taken into account when planning the teaching: there is a great diversity of learners in terms of their needs, motivations and characteristics. This means that other methods should not be totally excluded – indeed, in some situations, for example, traditional methods can be more effective than communicative approaches. (Trim 1992: 10.)

However, I believe that there is a general acceptance of communication as the central function of language today. As people travel more and become more international, in other words, as the world globalizes, communicative competence is valued higher and an increasing amount of language learners see the development of communicative skills as the aim of their language learning. According to Trim (1992: 10-11), focus on form has been displaced from its central position and errors are not seen as harmful anymore. It is believed that making mistakes is natural in the process of learning a new language and that people learn from their errors. In addition, more emphasis is

placed on the learner in the learning situation. Today language learner is seen more as an agent than as a passive recipient of teaching: learners are encouraged to take charge of their own learning. In addition, instead of independent work, participatory activities are favored and learners are encouraged to cooperate with each other in order to develop communicative competence in the foreign language. Even though Trim wrote about these trends almost twenty years ago, the same ideas are still valid, which can be seen for example from the Finnish National Core Curriculum which I will discuss next.

3.1 The National Core Curriculum for Upper Secondary Schools 2003

When looking at the current trends in language learning and teaching in upper secondary schools in Finland, one very important document is the National Core Curriculum for Upper Secondary Schools (2003). According to the curriculum “Students must be provided with opportunities to listen, read, speak and write for different purposes on every course, even though the priorities emphasized vary from course to course.” In other words, all the four areas of language knowledge should be equally taught. However, the idea of developing especially communicative competence can be clearly seen from the curriculum. Most of the course descriptions emphasize communication skills and attention is also focused on cultural issues: teachers should offer opportunities for students to develop their awareness and appreciation of the culture within the area where the language is spoken. In addition, as mentioned by Trim (1992: 10), the curriculum also emphasizes students’ role as agents rather than as passive recipients of teaching. According to the curriculum students should “be familiar with their own strengths and development needs as communicators and language learners” and “know how to develop their language skills through strategies that are appropriate to their development needs, study assignments and communication tasks.” However, the curriculum only outlines the general goals and aims of language learning in upper secondary school. In other words, it does not pay attention to any specific teaching methods and therefore gives language teachers the freedom to choose independently their own ways of teaching. In fact, the only thing referring to the actual teaching is the recommendation to use authentic teaching materials which is a common feature in communicative approaches.

The National Core Curriculum for Upper Secondary Schools also includes language proficiency levels which are based on the evaluation scale of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR 2001). The reference levels describe language proficiency with detailed

examples in different developmental phases beginning from level A and ending to level C. The six reference levels (A1, A2, B1, B2, C1, C2) of the CEFR have been further divided into smaller levels in the National Core Curriculum in order to make assessment easier. The curriculum shows which levels students should achieve in different syllabuses, for example students who have started a language in grades 1-6 of basic education (A) should achieve the level B2.1 in upper secondary school. In other words, with these levels the curriculum sets concrete goals for teachers and learners of foreign languages. (The National Core Curriculum for Upper Secondary Schools 2003.)

In addition to the actual National Core Curriculum, the Matriculation Examination is often seen as a hidden curriculum in upper secondary school (Romo 1991, cited in Huuskonen & Kähkönen 2006). According to the study by Huuskonen and Kähkönen (2006: 135), English teachers in Finland think that the Matriculation Examination restricts them from teaching oral skills. The reason for this is that they feel like they are forced to prepare their students for the exam, which only tests written and listening skills.

3.2 The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages

Several European countries, including Finland, have used the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) as a main source in planning language curriculums. Indeed, the CEFR has become to be used as a practical tool for language teaching, testing and assessment. The document was developed in order to promote co-operation among educational institutions in Europe and the need to assess and compare the language skills of people coming from different countries was the stepping stone for the CEFR. The document is the result of extensive research and wide consulting and its main aim is to provide clear definitions of teaching and learning objectives and to help to evaluate language proficiency in an internationally comparable manner. (Council of Europe 2010.)

Accordingly, the Finnish language curriculum is largely based on the CEFR, which promotes the importance of versatile language proficiency and communicative competence. Indeed, these ideas can be seen in the National Core Curriculum as well. In addition and as mentioned earlier, the Finnish curriculum includes a language proficiency scale which is based on the CEFR – the document's description of language proficiency has become one of the most influential and indeed, many countries in Europe use CEFR today as a guide in language teaching, testing and assessment.

The common reference points are represented in different ways for different purposes. For example, below are descriptions of the general language skills an A1 basic user and a C2 proficient user should have:

A1. Can understand and use familiar everyday expressions and very basic phrases aimed at the satisfaction of needs of a concrete type. Can introduce him/herself and others and can ask and answer questions about personal details such as where he/she lives, people he/she knows and things he/she has. Can interact in a simple way provided the other person talks slowly and clearly and is prepared to help.

C2. Can understand with ease virtually everything heard or read. Can summarise information from different spoken and written sources, reconstructing arguments and accounts in a coherent presentation. Can express him/herself spontaneously, very fluently and precisely, differentiating finer shades of meaning even in more complex situations. (The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages 2001: 24.)

Indeed, even though the CEFR does not provide direct advice on how to teach languages, as can be seen, it sets goals and gives detailed descriptions of different skill levels which should be achieved in different developmental stages. In other words, it provides a clear definition of teaching and learning objectives. In addition to focusing on the competences necessary for communication the document also describes the related knowledge and skills and the situations and domains of communication. (Council of Europe 2010.)

4. PREVIOUS STUDIES ON THE POPULARITY AND USE OF DIFFERENT LANGUAGE TEACHING METHODS

Now that I have discussed main trends in the history of language teaching methodology and some present day views I will introduce some previous studies related to this issue. Indeed, language teaching strategies have been studied quite widely from both, students' and teachers' perspectives. However, I will only introduce the most recent results. The use of different language teaching methods by teachers has been investigated by Liu (2004). The focus of the study was on finding out whether different language teaching methods still have a place in the 21st century and if they have, what are the most popular teaching strategies. Altogether 446 teachers all over the world filled in a questionnaire. The results indicated that among ten commonly recognized teaching methods both, communicative language teaching and an eclectic method (combining several methods) were the most popular whereas traditional teaching methods such as grammar-translation and audio-lingual method were the least preferred. However, the results also showed that depending on multiple factors, such as context, class size and learner's proficiency levels, exceptions do emerge: grammar translation is still used especially in larger classes and with learners at low proficiency levels even

though teachers might personally prefer more innovative strategies. In addition, the results indicated that there is a general decrease in the use of each method to learners at advanced proficiency levels. In other words, according to this study specific teaching strategies are used more with students at lower proficiency levels.

A similar study was conducted by Bernaus and Gardner (2008) in Spain. However, in addition to finding out what kinds of language teaching strategies were used they compared teacher and student perceptions of strategy use and the effects of those strategies. According to the results teachers used more traditional than innovative methods. In addition, correlation was found between strategy use and affective variables - students who perceived that teachers used traditional strategies tended to do poorly on English tests and vice versa. Interestingly, when comparing the teachers' and students' perceptions of strategy use, traditional strategies were mostly recognized by both but innovative strategies were not. In other words, many students did not recognize the innovative strategies teachers claimed to use. Because of this, a conclusion was drawn that for the strategies to be effective in influencing students' motivation and attitudes, they must be perceived as such by the students. In order to make this possible, teachers should assess students' perceptions of any strategies they use and for example collect feedback from students.

Supporting the study by Bernaus and Gardner (2008), the results of the study by Ibarrran, Lasagabaster and Sierra (2007, cited in Bernaus and Gardner 2008) show that students clearly prefer innovative language teaching strategies such as communicative tasks and the use of authentic materials to traditional teaching methods. In addition, a study by Schulz (2001, cited in Bernaus and Gardner 2008) supports the finding that teachers and students can perceive things differently. He investigated the perceived value of the use of grammar instruction and corrective feedback in Colombia and the United States. The results showed that there was a significant disagreement between the teachers and the students in these two countries, even though the two teacher groups and the two student groups showed reasonable agreement with each other.

Even though language teaching strategies have been investigated in several foreign studies, the topic seems to be quite narrowly studied in Finland. In addition, the studies I found concentrated more on oral skills teaching whereas my focus is on language teaching in general. However, the studies gave some interesting results and now I will introduce some of them. A study by Yli-Renko and Salo-Lee (1991) looked at students' experiences and opinions on language teaching in Finnish

upper secondary schools. The purpose of the study was to find out if students were satisfied with language teaching and if they were not, what kinds of changes should be made. The results showed that students were generally satisfied with language teaching. However, the majority thought that the teaching does not provide oral skills good enough, biggest reasons for this being the lack of practice, large group sizes, emphasis on grammar teaching, the matriculation exam which emphasizes literary skills and teacher-led lessons. Despite the fact that students wanted more practice in speaking they did not want to reduce traditional language teaching because it was experienced as a clear and safe way of working. According to the results, the biggest reason for this is the matriculation examination which focuses on testing literary skills. Overall, the results of the study showed that according to the majority of the students, the most important goal of language learning is to learn to speak and use the language in real life situations and because of this, more emphasis should be placed on teaching oral skills. (Yli-Renko and Salo-Lee 1991: 25-69.)

A quite recent study by Huuskonen and Kähkönen (2006) examined teachers' perceptions on teaching oral skills in upper secondary schools. The results showed that even though teachers generally have a positive attitude towards teaching speaking skills, oral proficiency was not assessed by most of the teachers as part of the course grade. The participants explained that even though oral skills are practised for example with pair and group discussions and debates, assessing oral proficiency is very time consuming and difficult in large groups. In addition, the matriculation examination tests only literary skills and that is why many teachers considered written skills more important. Indeed, even though these results do not tell anything directly about what language teaching strategies the teachers use, it can be assumed that if written skills are preferred over oral skills, more traditional ways of teaching are favoured.

5. THE PRESENT STUDY

The aim of this study was to find out what kinds of ways of language teaching are used in English lessons in Finnish upper secondary schools. I also wanted to find out what students' opinions on the most effective ways of teaching English are and finally, I compared students' and teachers' answers in order to see if they perceived things similarly. This topic is worth investigating because the use of English has changed a lot in a short period of time and people use it more in everyday communication because of the media and globalization of the world. Because of this, it would be important to find out if the teaching in English lessons corresponds to students' needs. In addition,

the latest study made on this topic is already twenty years old – in other words, there is a need for a new research. Indeed, communicative approach is the latest trend in language teaching: speaking and communication are valued much more than earlier. However, we cannot know how much communicative methods are actually used in English teaching and how much teachers rely on more traditional ways of teaching. It is to be remembered that this research does not take a stance on the effectiveness of specific strategies – the only purpose is to find out what kinds of ways of teaching are among the most popular and what are students' opinions on the most effective ways of teaching English.

Based on earlier research and my own experience as a student in upper secondary school my assumption is that despite the general preference for communicative approach in language teaching, writing and reading are still the most valued skills in school. The biggest reason for this, in my opinion, is the Matriculation Examination, which only tests students' written and listening skills. Indeed, it is natural that teaching concentrates on what is actually tested and I believe that literary skills are mostly taught by using traditional ways of teaching.

My research questions are:

1. What are the most common ways of teaching English in Finnish upper secondary schools?
2. What are students' opinions on the most effective ways of teaching English?
3. Are there differences in students' and teachers' perceptions on language teaching?

As I already mentioned, this topic is quite narrowly studied in Finland. Furthermore, the study by Yli-Renko (1991), which is closest to my study because it is made from the point of view of students is already 20 years old and it can be argued that it is not contemporary anymore. In other words, there is a need for a study like this.

6. METHODS

In this section, I will discuss the participants of this study. Both students and teachers took part in my study and, accordingly, background information will be provided. After that, I will move on to discussing the data gathering and finally, I will introduce the method of analysis used in this study.

6.1 Participants

There were 56 participants from two upper secondary schools in Central Finland. There were two language teachers and 54 students aged 17-18. Because the student participants were second year students they had already had some experience of studying English in upper secondary school. Indeed, the reason I did not choose first year students as participants was that there might have been some students who had not even had English courses yet at secondary education. In addition, third year students were already focusing on their matriculation examinations and therefore, second year students seemed like a natural choice. Because some of the students were underage, I had to ask written permissions from their parents in order to be able to use their answers in my study. The participants did not have to tell anything about their backgrounds, because the only purpose of this study was to find out students' and teachers' opinions objectively.

6.2 Data gathering

The data was collected during February and the beginning of March 2010. I compiled a short Likert-scale questionnaire including 20 statements and one open-ended question where the students could freely tell about their opinions. The questions were in Finnish in order to minimize the possibility of misunderstandings. In addition, I thought it would be easier for both students and teachers to answer the open-ended question in their mother tongue because using English might have affected to the length and quality of their answers. I made the questions suitable for both the teachers and students because they answered the same questionnaire and because I wanted to compare the answers. After conducting a pilot study on nine people I modified some of the statements and the instructions of the questionnaire in order to make it easier to understand. The participants had altogether ten minutes to answer the whole questionnaire: approximately five minutes for the statements and five minutes for the open-ended question. The purpose of the statements was to find out how teachers teach English in Finnish upper secondary schools and the students and teachers were to decide if they agreed or disagreed with the arguments. The response alternatives were:

1. I strongly agree
2. I agree to some extent
3. I disagree to some extent

4. I strongly disagree

In order to get a general overview of the issue a quantitative study was needed and regarding the limitations of time, a Likert-scale questionnaire was a good solution. However, several other methods could have also been used instead of a questionnaire, such as interviewing students personally or observing lessons. Nevertheless, these methods would have been too time-consuming and I would not have had the time to interview personally as many participants as I now have in my study. However, it would be interesting to find out if these different methods give similar results.

The emphasis of the questionnaire was on finding out how much teachers use traditional ways in language teaching compared to more innovative and communicative ways of teaching: 11 of the statements were related to traditional ways whereas 8 statements were related to more innovative and communicative methods. In addition, one statement relating to students' opinions on the atmosphere in lessons was included in order to find out if students were satisfied with the teacher's way of teaching. As mentioned above, the questionnaire also had one open-ended question in which students got the opportunity to tell freely about their opinions on the most effective ways of teaching.

Some of the statements in my questionnaire were adapted from the study by Bernaus and Gardner (2008) even though most of them were my own. Furthermore, I got the idea to examine and compare the use of traditional and innovative methods from the same study.

6.3 Method of analysis

The answers for the multiple choice questions were analyzed by means of a statistical analysis. After gathering the data, it was entered into the Excel programme and analyzed with the SPSS programme which gave the means and standard deviations for the answers. In addition, the answers of the open-ended question were analyzed qualitatively.

7. RESULTS

In this section I will introduce the results of the questionnaire and discuss them in detail. Firstly, I will take a closer look at the statistically analyzed results of the Likert-scale questionnaire and compare the traditional and innovative statements. After that, I will discuss the answers for the open-ended question.

7.1 Likert-scale questionnaire

As already mentioned, the first part of the questionnaire consisted of twenty statements relating to different ways of teaching English. The students' answers are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Students' answers to the Likert-scale questionnaire

Descriptive Statistics

Questions	N	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Deviation
S1. Teacher spends a lot of time teaching grammar.	54	1	3	1.96	.548
S2. Teacher often makes learning English fun and interesting.	53	1	4	2.57	.772
S3. We do a lot of translation exercises.	54	1	3	1.44	.538
S4. We work a lot independently concentrating on writing and reading rather than together concentrating on speaking and listening during lessons.	54	1	4	2.83	.694
S5. Our lessons often follow the same order and exceptions to the routine are rare.	54	1	4	2.31	.722
S6. Teacher usually pays a lot of attention to the mistakes in students' speech.	53	1	4	2.26	.684
S7. We often read textbook chapters or other texts aloud with a partner.	54	1	4	1.96	1.009
S8. Teacher often asks feedback on the teaching from the students.	53	1	4	2.96	.919
S9. Teacher often makes students do vocabulary tests.	54	1	3	1.52	.606
S10. We discuss a lot in English either in pairs or in larger groups during lessons.	54	1	4	2.28	.738
S11. Written exams have the biggest value in evaluation.	54	1	3	1.31	.507
S12. The classroom is cozy and supportive.	54	1	4	2.56	.744
S13. Teacher teaches often first a new thing (for example a grammar rule) after which we do exercises related to that topic.	54	1	2	1.31	.469

S14. We usually use only English during lessons.	54	1	4	2.35	.731
S15. We do often tasks in groups or in pairs during lessons.	54	1	3	1.94	.627
S16. In addition to the schoolbooks, we use often also other material during lessons. (For example movies, newspapers, music, books etc.)	54	1	4	2.76	.823
S17. We concentrate equally on writing, reading, listening and speaking during lessons.	53	1	4	2.28	.769
S18. Teacher usually teaches grammar rules in Finnish.	54	1	3	1.37	.525
S19. Teacher encourages us to use English during lessons as well as in our free time.	54	1	4	1.96	.823
S20. Teacher is the one who speaks the most during lessons.	54	1	4	1.48	.637
Valid N (listwise)	50				

The response alternatives: 1. I strongly agree 2. I somewhat agree 3. I somewhat disagree 4. I strongly disagree

As can be seen from the table, the differences between the means of the answers are not very big. In this analysis, I decided to round the means to the closest whole number, for example the mean of statement 1, 1.96 is rounded to 2. This makes analyzing the results easier and clearer, but it must be remembered that some of the results of the roundings of the means, such as $1.52 \approx 2$ (statement 9), are not as obvious as the others.

Statements referring to more traditional ways of teaching were: 1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 9, 11, 13, 18 and 20. The table shows that the questionnaire did not include statements which would have made the participants strongly disagree (mean ≥ 3.5). Statement 4, “*We work a lot independently concentrating on writing and reading rather than together concentrating on speaking and listening during lessons*” got the mean of 2.83, which was the highest among the statements referring to more traditional ways of teaching. Indeed, it was the only statement of which students somewhat disagreed with.

The participants somewhat agreed with the statements 1, 5, 6, 7 and 9 ($1.5 \leq \text{mean} < 2.5$). Indeed, according to the results students somewhat agree that: 1) teachers use a lot of time teaching grammar, 2) there is a specific pattern which is followed in every lesson and exceptions are rare, 3) teachers usually pay a lot of attention to the errors students make in speaking, 4) students often read the chapters of the textbook or other texts aloud with a partner and 5) there are a lot of vocabulary tests. The statement 7, “*We often read textbook chapters or other texts aloud with a partner*” had

the standard deviation of 1.009, which was clearly the biggest. Accordingly, students were not that unanimous in their answers with this statement.

The results showed that participants strongly agreed with the statements 3, 11, 13, 18 and 20 (mean < 1.5). Indeed, according to the results 1) a lot of translation exercises are done, 2) written examinations have the biggest role in evaluation, 3) inductive teaching is often used (first a rule and then exercises), 4) teachers use Finnish when teaching grammar and 5) teacher is the one who speaks the most during lessons. Statement 11, “*Written exams have the biggest value in evaluation*” and statement 13, “*Teacher teaches often first a new thing (for example a grammar rule) after which we do exercises related to that topic*” shared the same mean, 1.31, which was the lowest of the whole questionnaire. In addition, the participants were fairly unanimous with the statement 13, which also had the lowest standard deviation of the whole questionnaire, .469. However, as the table shows, also all the other strongly agreed statements had relatively low standard deviations.

Statements referring to more innovative and communicative ways of teaching were: 8, 10, 12, 14, 15, 16, 17 and 19. As with the statements referring to traditional ways of teaching, nobody disagreed strongly with these statements either. Nevertheless, according to the results participants somewhat disagreed ($2.5 \leq \text{mean} < 3.5$) that 1) teacher often asks feedback on teaching (S8), 2) the classroom is cozy and supportive (S12) and 3) authentic material is often used in addition to schoolbook materials (S16). Interestingly, the standard deviations of the answers for these statements were relatively high compared to the other statements, (S8. .919, S12. .744 and S16. .823,) which means that the participants’ experiences differ to some extent with these issues.

According to the results, the participants did not agree strongly with any of the statements referring to more innovative and communicative ways of teaching. Instead, students somewhat agreed ($1.5 \leq \text{mean} < 2.5$) with the rest of the statements. Indeed, the results show that, at least to some extent, 1) there is a lot of conversation in English either with pairs or in larger groups (S10), 2) English is usually the only language used during lessons (S14), 3) exercises are often done in groups or in pairs (S15), 4) all the four language skills, writing, reading, speaking and listening are in balance and they are equally taught (S17) and 5) teacher encourages students to use English in and outside school (S19). Statement 15, “*We do often tasks in groups or in pairs during lessons*” had the lowest standard deviation, .627, of these five statements. Nevertheless, the standard deviations of all of these answers were again relatively high.

As already mentioned, the purpose of the statement 2, “*Teacher often makes learning English fun and interesting*” was to test the general atmosphere in the lessons and to find out if students liked their teachers’ ways of teaching. The mean of the answers for this statement was 2.57 which means that the participants slightly more “somewhat disagreed” with the statement. However, there was some disagreement between the participants because the standard deviation was relatively high, .772.

Because only two teachers answered my questionnaire, the results cannot be generalized at all. However, I am going to shortly introduce some of their answers because, coincidence or not, the results have some similarities to the results of the study by Bernaus and Gardner (2008). I will only introduce the statements of which the teachers were of same opinion. First of all, when examining the answers for the statements referring to more traditional ways of teaching, both teachers strongly disagreed with the statement 4, “*We work a lot independently concentrating on writing and reading rather than together concentrating on speaking and listening during lessons.*” whereas students only somewhat disagreed with it. In addition, both teachers somewhat disagreed with the statement 3, “*We do a lot of translation exercises*”, whereas students agreed strongly with it. Furthermore, teachers disagreed with statement 5, “*Our lessons often follow the same order and exceptions to the routine are rare.*”, whereas students somewhat agreed with it. As students, also both teachers somewhat agreed with statement 6, “*Teacher usually pays a lot of attention to the mistakes in students’ speech.*” Finally, both teachers strongly agreed with statements 9, “*Teacher often makes students do vocabulary tests*”, 13, “*Teacher teaches often first a new thing (for example a grammar rule) after which we do exercises related to that topic*” and 18, “*Teacher usually teaches grammar rules in Finnish.*”. Students also agreed strongly with statements 13 and 18 but only somewhat agreed with statement 9.

Interestingly, when examining the statements referring to more innovative and communicative ways of teaching, only the other teacher strongly disagreed with one statement. (S8. *Teacher often asks feedback on the teaching from the students.*) Otherwise, they did not strongly disagree with any of the statements. Both teachers somewhat agreed with statements 10, “*We discuss a lot in English either in pairs or in larger groups during lessons*”, 14, “*We usually use only English during lessons*”, 16, “*In addition to the schoolbooks, we use often also other material during lessons. (For example movies, newspapers, music, books etc.)*” and 17, “*We concentrate equally on writing, reading, listening and speaking during lessons*”. Students agreed with the teachers on the

statements 10, 14 and 17. However, they somewhat disagreed with the statement 16.

The teachers were mostly quite unanimous with their answers. However, their opinions differed completely with the statements 7 and 8. The other teacher strongly agreed that they often read textbook chapters or other texts aloud with a partner and that feedback on the teaching is often asked of the students whereas the other teacher strongly disagreed with these statements. Interestingly, when looking at the students' answers, these same statements had the biggest standard deviations (*1.009* for S7 and *.919* for S8). In other words, there was disagreement between the students as well. However, more teachers are required in order to be able to draw any conclusions of this at all.

7.2 The open-ended question

As already mentioned, the questionnaire had also an open-ended question. The participants were asked to write their opinions on what kinds of teaching methods and tasks are most beneficial in learning English and what kind of teaching they wish to have in English lessons. However, the participants did not separate their answers for these two questions in any way which is why I made the conclusion that the tasks the participants considered as the most beneficial were also the kind of teaching they wished to have in English lessons and vice versa. In this section I will introduce and discuss the answers for the open-ended question.

The length and quality of the answers varied substantially, some participants had answered only with a couple of words and some had written longer responses with detailed examples. There were four participants whose answers I had to leave out because one of them was written unclearly and the others were vague and irrelevant. Therefore I had 50 answers to examine.

Even though there were some clear common preferences, the content of the answers varied to some extent. Some answers had concrete examples whereas others had more general suggestions. However, after reading the questionnaires I decided to write down all the different ideas and suggestions that were mentioned in the answers. After writing a list of twenty-one different "ways of teaching" I counted how many times each of these ideas was mentioned. Next, I am going to introduce the results.

There was one answer, “a way of teaching” which clearly stood out: oral tasks, to be more specific, discussion exercises in pairs or in groups. Indeed, oral practice was mentioned in twenty-four papers, therefore, almost half of the participants agreed on the effectiveness of communication in learning English - it was clearly the most popular answer. In addition, other answers which could be labeled to more innovative ways of teaching were watching English movies or television programmes (9), doing listening exercises (8), using more authentic material instead of school books (2) and playing different kinds of games in English (2).

However, despite the popularity of oral tasks, many participants still preferred traditional ways of teaching or at least mentioned them in addition with discussion exercises. Among the most popular traditional suggestions were translation exercises (9), vocabulary tests (8), grammar exercises (6) and essays (4). In addition, other traditional ways of teaching mentioned were written exercises (2), teaching which helps in the matriculation examination (2) and reading chapters aloud with a partner (1).

In addition to the traditional and innovative suggestions, there were also answers which were difficult to label into any specific category. Schoolbook exercises were mentioned by three participants. Moreover, three students wrote that they were happy with the teaching as it already is. Versatility in teaching was mentioned by six participants and independent work was mentioned in three answers. Furthermore, three participants wrote that they hoped to have teaching which would provide practical language skills and one participant suggested doing exercises together with a teacher.

Furthermore, there were twelve participants who had only mentioned traditional techniques, such as vocabulary tests, grammar exercises and essays, as the most effective ways of teaching. In comparison, ten participants had suggested only oral tasks. The other answers contained either both, oral and written task suggestions or something more general.

According to the answers, discussion tasks are considered to be very popular in learning English among the participants. However, it must be remembered that oral tasks were mentioned twenty four times of which fourteen included other suggestions such as written exercises as well. Because of this, it is difficult to say what is considered, when examining these answers, as the most effective way of teaching among the participants. In addition, it is to be noted that there were twelve answers

including only traditional ways of learning (translation, vocabulary tasks, grammar exercises, essays) whereas oral tasks were mentioned alone in only ten answers. Because of this, it could be even argued that traditional techniques are considered to be more effective in learning English among the participants.

Nevertheless, sixteen participants, which is the majority, suggested both spoken and written exercises in their answers. For this reason, it could be argued that versatility and equality between the different language skills are considered to be important for the participants. In addition to these sixteen participants with both spoken and written exercises mentioned in their answers, there were six participants suggesting more versatility and variation to the teaching. In other words, altogether twenty two participants mentioned more than only one way of teaching.

In addition, teachers' answers were:

“Opiskelijoita täytyy aktivoida ja innostaa + rohkaista. Täytyy huolehtia siitä, että he tekevät työtä + opettelevat uutta + kertaavat opittua. Kielen ilon tulee säilyä...”

“Students must be activated and inspired + encouraged. It must be taken care that they work + learn new things + rehearse what is learned. The joy of learning a language must remain...”

”Vaihtelevien työtapojen uskon olevan parhaita, kieliopissa opettajajohtoisuus, ääntämisessä myös, (kalvolta/monisteesta säännöt joita oivaltaen/soveltaen tehtäviä), tekstin ymmärtämistä + sanastoa opetellessa ryhmä-, pari- ja yksin opiskelu. Kuuntelussa tärkeää myös vastausten purkaminen + selittäminen.”

“I believe that varying methods are best, grammar teaching should be teacher-led as well as teaching pronunciation, (handouts with rules which are then applied in tasks), text comprehension + vocabulary learning in groups, in pairs and alone. When doing listening exercises, it is important to go through the answers and explain them.”

8. DISCUSSION

Now that the results are represented, I will move on to discuss them in more detail.

8.1 The Likert-scale questionnaire

As can be seen from the Table 1, the means of the participants' answers vary between 1.31 and 2.96. Indeed, the differences between the means were not big. In addition, the students were mostly quite unanimous with their answers with the standard deviations varying between .469 and 1.009. However, some differences can be seen when comparing the answers for the traditional and innovative statements. The means of the answers for the statements referring to more traditional

ways of teaching vary between 1.31 and 2.83, whereas the means of the answers for the statements referring to more innovative and communicative ways of teaching vary between 1.94 and 2.96. In other words, according to these results students agreed more with the statements referring to more traditional ways of teaching.

Indeed, when examining the means of the statements referring to more traditional ways of teaching the students somewhat disagreed with only one statement, somewhat agreed with five statements and strongly agreed with yet another five statements. However, when examining the means of the statements referring to more innovative and communicative ways of teaching the students somewhat disagreed with three statements and somewhat agreed with five statements. Interestingly, according to the means, there were not any statements which would have made the students strongly agree. In short, the results show that even though students mostly agreed with the statements referring to more innovative and communicative ways of teaching, they agreed even more with the statements referring to more traditional ways of teaching. What is more, even though the differences between the standard deviations are not very significant, it can be clearly seen that students are more unanimous with the traditional statements than with statements referring to innovative and communicative ways of teaching.

As already mentioned, my assumption was that traditional ways of teaching are still used more than communicative ways in English lessons in Finnish upper secondary schools. According to these results, at least to some extent my assumption was right. Nevertheless, this study does not provide reasons for these results which is why further study is needed. However, in my opinion and as already mentioned, the Matriculation Examination is definitely one reason for using more traditional ways of teaching. As long as the Matriculation Examination has such a significant role in upper secondary schools and only tests writing and reading skills as compulsory, it is quite natural that teachers want to focus on developing those particular skills, unfortunately in many situations with the expense of communicativeness. In addition, as Yli-Renko and Salo-Lee (1991) discuss in their study, large group sizes can also hinder communicative activities.

8.2 The open-ended question

Nevertheless, as can be seen from the answers for the open-ended question, traditional activities in English lessons, such as writing essays or translating sentences are seen as effective ways of

learning by the majority of students. In other words, using traditional ways of teaching is not a bad thing at all. However, according to the answers, lessons need to have variation because communication skills are also considered as very important.

Indeed, the answers for the open-ended question were actually quite predictable – I knew that discussion exercises would be popular and that traditional methods would also be suggested. However, there were some interesting results, which I am now going to discuss. First of all, what surprised me was that there were so many students who did not see the importance of communicative skills. As already discussed in the results section, twelve students mentioned only traditional techniques, such as vocabulary tests, grammar exercises and essays, as the most effective ways of teaching English. In addition, some of these twelve participants even wrote how communicative exercises should not be used that much. One reason for this might be that these students simply lack motivation in learning English and only want to pass the matriculation examination. In addition, shyness can also be one reason for their answers. Secondly, nobody suggested using the Internet even though films and movies were mentioned in several answers. Accordingly, students do not see the possibilities of the Internet – perhaps they do not have much experience of using it as a tool in learning English or they simply do not consider the Internet as an effective way of teaching and learning even though they probably use it a lot in their everyday lives. Thirdly, all the suggestions were somewhat ordinary ways of teaching which I believe the students have experienced earlier. Indeed, even though some participants hoped that their teachers would use more new and versatile ways of teaching, they did not give any examples or have ideas of their own.

9. CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study was to find out what kinds of ways of teaching are used in Finnish upper secondary schools. Furthermore, I wanted to find out what are, according to students, the most effective ways of teaching English. In addition, two teachers took part in the study by answering the same questionnaire as the students did. The purpose was to compare teachers' and students' answers in order to see how similarly they perceived this issue.

According to the answers of the students, even though communicative ways of teaching are used in English lessons, teachers rely slightly more on traditional ways of teaching. In addition, when

asking students' opinions on the most effective ways of teaching English, versatility and variation in teaching was the most popular answer. Both written and oral exercises were mentioned and even though oral tasks stood out as the most preferred answer, traditional ways of teaching (translation, vocabulary tasks, grammar exercises, essays) were mentioned by many participants as well. Moreover, there was some disagreement between teachers' and students' answers for the Likert-scale questions: compared to students' answers, teachers seemed to disagree slightly more with the statements referring to traditional ways of teaching and agree more with the statements referring to more innovative ways of teaching English. However, because only two teachers answered the questionnaire, generalizations cannot be made.

It is to be remembered that this study was very small and it has weaknesses. First of all, my research was quite narrow because only 56 participants, 54 students and two teachers, took part in the survey. Furthermore, I did not have time to send the questionnaire for 54 students with different teachers in different schools which would have given more versatile and reliable results. Instead, only two groups in two different schools were included in the study, which lowers the number of teachers significantly. In other words, the study only covers the ways of teaching used by a couple of teachers. Because of this, further and more extensive study is needed in order to be able to generalize the results. Moreover, the results would have been more reliable if the Likert-scale questionnaire had had more statements.

In addition, the students were quite young which is why they might not yet have necessarily known what kinds of ways of teaching suit them best and what kind of language teaching is useful. Furthermore, perhaps participants might have been able to concentrate more on answering the questions if they had had more time and if they had been able to answer the questions in a more peaceful and private place than a classroom full of other students.

As already mentioned, further and more extensive study is needed in order to be able to generalize the results. Indeed, it would be interesting to include more teachers in the study in order to be able to reliably compare teachers' and students' answers. In addition, further study could be made in order to find out the reasons behind the ways language teachers teach. Moreover, different methods could be used in gathering the data, such as observing the lessons or interviewing the participants personally in order to find out if these methods give similar results. What is more, the focus of the study could also be in finding out if there are any local differences in English teachers' ways of

teaching by gathering the participants from all over Finland. In addition, it would be interesting to know if the age of the teacher has any effect on the way he or she teaches English.

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Appendix

The questionnaire

Hyvä kyselyyn osallistuja,

alla näet väittämiä liittyen **lukion englannin tunteihin**. Mieti, millaista **edellisen englannin kurssisi** tunneilla on ollut ja vastaa väittämiin **omien kokemustesi perusteella** ympäröimällä oikea vaihtoehto. Vastaukset käsitellään luottamuksellisesti. Lomakkeen täyttämiseen menee 5-10 minuuttia.

Vastausvaihtoehdot ovat:

1 Täysin samaa mieltä

2 Jokseenkin samaa mieltä

3 Jokseenkin eri mieltä

4 Täysin eri mieltä

	Täysin samaa mieltä	Jokseenkin samaa mieltä	Jokseenkin eri mieltä	Täysin eri mieltä
1.Opettaja käyttää paljon aikaa kieliopin opettamiseen.	1	2	3	4
2. Opettaja tekee englannin oppimisesta usein hauskaa ja mielenkiintoista.	1	2	3	4
3. Teemme usein käännöstehtäviä. (lauseita tai tekstipätkiä)	1	2	3	4
4. Teemme tunneilla enemmän tehtäviä yksin keskittyen kirjoittamiseen ja lukemiseen kuin yhdessä keskittyen puhumiseen ja kuuntelemiseen.	1	2	3	4
5. Tunneilla toimitaan usein saman järjestyksen mukaisesti ja poikkeuksia rutiiniin tulee harvoin.	1	2	3	4
6. Opettaja kiinnittää yleensä paljon huomiota oppilaiden puheessa ilmeneviin virheisiin.	1	2	3	4
7.Luemme usein kirjan kappaleita tai muita tekstejä parin kanssa ääneen.	1	2	3	4
8. Opettaja pyytää oppilailta usein palautetta antamastaan opetuksesta.	1	2	3	4
9. Opettaja pitää usein sanakokeita kirjan kappaleista.	1	2	3	4
10. Keskustelemme tunneilla paljon englanniksi joko pareittain tai isommissa ryhmissä.	1	2	3	4
11.Kirjallisilla kokeilla on suurin merkitys arvioinnissa.	1	2	3	4
12. Luokkahuone on viihtyisä ja kannustava.	1	2	3	4

13. Opettaja neuvoo usein ensin uuden asian (esim. kielioppisääntö), jonka jälkeen teemme tehtäviä siihen liittyen.	1	2	3	4
14. Tunneilla käytetään yleensä vain englantia.	1	2	3	4
15. Teemme usein tunneilla tehtäviä ryhmissä tai pareittain.	1	2	3	4
16. Käytämme tunneilla usein oppikirjan lisäksi myös muuta materiaalia. (esim. elokuvat, sanomalehdet, musiikki, kirjat jne.)	1	2	3	4
17. Tunneilla keskitytään tasapuolisesti kirjoittamiseen, lukemiseen, kuuntelemiseen ja puhumiseen.	1	2	3	4
18. Opettaja neuvoo kielioppiasiat yleensä suomeksi.	1	2	3	4
19. Opettaja rohkaisee meitä käyttämään englantia niin tunnilla kuin vapaa-ajallakin.	1	2	3	4
20. Opettaja on tunneilla eniten äänessä.	1	2	3	4

Kerro lyhyesti millaisten opetustapojen ja tehtävien uskot omasta mielestäsi olevan kaikkein hyödyllisimpiä englannin oppimisessa? Millaista opetusta toivoisit englannin tunneille?

KIITOS VASTAUKSISTASI! 😊

