

”It’s useful but challenging, and it’s not for everyone”: Motivational and practical reasons behind Finnish upper secondary students’ decision to not study voluntary languages

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Noora Ervelius

University of Jyväskylä  
Department of Languages  
English  
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Tiivistelmä – Abstract <p>Suomessa opiskellaan enenevässä määrin vain kahta kieltä opetuskielen lisäksi. Syitä tähän kehityskulkuun on etsitty mm. kielikoulutuksen rahoituksen leikkauksista muuttuneisiin asenteisiin, mutta mitään yksittäistä ratkaisevaa tekijää ei ole löydetty. Myöskään tilanteen korjaamiseksi aloitetut kieliohjelmat eivät ole onnistuneet vaikuttamaan toivotusti pitkällä aikavälillä.</p> <p>Tämän tutkimuksen tarkoituksena on tutkia asiaa opiskelumotivaation näkökulmasta. Motivaatiolla on todettu olevan myönteinen vaikutus oppimistuloksiin, joten sen ymmärtäminen antaa mahdollisuuksia tukea oppijoita ja heidän tarpeitaan.</p> <p>Tutkimus toteutettiin kyselynä, johon osallistui 109 suomenkielistä koulua käyvää lukiolaista eri puolilta Suomea. Vastaajista 72 opiskeli tutkimushetkellä pelkästään englantia ja ruotsia. Näitä opiskelijoita pyydettiin nimeämään tärkeimmät syyt, jotka vaikuttivat heidän päätökseensä olla opiskelematta vieraita kieliä. Lisäksi kyselyssä kysyttiin kaikilta vastaajilta kielten opiskelumahdollisuuksista näiden koulu-uralla sekä erilaisista motivaatiota lisäävistä ja vähentävistä tekijöistä sekä kartoitettiin opiskelijoiden mielipidettä englannin kielen asemasta. Kysely koostui taustakysymyksistä, monivalintakysymyksistä sekä kahdesta avoimesta kysymyksestä.</p> <p>Yleisimmät syyt päätökseen olla valitsematta ylimääräisiä kieliä (tai lopettaa jo aloitetut opinnot) olivat kiinnostuksen ja ajan puute sekä kielten opiskelun vaikeus ja aiemmat negatiiviset kokemukset. Vieraskieliset mediasisällöt, onnistumisen kokemukset ja kielten hyödyllisyys opiskelijan arjessa tai tulevaisuudessa olivat voimakkaita motivaattoreita, kuten myös matkustelu ja kontaktit vieraiden kielten puhujiin. Oppimistilanteisiin liittyviä tekijöitä (opettaja, tunnin sisältö jne.) sekä epäonnistumisen kokemuksia mainittiin usein motivaatiota vähentävinä.</p>	
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## Table of contents

<b>1</b>	<b>Introduction.....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>2</b>	<b>Motivation and language choices.....</b>	<b>2</b>
	2.1 Demotivation and amotivation.....	3
<b>3</b>	<b>Finnish foreign language learning situation.....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>4</b>	<b>Research questions .....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>5</b>	<b>Methods and data.....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>6</b>	<b>Analysis and results.....</b>	<b>8</b>
	6.1 Language choices of the students.....	8
	6.2 The role of English.....	10
	6.3 Motivational characteristics of the students.....	11
	6.4 Demotivational factors.....	16
	6.5 Reasons not to study additional foreign languages .....	18
<b>7</b>	<b>Discussion and conclusion.....</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>8</b>	<b>References.....</b>	<b>22</b>

## Appendix A: The questionnaire

## 1. Introduction

The number of students studying more than two languages that are not the language of instruction (“foreign languages” for the purposes of this study) has steadily decreased in Finland since the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Niemeläinen, 2014). While the students’ English proficiency has increased, only being able to communicate in one major world language is not enough in an increasingly globalized society (Confederation of Finnish Industries 2015, Ylönen 2011).

It is difficult to identify a single factor contributing to the phenomenon. The uncertain financial climate has led to many cuts in funding, which in turn has made it difficult for schools to offer several optional languages (Kangasvieri et al. 2011: 21, 27). In addition to a lack of resources, the attitudes of school staff, parents or the students themselves play a role in whether foreign languages are chosen or not: languages may, for example, be considered too difficult or time-consuming (Pietarinen, Kolehmainen and Kuosmanen 2011).

The aim of the present study is to explore the reasons behind students’ decision not to study additional voluntary languages. While research on motivation and attitudes towards different languages has been conducted, reasons *not* to study foreign languages have not been a popular research topic in Finland: only a handful of studies have briefly discussed this specific aspect of learning motivation (e.g. Pietarinen, Kolehmainen and Kuosmanen 2011, Grasz and Schlabach 2011). The data consists of a questionnaire answered by second year students of upper secondary school (*lukio*) in various areas in Finland. The questionnaire contained questions related to the availability of foreign language study in the schools the respondents have attended. Questions regarding students’ attitudes toward foreign languages and studying them were also included to gauge what kind of motivation the students have to study languages.

The theoretical background of the study is introduced in the second section. In the third section, I take a closer look at the particular context of the study: the recent trends in foreign language learning in Finland are examined in more detail, and the reader is familiarised with the Finnish school system. Research questions and methods are discussed in the fourth and fifth section respectively. The sixth section contains the analysis of the questionnaire data and the main results. Finally, the implications of the analysis are discussed in the seventh section. The questionnaire used in the study is attached in the Appendix.

## 2. Motivation and language choices

The term *motivation* derives from the Latin word *movere*, which means “to move” (Dörnyei and Ushioda 2011: 3). Motivation thus refers to the things that “move” individuals and make them engage in activities, making it a crucial concept to understand in order to make sense of people’s actions, success and failure. In the language learning context specifically, motivation has been demonstrated to be connected to learning achievements (see Gardner 1985, Dörnyei 1994).

One of the most influential in the field is Gardner’s Socio-Educational Model, in which second language learning motivation is defined as “the combination of effort plus desire to achieve the goal of learning the language plus favourable attitudes toward learning the language” (Gardner 1985: 10). The model claims that motivation is supported by integrativeness and attitudes toward the learning situation, and motivation is directly linked to achievement in language learning.

The Socio-Educational Model has been developed by various researchers, but its main components have remained the same. *Attitudes toward the learning situation* can be divided into evaluation of the teacher and evaluation of the course. *Integrativeness* refers to one’s interest in foreign languages and attitudes toward the target language community. *Motivation* is a combination of the attitudes the learner brings to the learning situation as well as the effort needed to carry out actual learning. (Masgoret, Bernaus and Gardner 2001: 283). While Gardner was mostly focused on the integrative aspects of motivation, one of his most enduring legacies is the dichotomy of integrative and *instrumental* motivation orientations. Instrumentality accounts for motivation that focuses on pragmatic gains of language learning, e.g. getting a job (see Dörnyei and Ushioda 2011: 41-43).

Rather than simply looking at the presence or absence of motivation, other scholars have also identified different types or orientation of motivation (see Ryan and Deci 2000: 54). The simplest categorization of such orientations consists of *intrinsic* and *extrinsic* motivation. An *intrinsically* motivated individual takes part in an activity because of the pleasure received from the activity itself, not for an instrumental goal. *Extrinsic* motivation, on the other hand, presupposes the existence of a reason outside the activity. However, Deci and Ryan (1985, also discussed in Ryan and Deci 2000) argue in their Self-Determination Theory (SDT) that such a simple division fails to grasp the complexity of different types of motivation. They divide extrinsic motivation in four categories based on how much autonomy and self-determination the person partaking in an activity has. *External regulation* refers to a situation where motivation stems directly from an external source: for example, a learner who only studies in order to avoid negative sanctions from the

teacher or other authorities. This reaction-based motivation is the type that is considered to be the prototypical example of extrinsic motivation. Another type is *Introjection*, in which the individual is motivated to act in order to protect or enhance his or her ego and self-esteem – for instance, a student may be motivated to improve if he or she feels that not being able to speak the target language fluently is embarrassing. Somewhat more internal in nature, the next step on the SDT scale is *Identification*. On this stage, one has accepted the activity as a part of another personal value or need: in a language learning context, a learner may not necessarily enjoy studying languages, but may be very motivated to learn if he or she thinks language proficiency will connect to other important values, such as being able to travel and communicate with people from other cultures. Finally, the most autonomous of the extrinsic motivation types is *Integration*, where reasons for action have been internalized. (Ryan and Deci 2000).

The self-determination continuum is not a one-way developmental path. One may begin from any stage and move “forward” towards intrinsic motivation as well as “backward” depending on the activity and the conditions in which the activity takes place. One of the most important implications of the SDT is that more autonomous motivation can be facilitated or undermined (Ryan and Deci 2000: 55). The least autonomous motivational dimension in SDT, amotivation, is discussed section 2.1.

## **2.1 Demotivation and amotivation**

Given that motivation boosts learning results, it is natural that the lack of motivation and causes for it are also of interest to researchers. Demotivation and amotivation are the central terms describing the lack or loss of motivation. They may appear similar, but their approach is somewhat different.

According to Dörnyei and Ushioda (2011: 139), demotivation refers to “specific external forces that reduce or diminish the motivational basis of a behavioural intention or an ongoing action” – things that cause a once motivated individual lose their motivation. Kikuchi (2011: 11) adds that not all demotivational forces suggested by literature are external, and defines demotivation as the “specific internal and external forces” negatively influencing motivation.

Kikuchi and Sakai have conducted several studies on demotivational factors among Japanese students studying English (see Sakai and Kikuchi 2009, Kikuchi 2009, Kikuchi 2011). From their own research and by reviewing a number of other studies, they identified six categories of demotivational factors: *Teacher-related* demotivators include the attitudes, personality, competence and teaching style of the teacher. The second category (*Characteristics of classes*) consists of factors such as course contents, pacing, boring lessons and focus on difficult grammar and vocabulary aspects of language. *Experiences of failure* include disappointment over test scores

and lack of acceptance. *Class environment* can cause demotivation due to attitudes of classmates, compulsory nature of the study or inappropriate use of school facilities, while problems related to *Class materials* involve lack of suitable and interesting materials. The sixth category, *Lack of interest* can suggest lack of will to identify with the target language community or the feeling that the language learned at school is not practical or useful. (Sakai and Kikuchi 2009: 60-61).

Amotivation, as first introduced by Deci and Ryan (1985: 110), describes a lack of motivation resulting from an individual's feelings of incompetence to succeed in an activity. The difference between demotivation and amotivation is that while the former refers to specific things that hinder motivation, the latter signifies the general outcome expectations that an individual has. Amotivation can take different forms: researchers have identified capacity-ability beliefs (one feels one lacks the ability to successfully complete a task), strategy beliefs (one feels that current strategies do not result in the desired outcome), capacity-effort beliefs (one does not want to expend the effort to perform the activity) or helplessness beliefs (one feels that one's actions have little to no effect on the enormous task at hand) (see Vallerand 1997: 282).

### **3. The Finnish foreign language learning situation**

In Finland, foreign languages studied at school are usually sorted by using letters and numbers to identify when the language study began. The letter A refers to languages first introduced during years 1 through 6 in compulsory education, while the letter B pertains to years 7 through 9 in compulsory education and onward to upper secondary school. (Kumpulainen 2014: 42–43).

For the majority of the population, there are two mandatory foreign languages. The study of the first foreign language, often called the A1 language, begins usually in the third grade of compulsory education; in some schools it is possible to start already in the first or second grade. The other mandatory language for Finnish-speaking students is the country's other official language Swedish. The Swedish lessons (B1 language) typically begin in grade 7. From 2016 onward, it is possible that Swedish is already studied a year earlier (Vähäsarja 2014), but the change does not yet affect the results of the present study.

In addition to the two obligatory languages, there are several chances to study additional foreign languages (hereafter “additional” or “voluntary”). The first voluntary A2 language typically starts in the fifth grade, sometimes a year earlier. B2 language begins in the eighth (sometimes ninth) year of compulsory education. B3 languages are chosen in upper secondary school. (Kumpulainen 2014: 42–43).

The number of students studying additional foreign languages has decreased steadily since the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. In 2000, 32.4% of all upper secondary school students (including a small number of students who have been exempted from the study of one or more languages) studied up to two foreign languages (Kumpulainen 2003: 45). In 2005 and 2010, the figure continued to increase to 39.4% and 46.4% respectively (Kumpulainen 2014: 98). In 2015, nearly half (48.5%) of Finnish upper secondary students studied only two or fewer foreign languages (Vipunen 2016). There have been several attempts to reverse this trend by implementing programmes promoting language learning, but they have not succeeded in bringing about long-term changes (see Kangasvieri et al. 2011: 26–28 for examples of such programmes).



## **4. Research questions**

The present study aims to gain insight on three research questions, which all concern foreign language learning and motivation. The first question is discussed in the analysis section 6.2, while sections 6.3 and 6.4 look at the second question. Finally, the results of the third question are presented in section 6.5.

RQ1) How do the students perceive the role of other foreign languages in relation to English?

RQ2) What kind of factors do the students find motivating or demotivating for their foreign language learning?

RQ3) What are students' views on the underlying reasons that affect/affected their decision to not study voluntary foreign languages?

## **5. Methods and data**

A printed questionnaire was chosen as the method of data collection for the present study. Questionnaires enable the collection of data from a relatively large number of people cost-effectively, especially when the informants are spread out in a wide area (Vilkkä 2007: 28). A printed out version distributed in schools was chosen instead of an online survey in order to lower the non-response rate of the students and to reach a larger variety of respondents (and not e.g. only people who are interested in languages or enjoy participating in surveys).

Initially, randomly chosen schools were contacted via email to seek potential participants for the study. Out of the 29 schools contacted, six agreed to participate and one declined. The other 22 schools gave no response after the original request and one reminder. The questionnaire sheets were sent via mail to participating schools and returned during a period between late February and mid-March 2016.

The questionnaire contained five multiple choice questions with three options (Yes / No / I do not know) and 14 questions with a five-point Likert scale (Disagree strongly – Agree strongly). For eligible respondents, there was a multiple choice question where they were asked to

choose up to three items from ten options. In addition, the students were asked to fill in the following background information: name of their upper secondary school, the municipality (or municipalities) where they received their compulsory education, native language(s), gender and all foreign languages they had studied. All of the background information was eventually not used in the analysis for two reasons: firstly, the study was originally intended to look at differences between larger and smaller communities (with the hypothesis that smaller schools and municipalities would struggle to offer their students as many opportunities to study as their larger counterparts), but this approach was eventually scrapped due to difficulties in getting a sufficient amount of data from all size groups. Secondly, the possibility of using the data in the future was reserved, so some extra information was collected in case of future use. At the end of the questionnaire, there were four open questions. Only two of them were phrased as actual questions, the other two were open spaces for free comments and feedback for the questionnaire.

The data obtained for the study was mainly quantitative with some qualitative information (mostly the open questions). The answers were coded into a Microsoft Word Excel spreadsheet and analysed there. Frequency distribution charts were created for each question and the results were compared to find the most common responses. The open question data was also divided into categories (the rationale is discussed in sections 6.3 and 6.4) and treated as quantitative data.

The total number of students who took the questionnaire was 109. The schools chosen for the study were located in various regions of Finland and the school size varied from less than 100 students to more than 700 students. 67 students (61%) were female and 42 (39%) were male. All respondents spoke Finnish as their native language, three reported being bilingual in Finnish and some other language.

## **6. Analysis and results**

In this section, the results of the questionnaire are discussed. First, the language choices of the students are examined to give the reader a general picture of the respondents. In the following sections (6.2 and 6.3) the results from the multiple questions are presented in figures and discussed. The number of each question is identified in the heading of the figure, so interested readers can refer to the original Finnish question in Appendix A.

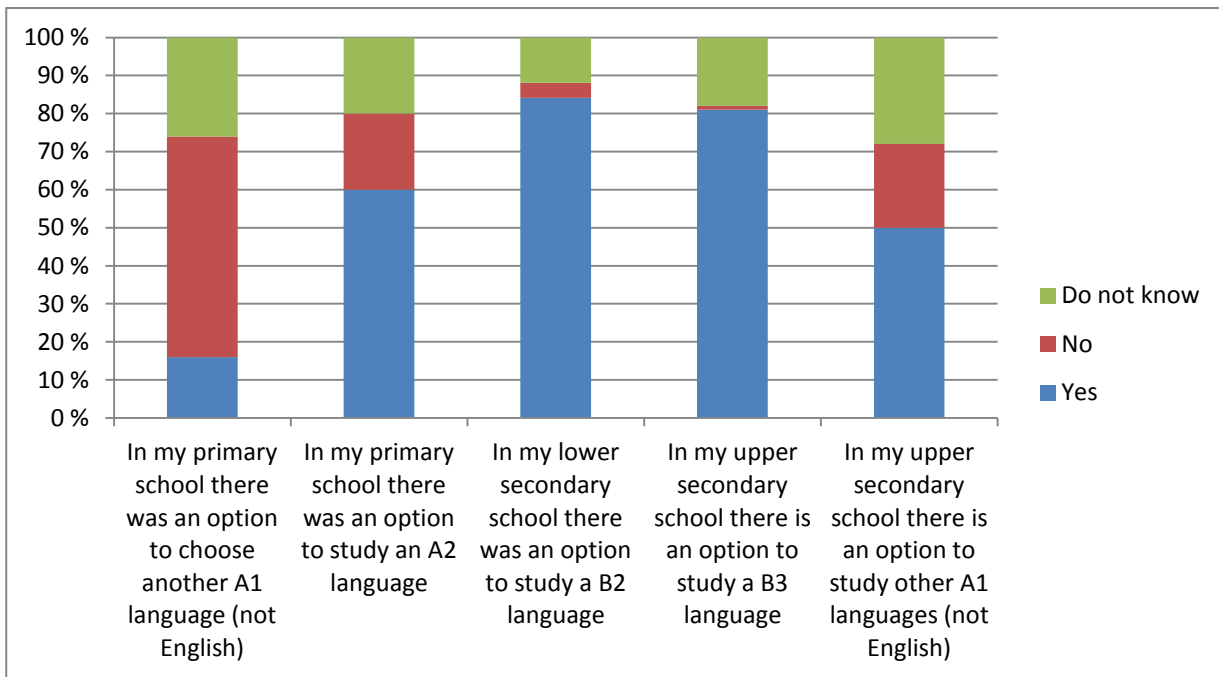
### **6.1 Language choices of the students**

The mandatory language studies of the students in this study were identical: all respondents (108 for this question) had studied English as their A1 language and Swedish as their B1 language. 44 respondents had never undertaken language studies – at school or otherwise – beside these obligatory classes. 25 reported having studied an A2 language, but about half of them (12) had discontinued their studies at some point. Similar results were given for B2 languages: out of 27 students, 13 had chosen not to continue studying. B3 languages were studied by 29 students, out of which 11 had stopped to study. In addition, seven students reported having studied a language outside school, and two of them did so no longer. There were four cases of a student having studied two B3 languages and one informant who studied two languages in his free time.

German was by far the most common language at all school levels, followed by French and Spanish. Russian was studied at B2 and B3 levels, Italian by one respondent as a B3 language. Languages studied outside school were more varied: in addition to Spanish, Russian and Italian, Japanese, Chinese, Hindi and Romani were mentioned once each.

In addition to their personal language studies, students were asked to answer questions regarding the availability of language classes in their schools in different levels (see Figure 1). Options “Yes”, “No” and “I do not know” were provided for this question. 58% of students said that there were no A1 languages available in their primary school beside English – 16% of students remembered there having been a possibility to choose another language, but none of the respondents made that choice. According to Kangasvieri et al. (2011: 21), approximately 90% of municipalities have English as the only choice for an A1 language.

In the case of A2 languages, 60% report that studying a voluntary language in the first years of their compulsory education was possible (while only 23% had chosen to study an A2 language). The study options seem to increase as the students age: more than 80% of all respondents were aware of the possibility of studying a B2 language and B3 language.



**Figure 1: Language options in the respondents' schools (C1 through C5)**

It is worthwhile to note that according to their websites, all upper secondary schools that participated in the study had some B3 language courses available. However, one student reported that B3 languages were not available in his school and 18% were unsure. Across all levels, approximately 10% to 30% of the respondents did not have clear information about the availability of language studies in the schools they attended. Regardless, most students do not consider this a problem: about half (49%) of the students agreed or agreed strongly when asked whether they had received enough information about opportunities for language learning during their school years. The opinions on study opportunities outside school were somewhat more mixed, as nearly half of the respondents felt they had not received enough information on the topic, while 31% gave a positive response. Overall, the majority (57%) were content with the language options available for them in their school and municipality.

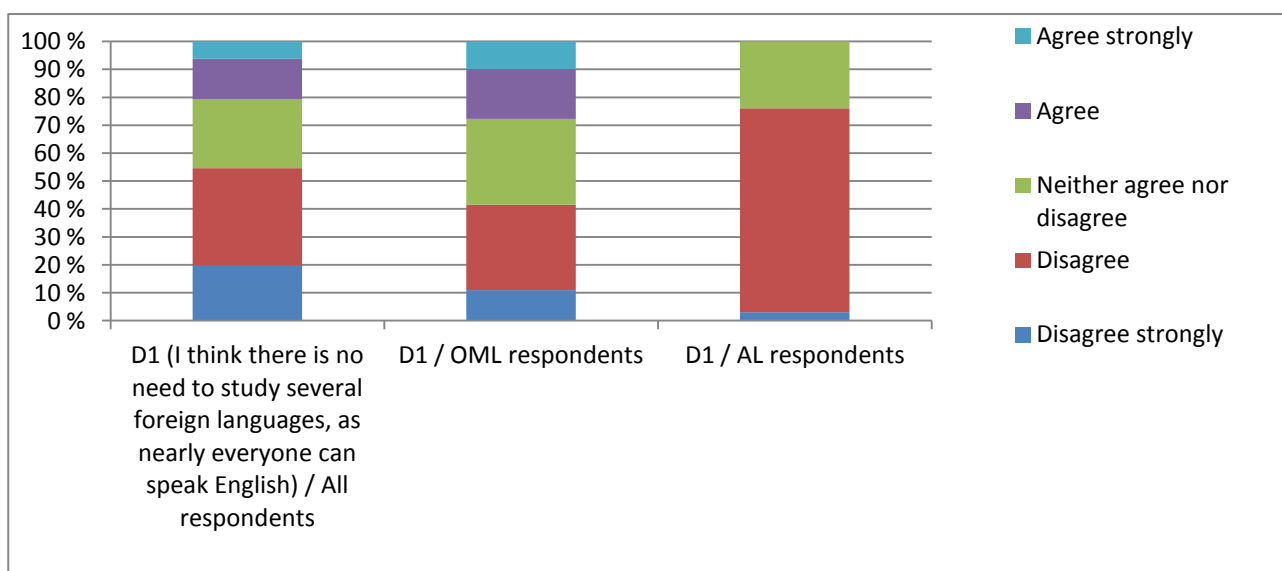
In the next two subsections (6.2 and 6.3), the students have been divided into two groups based on their language choices. The students who have only studied the mandatory languages or discontinued their language studies (hereafter “Only Mandatory Language” or “OML” students, N=72) form one group and students who study one or more additional language form the other (hereafter “Additional Language” or “AL” students, N=37). As the groups are imbalanced and the sample size of the entire study is rather small and hardly representative, no conclusive inferences can be made by comparing the responses of the two groups. The purpose of the sections is to see whether there are some general trends in the way in which the two kinds of students are

motivated. The results for all respondents and those of each group are given side by side in the figures.

## 6.2 The role of English

English has an especially powerful position as the most studied foreign language in Finland (Kumpulainen 2014: 98). The purpose of this subsection is to look at the views of the students regarding English in relation to other foreign languages and whether they consider the amount of class time devoted to English suitable.

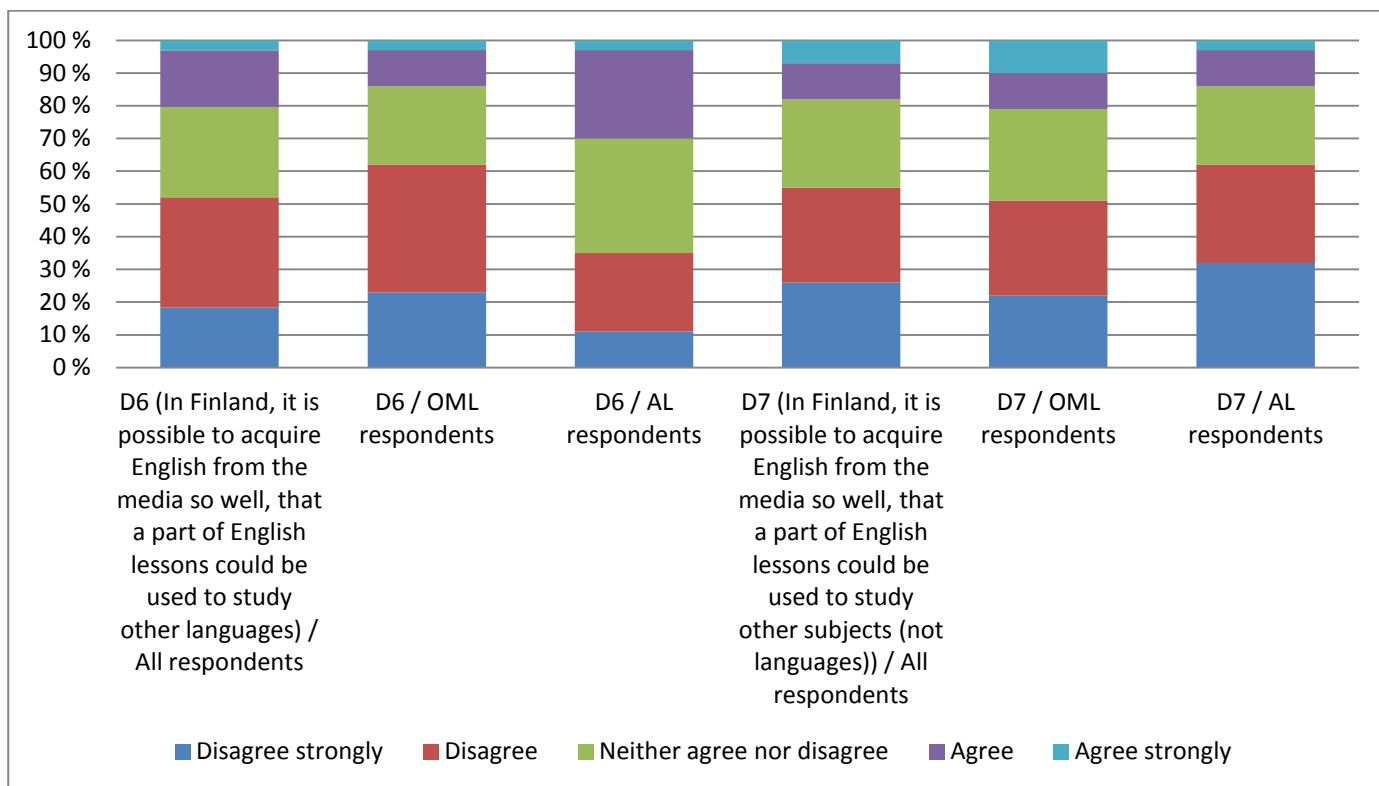
Students seem to recognize the value of different languages (see Figure 2): 54% of respondents disagreed somewhat or disagreed strongly with the statement that one does not need to study multiple languages as nearly everyone speaks English. None of the AL students and less than a third (28%) of OML students agreed with the statement.



**Figure 2: The role of English (D1)**

The students were not eager to reduce the class time spent on teaching English in favour of other subjects (see Figure 3). The OML students were very consistent in their wish to maintain the status quo: 62% opposed devoting English instruction time for other languages, while about half (51%) resisted the idea of using the time to teach other subjects besides languages. In the case of the AL students, 30% supported learning other languages at school at the expense of English with 35% opposing the idea. However, they were not ready to give up English classes for subjects that were not languages: 62% disagreed with the idea and only 14% supported it. Interestingly, the

opinions of OML students towards increasing the number of language classes and those of AL students towards increasing non-language classes are nearly identical, but the reverse is not true.



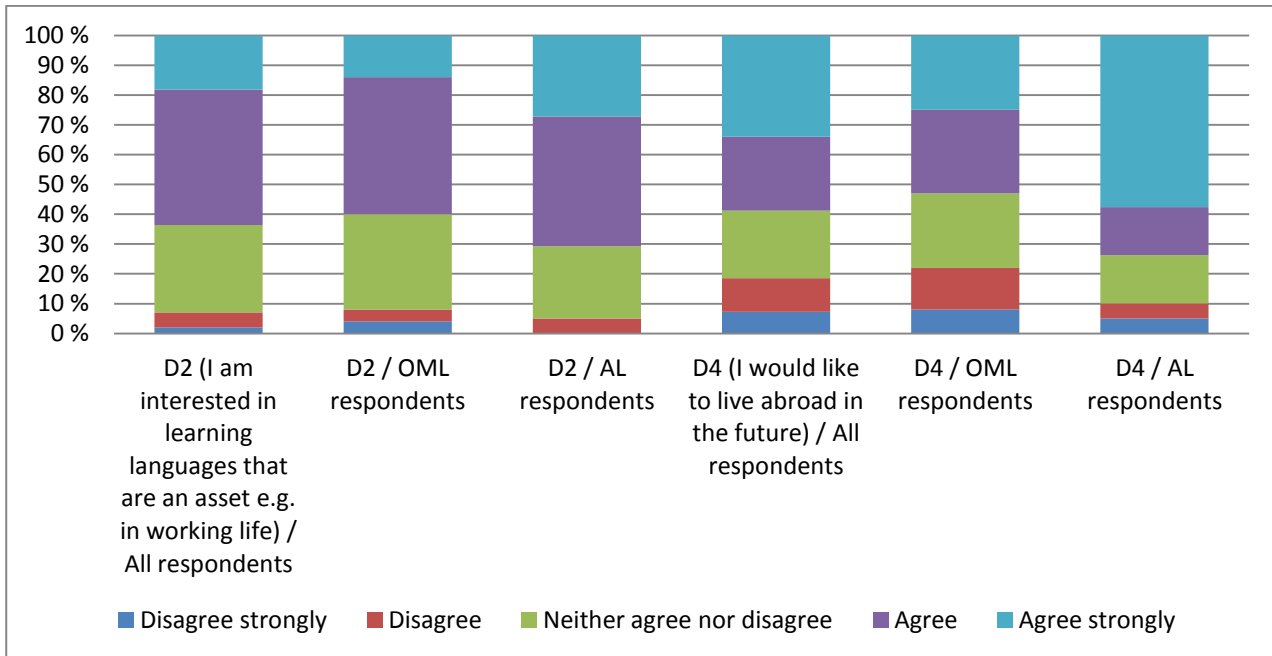
**Figure 3: The role of English (D6 and D7)**

### 6.3 Motivational characteristics of the students

The second research question of the present study concerns the motivators and demotivators that affect the foreign language learning motivation of the students. Two types of questions were used for determining trends in the motivation of the students. First, the students answered on a five-point Likert scale according to whether they agreed or disagreed with the provided statements. Questions D8, D9 and D10 had 108 respondents, while the rest of the questions had 109. Second, students were allowed to write freely about factors they found motivating. This question is discussed at the end of section 6.3.

The possible advantage in the job market, being able to live abroad and gaining intercultural competence seem to be central motivators for many students, as illustrated in Figure 4. More than 60% of all respondents reported wanting to study languages that are an asset in the working life, and approximately the same number of respondents said they would like to live abroad in the future. The AL students were somewhat more likely (a difference of 10 percentage points for D2 and 20 for D4) to agree with both statements than their OML counterparts. Three students out of

four (75%) felt that language skills are an important part of intercultural communication and understanding (see Figure 5). AL students were even more convinced of this, as 86% agreed with the statement, but 70% of OML students also expressed such views.

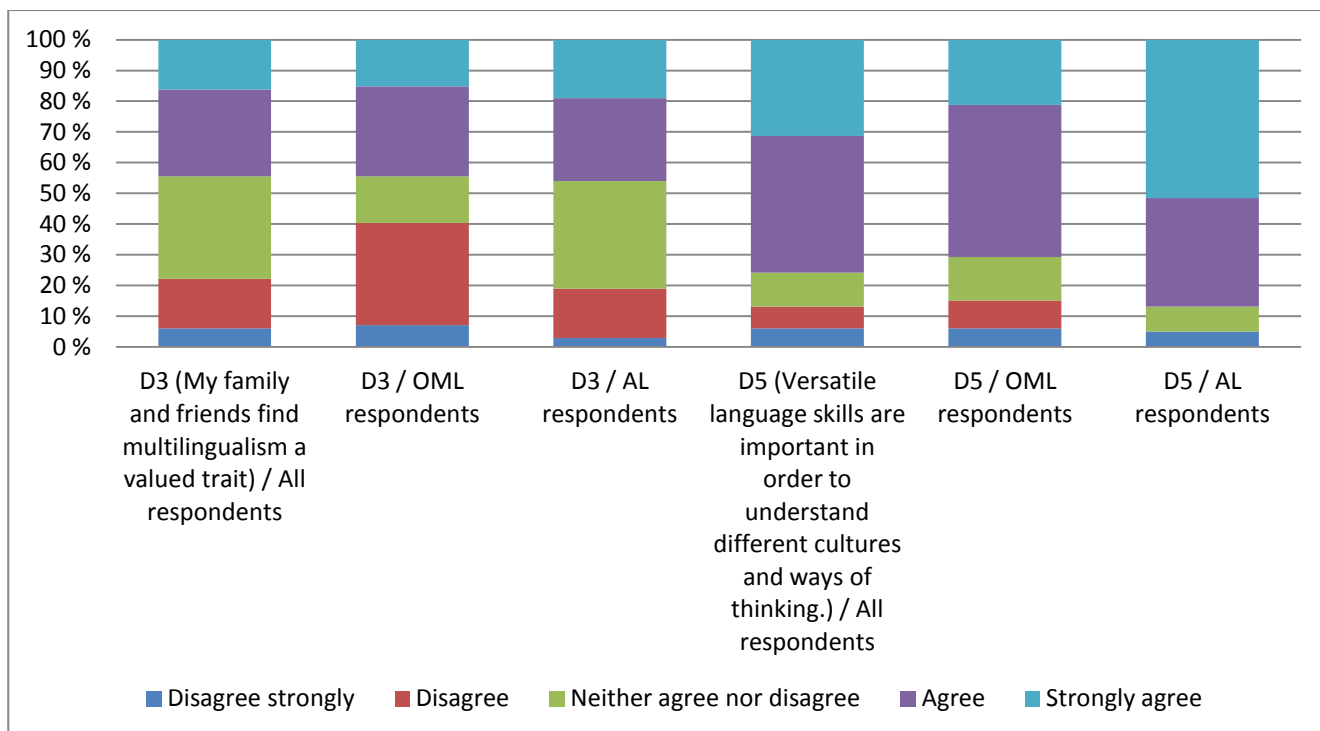


**Figure 4: Motivational factors (D2 and D4)**

From the point of view of Ryan and Deci’s (1985) SDT, language learning motivation linked to these factors suggests the Identification stage: when an individual wants to live abroad or communicate with people from different cultural backgrounds, learning a language naturally connects to that value. Being motivated by success in the working life could stem from the same orientation, but other explanations are also possible. If the language skills are primarily a key to a more prestigious line of work that will offer the individual a boost of self-worth, the Introjection orientation becomes more prominent. In addition, many companies nowadays require basic linguistic competence (e.g. passing a language test before being hired), so the job market could also be a source of motivation based on External regulation if not having the skills results in negative sanctions.

The students were less certain regarding how language skills are valued in their inner circle (Figure 5). Approximately 45% felt that foreign language skills were appreciated, but more than 20% said that they were not. The figure was nearly identical for both OML and AL students (44% and 46% respectively), but a considerably larger number of OML students (40%) felt that multilingualism was not particularly valued among their friends and family compared to AL

students (19%). It is likely that students who make similar subject choices at school spend more time together and parents' attitudes have a lot of influence on the language choices of their children especially at the early stages (Kangasvieri et al. 2011: 31, 37). Being motivated by appreciation from one's relatives and peers is often linked with Introjected regulation.



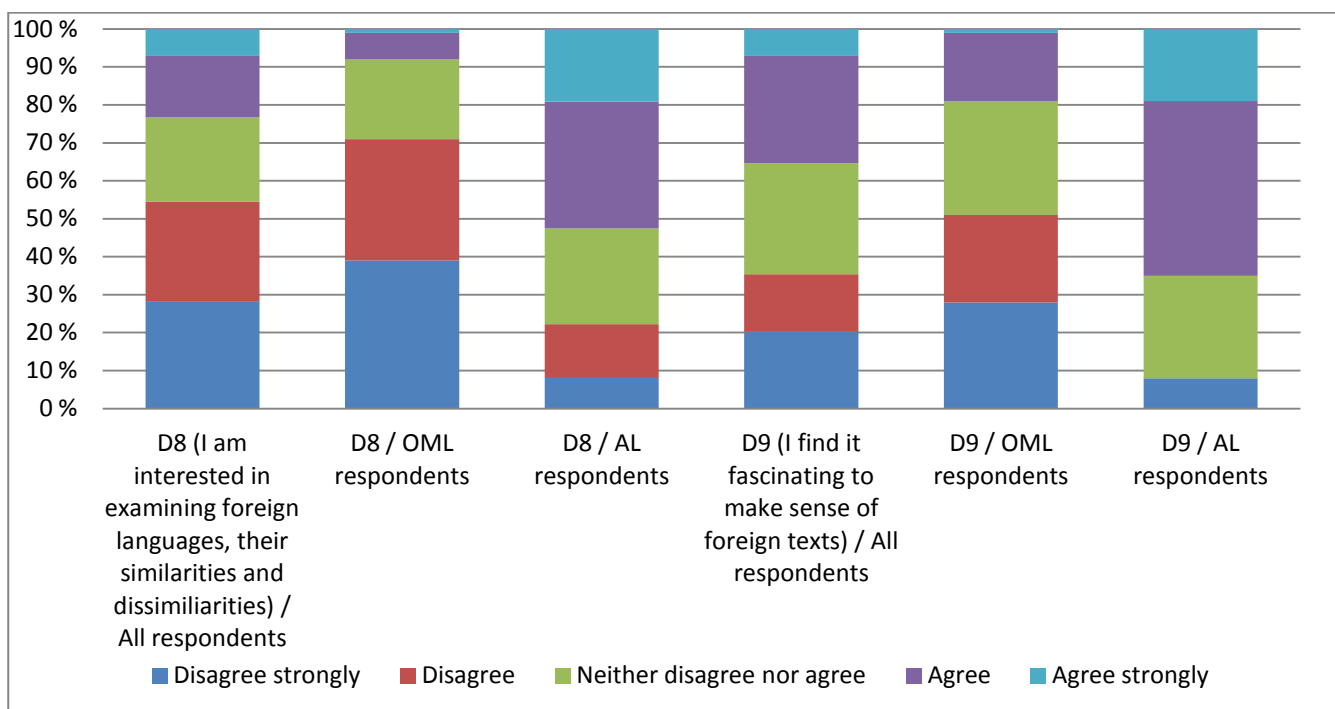
**Figure 5: Motivational factors (D3 and D5)**

The more intrinsic, intellectual value of learning foreign languages did not emerge as a strong motivator: only about a fourth of the respondents reported being interested in examining languages as such (Figure 6). However, OML students and AL students gave very different results. While only a handful of the OML students (8%) reported interest in the properties of different languages, more than half (52%) of the AL students did so. The next statement inquired whether students enjoyed making sense of texts in foreign languages. There were clear differences between OML students and AL students in this question as well: 19% of the former and 65% of the latter were interested in deciphering texts in another language. Among all respondents, 35% of the students agreed and 35% disagreed with the statement.

Learning languages simply for the sake of the intellectual challenge or pure enjoyment has a strong link with Intrinsic motivation, and the AL students seem more likely to report such attitudes. Studying foreign materials can also be for one's intrinsic pleasure, but it can also be



connected to slightly less intrinsic motivations: for example, a learner may put a great deal of effort into reading something in another language if it connects to a beloved hobby or other interest.

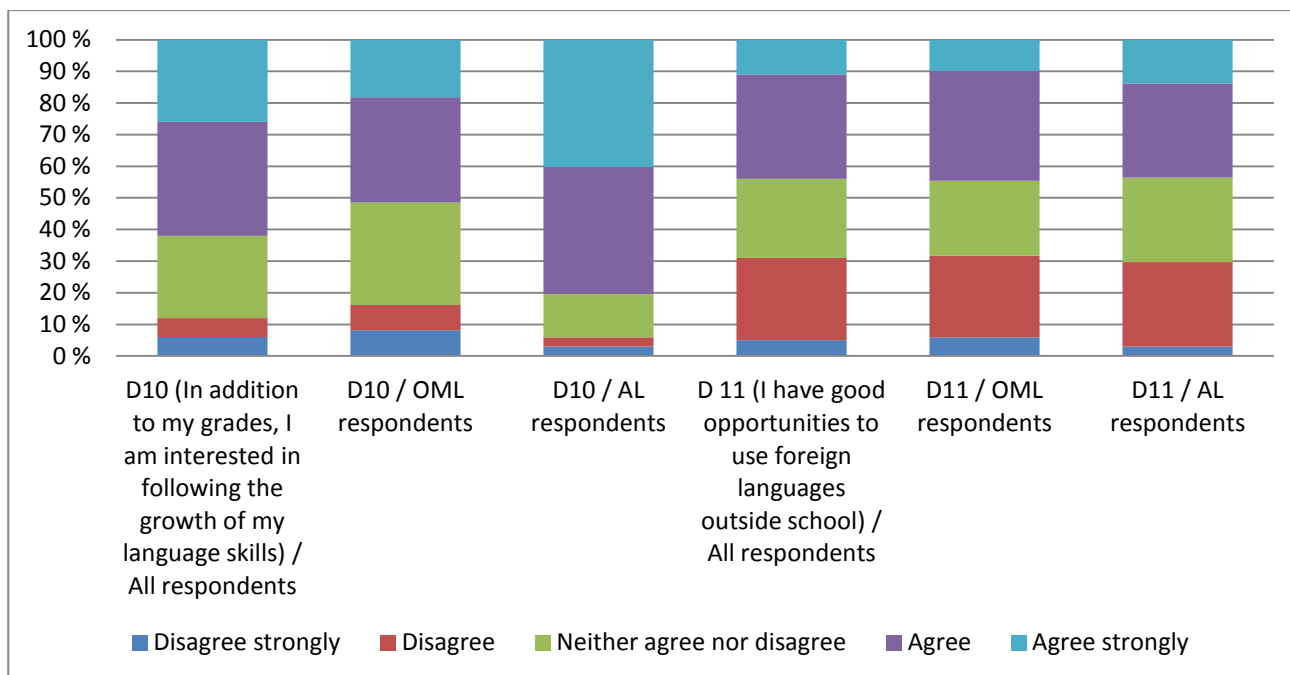


**Figure 6: Motivational factors (D8 and D9)**

Approximately 60% reported that they were interested in the development of their language skills alongside their course grades (see Figure 7). Disagreeing with this statement suggests strong External regulation: a learner who only cares about his or her test scores is dependent on outside evaluation or success and is thus not very autonomous. OML students were somewhat more likely to be disinterested in monitoring their own progress (16%, compared to the 6% of the AL students) and conversely, AL students more often reported the opposite. 82% of the AL students and 51% of the OML students claimed interest in the development of their language skills.

Students were also asked to estimate whether they felt they had opportunities to use their foreign language skills outside school. In this question, there were hardly any differences between the OML and AL students, as illustrated in Figure 7. Nearly half of the respondents (44%) said they had opportunities to use languages outside school, but 31% reported they did not. This question is not directly connected to any of the motivational orientations in SDT, but it is nevertheless relevant from the point of view of motivation: in Sakai and Kikuchi's (2009) study, perceived uselessness of the learned skills was one of the contributors to demotivation related to

Lack of interest. It should be noted that no differentiation between languages was made in this question. It is likely that English accounts for the majority of foreign language usage in the free time of both OML and AL students. The results may have been different if the perceived usefulness of different languages had been addressed in separate questions.



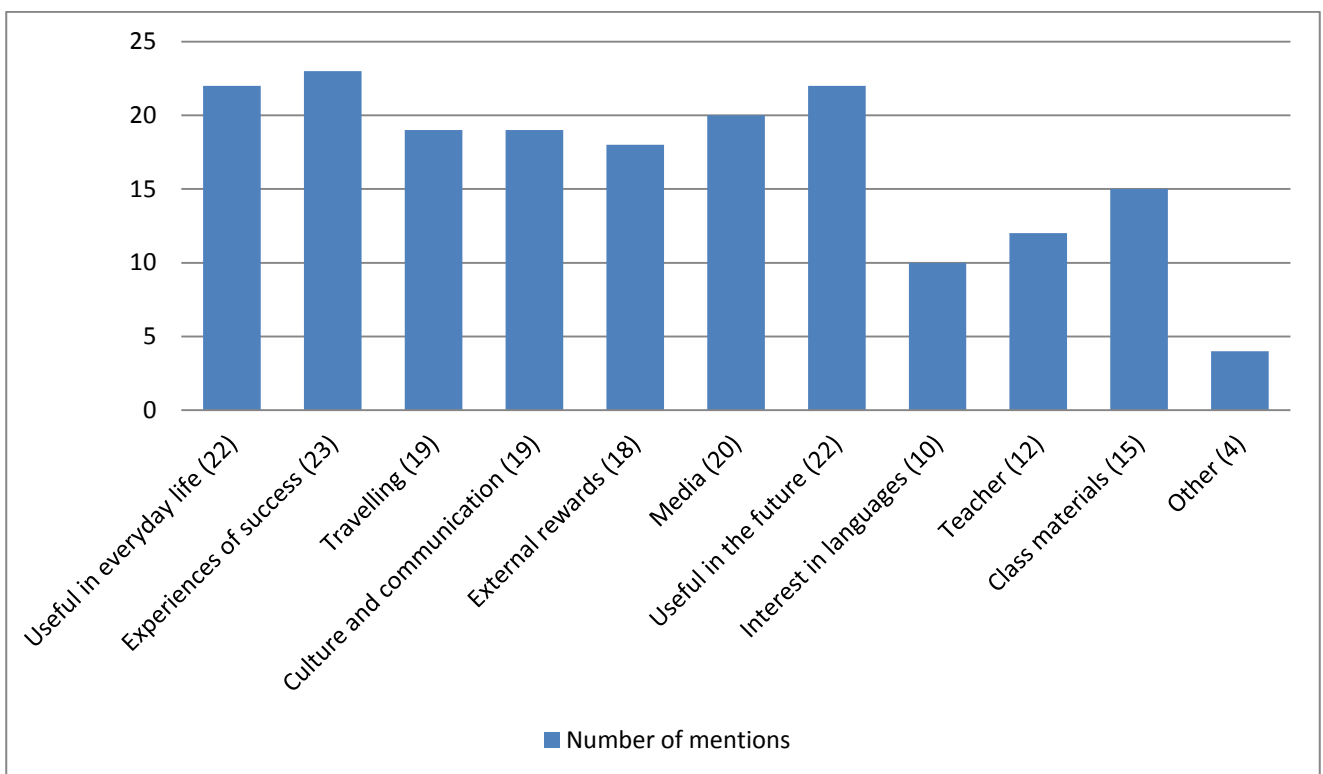
**Figure 7: Motivational factors (D10 and D11)**

In total, 104 students responded to the open question concerning motivating factors, generating a total of 184 motivators. The answers were read through twice before identifying the most common ideas and dividing them to categories (See Figure 8). Experiences of success were most commonly mentioned as a motivating factor (23 instances): when one communicates successfully in a situation or “just knows how to use the language”. Usefulness in the students’ current life and in the future were the second most common motivators (22 times each). Foreign language media was mentioned 20 times – many students noted this as a motivating factor for English specifically. 18 respondents considered external rewards, such as good grades or praise as motivating. A handful of these students stated simply passing a test (such as the Finnish matriculation examination) as a reason to study a language.

Travelling and communicating with different cultures was often considered factors that increase motivation (19 instances for each). There were different situations where intercultural interest played a part: some students had non-Finnish speaking relatives or they wanted to make friends with exchange students at their school, while others reported being interested in other

cultures in a more general way. Interest in languages themselves was mentioned less often (10 instances). These factors show signs of integrativeness: learners are willing to communicate with a foreign language speaker community and open to its different aspects (Masgoret, Bernaus and Gardner 2011: 283). On the other hand, the concept of “usefulness” and being motivated by goals outside language and its speaker community indicate the influence of instrumental motivation.

Attitudes towards the learning situation were also mentioned as motivating factors, though by a relatively small number of students: 12 respondents mentioned the motivating effect of having a good teacher, while 15 were motivated by class materials, such as interesting textbooks or good exercises. The “other” category (4 instances) contained some evaluation of the learning situation, including having a well-equipped classroom, having enough time to study and a suitable starting age for the beginning of the studies. One student felt that languages as a subject left room for his creative expression.

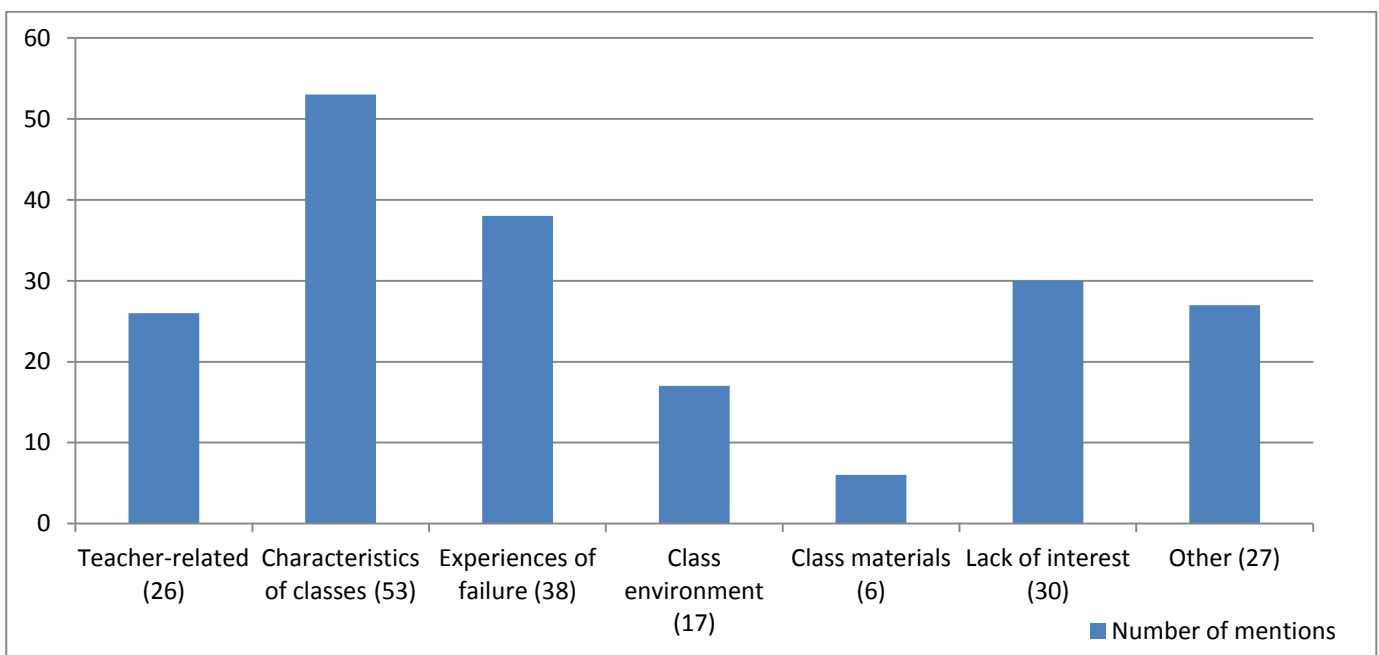


**Figure 8: Motivational factors (E2)**

## 6.4 Demotivational factors

A total of 107 students wrote something for the open question asking about demotivating factors in their foreign language studies. From the answers, 197 mentions of demotivators were identified and categorized by using the six demotivational factors identified by Sakai and Kikuchi (2009: 60–61).

Teacher-related factors were mentioned by 26 respondents. Factors related to a teacher’s personality or competence were mentioned several times, but several students also mentioned that frequently changing teacher trainees and substitute teachers were demotivating for them. Characteristics of classes was the most common demotivating category, containing numerous types of responses: these included the pacing of classes, boring or monotonous lessons, focus on grammar and vocabulary, inappropriate or “pointless” exercises and the excess amount of work needed for studying.



**Figure 9: Demotivational factors (E1)**

Experiences of failure were mentioned 38 times: this category included anxiety over test scores and strict grading, fear of making mistakes and other experiences of incompetence. A handful of students mentioned language mixing as a demotivating factor. This factor did not appear in Sakai and Kikuchi’s work, which only concerns native Japanese speakers learning English as their first foreign language. In the present study, concerns over language mixing were included in the category related to failure as language mixing could potentially lead to mistakes and situations that would be considered embarrassing for students and that could demotivate them.

The Class environment factor included 17 remarks, which were related to the class size (too large or too small), class conditions (e.g. only online instruction available or classes held at another school), compulsory nature of language study as well as demotivating class atmosphere or discouraging attitudes around the learner. Class materials were mentioned only six times: three

times the textbook was described as simply “boring”, and three times criticised the topics chosen for the textbook units. Finally, the Lack of interest category (30 instances) contained the following demotivators: no perceived use for the language outside classroom, lack of interest in learning languages in general and the learner’s preference to prioritize other subjects.

In addition to the six categories proposed by Sakai and Kikuchi, two common responses were given a separate “Other” category, as they did not fully correspond to any of the categories. These included 16 mentions of “lack of time” and 11 instances of “perceived difficulty” of foreign languages in general.

It is interesting to note that while factors related to evaluation of the learning situation only appeared in relatively small numbers as motivators (categories Teacher and Class materials), they constitute the majority of demotivational factors (Teacher-related, Class characteristics, environment and materials). The students seem to be more likely to attribute motivation to the instrumental uses of the language, while demotivation is often connected to classroom experiences.

## **6.5 Reasons for not studying voluntary languages**

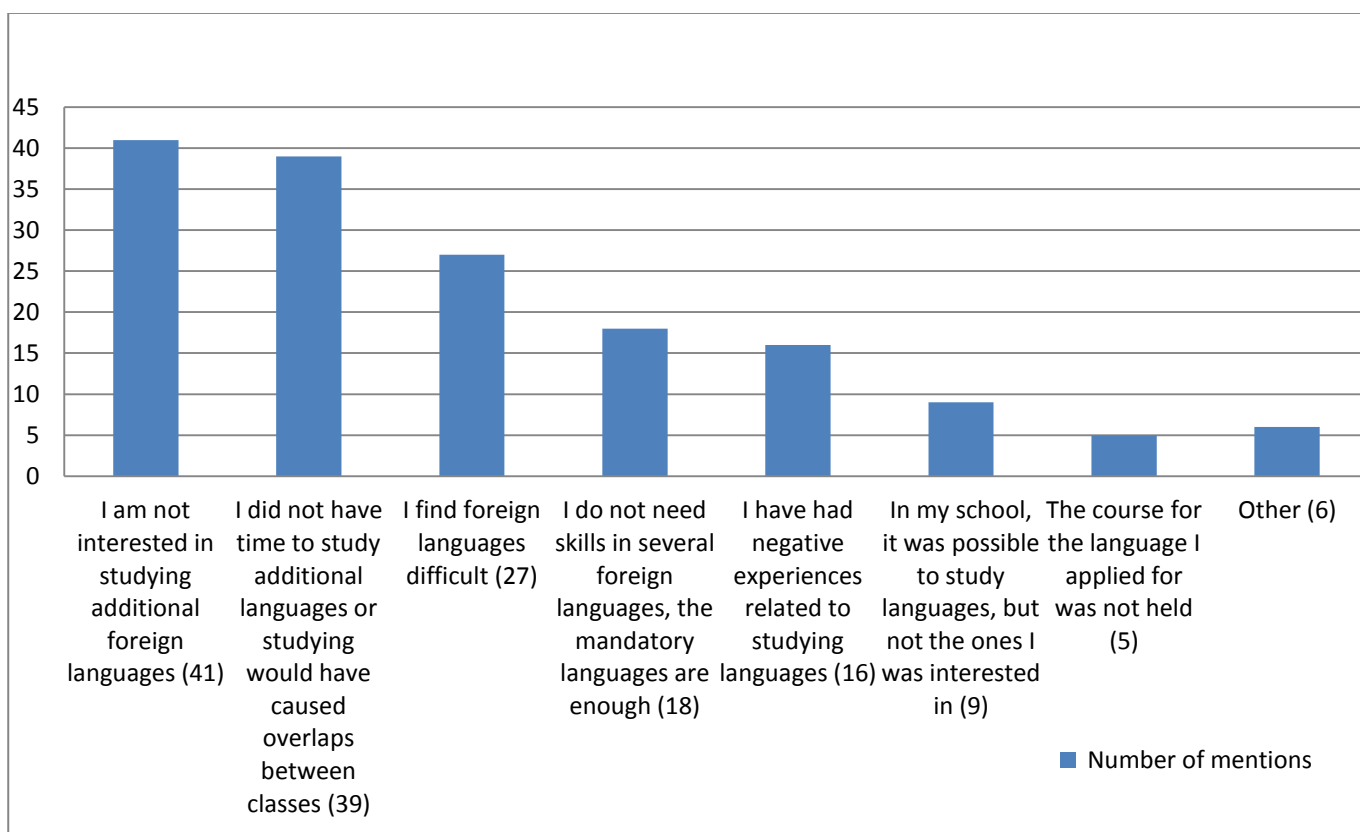
Only OML students were eligible for this question. Respondents were asked to fill in one, two or three most important reasons for choosing not to study additional languages or having discontinued their studies. Ten options (one of which was an open “other” category) were provided. Out of the total 72 OML students, this question was answered by 68 informants, who chose a total of 161 items.

The most common reason the students did not study additional languages was the lack of interest in studying additional languages (41 instances). The second most chosen option was the lack of time and overlap with other classes (39 instances). Other common responses were perceived difficulty of language studies (27 instances), the feeling that one does not need additional languages in one’s future life (18 instances) and negative experiences related to language learning in the past (16 instances). Some respondents had experienced problems with the availability of languages: 9 students reported that school did not offer a language they were interested in, and 5 had applied for a language group that was not formed due to a lack of interested students.

Six respondents chose the open option: two students attributed their choice to “lack of energy” or “laziness”. This suggests amotivation related to capacity-effort beliefs. Reasons directly related to the nature of languages themselves were given twice: one student “hated the German and Russian languages”, while another was not interested in languages that “do not have roots in Finland”. Finally, one student stated that there were other voluntary subjects that were more

appealing than languages and one had perceived language mixing to have a negative effect on her studies.

The findings were in line with previous studies on the subject: in Grasz and Schlabach (2011: 54-57), the most common reasons not to study certain languages were perceived difficulty of said languages and amotivation related to capacity-ability beliefs (the students believed they would not be able to reach a high level of proficiency in the language). In another study (Pietarinen, Kolehmainen and Kuosmanen 2011), parents and children expressed concern over the added workload and time constraints of choosing an additional language.



**Figure 10: Reasons not to study additional foreign languages (B1)**

## 7. Discussion and conclusion

The aim of the present study was to investigate motivation-related and practical factors that influence the choices made by Finnish upper secondary school students in their foreign language studies. The data was collected by means of questionnaire conducted in six schools in different areas in Finland.

The study had three research questions. For RQ1, the students were asked about their views on the role of English in relation to other foreign languages. Only about a fourth of respondents felt that the prevalence of English has substantially removed the need for versatile language skills. All students who were studying an additional language at the moment of the data collection and the majority of those who did not agreed that other languages are needed. However, most students also recognised the value of formal English education at schools and were against reducing English lessons in favour of other subjects.

RQ2 was the question that generated the most data, and is also the most difficult question to answer. The majority of the students are relatively autonomous in their language learning motivation: strictly external motivators do appear in the responses, but are not by any means the most important type of motivation. On the other hand, purely intrinsic motivations were not very common, either. Students who did not study additional foreign languages tended to be somewhat more extrinsically oriented than students who did.

Instrumental and integrative factors were both prominent motivators. Especially contacts with target language communities (such as travel and being able to live abroad) were mentioned often. The opportunity to use languages in real life situations was a powerful motivator, but nearly a third of students reported they did not have such opportunities in their lives. Institutional factors (e.g. good teacher, adequate school facilities or learning materials) were considered motivating by smaller number of students.

RQ3 concerned the students' views on the reasons why they had chosen not to study additional languages. Lack of interest in studying additional languages and problems related to time management were the most common reason reported by the students: one or both were chosen by nearly two thirds of the respondents. However, problems related to the availability of language classes in one's school or municipality were mentioned only by a relatively small number of students. Even though many municipalities have had to cut funding for language instruction in the recent years and can only offer a limited range of choices, this does not seem to be a central reason for students not studying additional languages. On the other hand, perceived difficulty of languages

and negative experiences were the third and fifth most commonly chosen reasons, and they were mentioned several times in the open questions as demotivators. This raises challenges for teachers and others working in the field of education: how to minimize the negative experiences and remotivate the students who already have lost interest in learning?

It is important to note that the present study has some limitations. While the questions were adapted from theoretical concepts of Deci and Ryan's (1985) Self-Determination Theory and Gardner's (1985) Socio-Educational model, the study does not contain a full test of motivational factors, as this may have led to a too lengthy survey. Thus, the study can only give approximate information regarding the nature of the students' motivation. In addition, the study only concerns students who attend an academic upper secondary school instead of a vocational school. In 2014 – the year when the students participating in the study began their studies – academic schools received 103,900 new students (Suomen virallinen tilasto 2014b) while their vocational counterparts gained 120,700 new students (Suomen virallinen tilasto 2014a). Future studies are needed to document the development in vocational schools as well. Furthermore, all foreign languages were treated as a single entity in the present study, except for the questions regarding the role of English in particular. The fact that many students mentioned specific languages in other questions as well shows that there are language-specific differences in motivation and the foreign-language learning experience.

Overall, the students seem to appreciate language skills on a general level, but several factors may lead to a decision not to pursue a large repertoire of languages personally. While not a part of the data used for analysis, one remark for the third open question (free comments on language learning), chosen to be included in the title of the present study, summarizes the mixed sentiment that the majority of students seem to have when it comes to foreign language learning: “[Foreign language learning is] useful but challenging, and it's not for everyone<sup>1</sup>”.

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<sup>1</sup> ”Hyödyllistä, mutta vaativaa eikä sovi kaikille” (sic.)



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## APPENDIX A: The questionnaire

### KYSELY KIELIVALINNOISTA JA VIERAAN KIELEN OPISKELUMOTIVAATIESTA

Teen Jyväskylän yliopistossa kandidaatintutkielmaa motivaation ja vieraiden kielten opiskelumahdollisuuksien vaikutuksista kielivalintoihin. Tutkimus toteutetaan kyselynä, johon vastaa lukion toista vuosiluokkaa käyviä opiskelijoita eri paikkakunnilla Suomessa.

Kyselyssä vieraaksi kieleksi lasketaan kaikki kielet, jotka eivät ole opetuskielenä. Niinpä myös esimerkiksi ruotsin kieli lasketaan vieraaksi kieleksi, jos käyt suomenkielistä koulua.

#### Eritasoisten kielten määritelmät kyselyssä

A1-kieli on ensimmäinen, pakollinen vieras kieli, joka alkaa yleensä alakoulun kolmannella luokalla, joissakin kouluissa aikaisemmin.

A2-kieli on valinnainen kieli, joka on joissakin kouluissa mahdollista valita alakoulun neljännellä tai viidennellä vuosiluokalla.

B1-kieli on seitsemänneltä luokalta alkava kieli.

B2-kieli on valinnainen, kahdeksannelta vuosiluokalta alkava kieli.

B3-kieli on valinnainen, lukiossa opiskeltava kieli.

Lue kysymykset huolella ja vastaa oman kokemuksesi mukaan. Kaikki vastaukset käsitellään luottamuksellisesti eikä yksittäisiä vastaajia voi tunnistaa tuloksista. Valmis tutkimus on vapaasti luettavissa Jyväskylän yliopiston opinnäytearkistossa ([jyx.jyu.fi](http://jyx.jyu.fi)) loppukeväästä 2016 alkaen. Tämän kyselyn vastauksia voidaan käyttää aineiston myös saman tekijän myöhemmässä opinnäytetyössä.

Kyselyyn osallistuminen on vapaaehtoista.

Ystävällisin terveisin

Noora Ervelius  
[noora.a.ervelius@student.jyu.fi](mailto:noora.a.ervelius@student.jyu.fi)

Ohjaajan nimi  
Samu Kytölä  
FT, yliopistonlehtori

Lukion nimi: \_\_\_\_\_

Paikkakunta / -kunnat, joilla kävin peruskoulua: \_\_\_\_\_

Äidinkieli / -kielet: \_\_\_\_\_

Sukupuoli:  Nainen  Mies  Muu  En halua kertoa

**A) Kirjoita kielet, joita olet opiskellut. Kohtaan ”muu” lisää myös, miten kieltä opiskelit (esim. itseopiskelu tai kansalaisopiston kurssi). Jos olet jossain vaiheessa kokonaan keskeyttänyt jo aloitetun kielen opinnot, laita perään X (esim. A2-kieli: ranska X)**

Pakolliset kielet A1-kieli: \_\_\_\_\_ B1-kieli: \_\_\_\_\_

Valinnaiset kielet A2-kieli: \_\_\_\_\_ B2-kieli: \_\_\_\_\_

B3-kieli: \_\_\_\_\_ muu: \_\_\_\_\_

HUOM. Jos opiskelet tällä hetkellä valinnaisia kieliä, vastaa seuraavaksi kohtaan C.

**B) Jos olet opiskellut VAIN pakollisia A1 ja B1-kieliä tai keskeyttänyt valinnaiset kieliopintosi, numeroi enintään kolme (1 - 3) mielestäsi tärkeintä syytä.**

- \_\_\_ Koulussani ei ollut mahdollisuutta opiskella valinnaisia vieraita kieliä.
- \_\_\_ Koulussani oli mahdollista opiskella valinnaisia kieliä, mutta ei kieliä, joista olin kiinnostunut.
- \_\_\_ Toivomani vieraan kielen kurssi ei toteutunut (esim. ryhmän minimikoko ei täyttynyt).
- \_\_\_ En ole kiinnostunut ylimääräisten vieraiden kielten opiskelemisestä.
- \_\_\_ Vieraat kielet ovat minulle vaikeita.
- \_\_\_ Minulla on ollut huonoja kokemuksia kielten opiskelusta (esim. opetustapa, opettaja, ryhmä, arviointi)
- \_\_\_ En tarvitse useamman vieraan kielen taitoja tulevaisuudessa, pakolliset kielet riittävät.
- \_\_\_ Minulla ei ollut aikaa valinnaisten kielten opiskeluun tai opiskelu olisi aiheuttanut paljon kurssien päällekkäisyyttä.
- \_\_\_ Opiskelutiloihin liittyi ongelmia (esim. tunnit järjestettiin toisella koululla, sisäilmaongelmat)
- \_\_\_ Muu syy (mikä?)

**C) Ympyröi sopivin vaihtoehto.**

(1= kyllä, 2= ei, 3=en tiedä)

- |  |   |   |   |
|--|---|---|---|
| 1. Alakoulussani oli mahdollisuus valita jokin muu A1-kieli kuin englanti.             | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 2. Alakoulussani oli mahdollisuus opiskella A2-kieltä.                                 | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 3. Yläkoulussani oli mahdollisuus opiskella valinnaista eli B2-kieltä.                 | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 4. Lukiossani on mahdollisuus opiskella ”lyhyttä” eli B3-kieltä.                       | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 5. Lukiossani on mahdollisuus opiskella muitakin ”pitkiä” eli A-kieliä kuin englantia. | 1 | 2 | 3 |

**D) Ympyröi mielipidettäsi parhaiten kuvaava vaihtoehto.  
(1= ehdottomasti eri mieltä, 5= ehdottomasti samaa mieltä)**

1. Mielestäni nykyään ei ole tarvetta opiskella useita vieraita kieliä, sillä lähes kaikki puhuvat englantia.	1	2	3	4	5
2. Minua kiinnostaa opiskella sellaisia kieliä, joista on konkreettista hyötyä esimerkiksi työmarkkinoilla.	1	2	3	4	5
3. Monikielisyys herättää lähipiirissäni arvostusta.	1	2	3	4	5
4. Tahtoisin joskus asua ulkomailla.	1	2	3	4	5
5. Monipuolinen kielitaito on tärkeää, erilaisten kulttuurien ja Ajattelutapojen ymmärtämiseksi.	1	2	3	4	5
6. Suomessa on mahdollista omaksua niin paljon englantia mediasta, että osan englannin opetustunneista voisi vapauttaa muiden kielten opintoihin.	1	2	3	4	5
7. Suomessa on mahdollista omaksua niin paljon englantia mediasta, että osan englannin opetustunneista voisi vapauttaa muiden aineiden (ei kielten) opintoihin.	1	2	3	4	5
8. Minua kiinnostaa tutkia vieraita kieliä ja niiden eroja sekä samankaltaisuuksia.	1	2	3	4	5
9. Minusta on kiehtovaa selvittää vieraskielisten tekstien merkityksiä.	1	2	3	4	5
10. Pelkkien kurssiarvosanojen lisäksi olen kiinnostunut siitä, miten vieraan kielen taitoni kasvavat opintojen aikana.	1	2	3	4	5
11. Minulla on hyviä mahdollisuuksia käyttää opiskelemiani vieraita kieliä koulun ulkopuolella.	1	2	3	4	5
12. Olen saanut tarpeeksi tietoa eri kouluasteilla mahdollisuuksista opiskella kieliä.	1	2	3	4	5
13. Olen tietoinen mahdollisuuksista opiskella kieliä koulun ulkopuolella paikkakunnallani.	1	2	3	4	5
14. Olen tyytyväinen kielitarjonnan laajuuteen koulussani ja paikkakunnallani.	1	2	3	4	5

E)

1. Millaiset asiat **vähentävät / ovat vähentäneet** vieraiden kielten opiskelumotivaatiotasi? Voit kertoa itse kieleen, kielen tunteihin, oppimateriaaleihin, arviointiin tai johonkin muuhun liittyviä esimerkkejä.

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2. Millaiset asiat **lisäävät / ovat lisänneet** kielten opiskelumotivaatiotasi?

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3. Mitä muuta tahtoisit sanoa vieraiden kielten opiskelusta?

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4. Palautetta kyselystä:

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Kiitokset osallistumisesta ja hyvää kevätlukukauden jatkoa!