

Finnish upper secondary school students' views on feedback for English oral skills

Bachelor's Thesis

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<p>Tiivistelmä – Abstract</p> <p>Palautteen merkitystä oppimiselle on tutkittu paljon ja Suomessa sekä Perusopetuksen opetussuunnitelman perusteet (2014) että Lukion Opetussuunnitelman perusteet (2015) tunnistavat sen merkityksen osana arviointia ja oppilaiden oppimisen tukemista. Lisäksi englannin suullisen kielitaidon merkitys kielten opetuksessa on kasvanut viime vuosina, kun englannin kielitaidon merkitys on kasvanut maailman globalisoituessa, mikä otetaan huomioon myös Perusopetuksen opetussuunnitelman perusteissa (2014: 350).</p> <p>Tämä tutkimus yhdisti palautteen ja suullisen kielitaidon teemat ja sen tavoitteena oli selvittää, kokevatko lukion ensimmäisen vuoden opiskelijat saavansa tarpeeksi palautetta englannin suullisesta kielitaidosta. Lisäksi pyrittiin selvittämään, miten he saavat palautetta tai miten he mahdollisesti haluaisivat saada lisää palautetta englannin suullisesta kielitaidosta. Opiskelijoiden näkökulma valittiin, sillä palaute on opiskelijoiden kehittymistä varten ja he tietävät parhaiten, millaisen palautteen he kokevat hyödyllisimmäksi. Tutkimuksen aineisto kerättiin kyselylomakkeella kahdessa ryhmässä yhdessä keski-suomalaisessa lukiossa ja kyselyyn vastasi yhteensä 49 opiskelijaa.</p> <p>Tutkimuksen tuloksista selvisi, että suurin osa tutkimukseen osallistuneista oppilaista oli tyytyväisiä saamansa palautteen määrään englannin opetuksessa, mutta heistäkin osa toivoi saavansa enemmän palautetta esimerkiksi ääntämisestä. Opiskelijat kertoivat saavansa palautetta suullisesta kielitaidosta enimmäkseen kirjallisessa muodossa opettajalta suullisen kokeen jälkeen. Opiskelijat, jotka eivät olleet kovin tyytyväisiä saamansa palautteen määrään, toivoivat kirjallisen palautteen lisäksi opettajalta suullista palautetta, josta selviäisi, missä suullisen kielitaidon osa-alueissa heillä olisi kehitettävää.</p> <p>Tutkimuksen tulokset viittaavat siihen, että tutkimukseen osallistuneet opiskelijat arvostavat palautetta ja toivovat saavansa sitä kehittääkseen suullista kielitaitoa, jota he pitävät tärkeänä taitona arjessa.</p>	
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1 INTRODUCTION

Feedback as a part of assessment is recognized in the Finnish National Core Curriculum for upper secondary schools (Lukion opetussuunnitelman perusteet 2015) as means to guide students' learning towards the set learning goals through communication between a student and a teacher. In other words, the core meaning of feedback is to help students learn, develop and make their learning more efficient. Considering that, feedback has been studied from many perspectives including the perspective of language learning and more specifically the perspective of oral skills, which is also the perspective of the present study. However, previous research on feedback for oral skills has focused on corrective feedback, which has also been studied from students' perspective. For instance, Zhang and Rahimi (2014) found that students consider corrective feedback as means to make their learning more efficient. On the other hand, in Finland students' opinions on feedback in language classes have been studied from a more general point of view, not focusing on any specific skill within language skills. For example, Pollari (2017) found that students appreciate individualized constructive feedback.

In addition to feedback, oral skills are of interest in the present study. As the communicative approach has gained a significant role in language teaching, the importance of oral skills has also become more widely acknowledged. Consequently, oral skills have been studied rather extensively, also in Finland. Research on the area has included the perspectives of teaching oral skills and students' views on them. For instance, it has been found that students consider oral skills as an important part of language skills (Ilola 2017). Moreover, the practices of oral skills teaching have been studied and for example, Kaski-Akhawan (2013) found that multiple kinds of oral tasks, such as discussion tasks, presentations, and pronunciation exercises, are used to practice oral skills during lessons. In addition, adding an oral exam into the matriculation examination has been discussed (Toisen kotimaisen kielen ja vieraiden kielten digitaalisten kokeiden määräykset 2017: 9), and thus, teaching oral skills and consequently also feedback for oral skills should be considered equally to for instance written production in language teaching.

Hence, the purpose of this bachelor's thesis is to shed light on students' views and experiences about feedback for English oral skills. Students' perspective was chosen since the purpose of feedback is to support their learning and thus, their contentment regarding feedback is significant. In short, the present study aims at finding out whether students feel that they receive enough feedback for English oral skills, how they receive it and how would they possibly wish to receive more of it.

The following two chapters present some theoretical background for the present study along with previous research about students' views on oral skills and feedback. Chapters 4 and 5 are about the present study reviewing the methodological choices, aims and the results of this study. In the last chapter some conclusions are drawn, and the limitations of the presents study are discussed along with suggestions for further research.

2 ORAL SKILLS IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHING

For the purposes of this study it is important to define what is meant with the concept of oral skills and hence, some definitions will be introduced in this chapter. Along with the definitions, the perspectives on teaching English oral skills in the Finnish Core Curriculum are presented. Finally, some previous studies on the topic will be introduced.

2.1 Definitions of oral skills

Rather many definitions of oral skills revolve around the term *communicative competence* and one example of that is Canale and Swain's (1980: 27-31) model. Their definition of communicative competence covers both written and spoken communication and it is divided into three different competencies, which include grammatical, sociolinguistic and strategic competencies. Grammatical competence refers to the language user's knowledge for instance about the structures, lexicon and phonology of the language. Issues related to discourse and social context of any discourse are included in the sociolinguistic competence. Strategic competence, in turn, covers a language user's capability to solve problematic situations in language use (Canale and Swain 1980: 27-31). According to Canale and Swain, each competence is as important when trying to achieve successful communication.

Nowadays, a widely acknowledged definition of language skills is provided in the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (2001), which is a frame of reference for language learning which focuses on seeing a language learner as an active user of the language in multiple contexts. The definition of language competence in the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages is one of the most known and used definitions nowadays as the communicative approach to language has gained more and more attention over the last few decades. This definition also uses the term *communicative competence*, which includes written and spoken communication, and it has many similarities with Canale and Swain's (1980) definition. However, the Framework provides a wider perspective than Canale and Swain's (1980) model. The components of this model are linguistic, sociolinguistic and pragmatic competencies. As in Canale and Swain's (1980) model, in this model the linguistic competence comprises of basic knowledge of lexicon, grammatical structures and phonology of a language. Sociolinguistic competence refers to social and cultural facts that a language user should be aware of when using the language especially in a communicative context. Pragmatic competence, in turn, includes important knowledge of language use in a rather concrete level; for example, knowing some phrases that are suitable only for specific situations are an

important part of pragmatic competence (Common European Framework of Reference for Languages 2001: 13).

According to the Framework, particularly oral skills are assessed in the following categories: range, accuracy, fluency, interaction and coherence (Common European Framework of Reference for Languages 2001: 28-29). Range refers to the number of linguistic items, like vocabulary and structures, that the language learner has a control over; the wider the skill the more precisely they can express themselves in different situations. In turn, when a learner has a high level of accuracy, they can use complex grammatical structures correctly without it taking concentration away from moving the communication forward. The third category, fluency, concerns for example a learner's need to take pauses to decide on the correct phrases and structures and to how spontaneously they can express themselves. As for interaction, it refers to a learner being able to make conversation more fluent by using natural ways to initiate a conversation and to take turns to make the conversation flow. Lastly, the level of coherence in speech depends on a learner's capability to connect his or her utterances into meaningful units by using a range of connectors. In short, a good language learner should be able to communicate understandably using correct language and taking the cultural and social contexts of the communication into account.

2.2 Oral skills in Finnish EFL teaching

In the Finnish context, the National Core Curriculum for comprehensive schools (Perusopetuksen opetussuunnitelman perusteet, POPS) sets guidelines for English teaching in comprehensive schools. In the National Core Curriculum (NCC), language skills are divided into multiple sections that are based on the levels of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages that were introduced above (POPS 2014: 350). In other words, the content of teaching that supports oral or communicative skills has many similarities with the definition of communicative competence in the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages. Generally, it is said that English teaching should give students courage to use the language in “versatile interaction” (POPS 2014: 348) and in terms of interactional skills the aims of teaching are to “encourage students to participate in discussions that are appropriate to age level, to support students' initiative in communication, in use of compensation skills and meaning negotiation, and to help students recognize cultural aspects of communication” (POPS 2014: 348-349).

The aims above are also the basis of the assessment criteria in the NCC. The assessment criteria provide, perhaps, more concrete examples of skills or situations that the students ideally handle at a specific stage of the studies. Moreover, it can be assumed that the aspects included in the assessment criteria are also the aspects that are considered when teaching oral skills. According to the assessment criteria a student who deserves a good grade (grade 8) communicates in daily situations, which also include expressing opinions, fairly easily, can make sure whether he or she has been understood, is able to negotiate meanings to some extent and knows the most important politeness rules (POPS 2014: 351-352). In these criteria, the connection to the assessment criteria in the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages can be observed clearly: daily situations refer to the range of active vocabulary of a learner, confirming understanding is a significant part of interaction and politeness rules refer to sociolinguistic aspects of language use.

Even though the NCC does not explicitly mention pronunciation, there has been support for emphasizing pronunciation teaching in EFL classrooms. It has been reported that Finnish English teachers perceive pronunciation as a significant part of language skills and that time is devoted to teaching pronunciation in classes to some extent (Tegujeff 2012). However, the teachers also acknowledge that using a bit more time on teaching pronunciation than they do at present could be beneficial (Tegujeff 2012). Furthermore, Lintunen (2015) has argued that teaching pronunciation should be emphasized more than the other components within oral skills, such as non-verbal signals and sociolinguistic skills, since the mentioned skills can be learned also in other contexts than language learning but target language pronunciation can be very different compared to a learner's first language and therefore more challenging to learn.

Regarding the more practical aspect of oral skills teaching in Finland, some studies on oral skills teaching practices have been conducted. Next, a couple of those studies will be presented, since for the purposes of this study it is useful to know how students usually perceive oral skills and learning them, and in which situations it may be possible for teachers to provide students with feedback for their oral skills. For instance, Kaski-Akhawan (2013) has studied upper secondary school students' perceptions about teaching of oral skills in Finnish EFL classroom in her master's thesis. According to her, students feel that enough time is devoted to practicing oral skills in teaching English. In addition, both students and teachers perceive that discussion tasks, in pairs or groups, are the most used and useful tasks to practice oral skills. In addition to discussion tasks, students named for example presentations, reading out loud, role plays and pronunciation exercises as ways of practicing oral skills in English lessons (Kaski-Akhawan

2013). Especially discussion tasks could be assumed to support for example the idea of practicing communication in daily situations which was mentioned as one of the aims in the National Core Curriculum of comprehensive schools (POPS 2014).

Furthermore, Ilola (2018) has studied students' views on oral skills in her dissertation. According to her, oral skills are generally viewed being important by students. She also points out that students regard oral skills as a rather holistic skill of being able to communicate understandably and they struggle to specify skills within oral skills but for instance pronunciation, grammatical competence and vocabulary are mentioned as the most significant factors with regards to oral skills. Listening comprehension, fluency, personality traits and communication skills are also mentioned as factors that affect oral skills. However, Ilola (2018) emphasizes that pronunciation is regarded as the most significant factor. According to the students, this is because it contributes greatly to being understood (Ilola 2018).

The introduced studies give some examples of students' perceptions of oral skills and thus, they also give some idea of which skills they might consider with regard to feedback for oral skills which is the focus of this study. The concept of feedback will be discussed in the following chapter.

3 FEEDBACK IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE LEARNING AND TEACHING

Since it is difficult to predict how students experience or define feedback as a concept and especially feedback for oral skills, any specific definition will not be used for the purposes of this study. However, in this chapter I will firstly introduce some theories of the meaning of feedback for learning in general and for language learning to clarify how different perspectives argue for the need of feedback when learning something. Secondly, some research about students' perspectives on feedback will be introduced.

3.1 Purpose of feedback for learning

Generally, feedback is a phenomenon that many people encounter in daily life. Askew and Lodge (2000) describe that feedback is often considered one way to support learning in different contexts. However, they also state that feedback is not a simple concept to define, and the definition and the type of feedback depends on the context in which the feedback is given. Further, they explain that in school world and teaching the definition of feedback depends, at least partially, on the adopted approach to teaching and learning and present three approaches of teaching and learning which are the receptive-transmission, constructive and co-constructive approaches.

Firstly, Askew and Lodge (2000) explain that feedback is rather often seen as a one-way action from a teacher who is considered an expert to a learner. This view is characteristic for the receptive-transmission model, and it includes strong assumptions that the learner is able to improve their performance with the help of the feedback and that learning is an automatic result of feedback. Secondly, they describe that within the constructivist model, feedback is considered to help constructing the learner's knowledge by making the feedback less evaluative in nature. In other words, in this approach feedback should help students make connections and new realizations using discussion. Finally, an approach of teaching and learning that may not be as familiar as the receptive-transmission and constructivist models is the co-constructivist model. This model includes a highly dialogic basis for feedback as Askew and Lodge (2000: 13) describe that feedback is seen as "constructed through loops of dialogue and information". Thus, the goal of feedback according to this approach is to solve problems and learn within a dialog.

The meaning of feedback has also been acknowledged in the Finnish school system. The Finnish NCC defines some guidelines for feedback as a part of assessment that happens during a whole year or a period instead of only in the end. It is said in the NCC that the aim of "guiding"

and “supportive” feedback in English teaching is to “make students aware of their knowledge and to help them develop it” (POPS 2014: 354). In the NCC, it is also emphasized that school affects students’ psychological development significantly, for instance self-esteem and self-knowledge, and that the feedback given by teachers plays an important role in this. It is stated that “guiding feedback as a part of versatile assessment is a central pedagogical medium in supporting a student’s development and learning” (POPS 2014: 47). In other words, the National Core Curriculum strongly recognizes the importance of feedback for learning and hence, it can be assumed for the purposes of this study that teachers provide it to students.

Compared to the NCC, rather similar purposes for feedback are named in the National Core Curriculum for general upper secondary schools (Lukion opetussuunnitelman perusteet 2015). It is stated in this Core Curriculum that feedback as part of assessment is interaction between the teacher and a student, and that the feedback is supposed to help guide learning towards the set learning goals. In addition, it is said that “assessment gives a student feedback about their progress in studies and learning results both during studies and in the end of studies” (Lukion opetussuunnitelman perusteet 2015: 228). The dialogical based feedback model to support the learner’s development and learning that both presented National Core Curriculums include reflect rather strongly the constructivist and the receptive-transmission approaches explained by Askew and Lodge (2000).

This section has focused on considering feedback for learning from a rather general point of view and in short, it could be said that at present, feedback practices in the Finnish school system emphasize the meaning of discussion when giving feedback. However, the interest of this bachelor’s thesis is feedback in language classrooms and hence, in the next section the focus will shift to practices and research on feedback in second and foreign language learning.

3.2 Feedback in second and foreign language learning

In terms of feedback in second or foreign language learning, the focus of research has rather extensively been on corrective feedback. Corrective feedback occurs when a teacher explicitly or implicitly implies that a student has uttered something incorrectly. Lyster and Ranta (1997) specify six different types of corrective feedback: explicit correction, recasts, clarification requests, metalinguistic feedback, elicitation and repetition. According to Lyster and Ranta (1997), explicit correction refers to a correction that is explicitly provided by the teacher and recasts, in turn, are the teacher’s repetitions of an incorrect utterance in the correct form without marking the error with a separate phrase for instance. Moreover, when the teacher implies that

he or she has not understood what a student has said, the correction type is called clarification request. Further, with metalinguistic feedback the teacher offers a student information of the type of the mistake, such as “you need an article before the noun” but does not provide the student with the correct form. Finally, elicitation refers to the teacher’s means to get students to utter the correct form, for example by asking how a word is said in a specific language, and repetition refers to teachers repetition which with intonation implies that there has been an error in a student’s utterance.

One category of corrective feedback is interactional feedback which refers to feedback that is given in an interactional situation or in other words, includes negotiation and modification when some linguistic problems occur (Nassaji 2016). Nassaji (2016) explains that this kind of feedback can include reformulations, prompts and metalinguistic feedback which also have some similarities with Lyster and Ranta’s (1997) model. Reformulations occur when the teacher provides the correct form of the incorrect form that a student has said, prompts, in turn, are about giving the students a chance to repair the utterance themselves and lastly, metalinguistic feedback offers an explanation of the needed correction (Nassaji 2016). According to Nassaji, research shows that different combinations of interactional corrective feedback strategies are beneficial in different contexts and that providing feedback can improve learning if for instance structures are taught at the right level of language proficiency.

With regards to corrective feedback from a student’s viewpoint, especially when it comes to pronunciation, receiving feedback can cause negative feelings in students as pronunciation is a very personal skill for students and stronger reactions have been noted in language classrooms when receiving corrective feedback for pronunciation compared to other language skills, such as knowledge of grammar (Lintunen 2015). Thus, given feedback should be encouraging, remind the students about the learned aspects and make students aware of their strengths and weaknesses instead of simply indicating their mistakes (Lintunen 2015). Students’ views of feedback have been studied also in other contexts and some of those studies will be presented in the following section along with questions that have not been studied at least in a larger extent.

3.3 Students’ views on feedback

In this section, studies of students’ insights about feedback will be introduced. Firstly, some studies focusing on corrective feedback will be introduced. And secondly, a few studies conducted in Finland will be discussed.

Since the focus of studying feedback in second and foreign language learning has largely been on corrective feedback, most studies of students' perceptions and opinions about feedback concern particularly corrective feedback (e.g. Ananda, Febriyanti, Yamin and Mu'in 2017). Ananda et al. (2017) studied students' preferences for oral corrective feedback in a speaking class and discovered that most students appreciate oral corrective feedback given by the teacher. They also found that was that most students prefer repetitions as a means of corrective feedback. In addition, they appreciate the types of corrective feedback that require them to make the correction based on the teacher's help which in this case are elicitation and clarification requests. Moreover, Ananda et al. (2017) explain that half (50%) of the students hope to get corrective feedback in the classroom whereas, 23% of the students would prefer to receive the feedback after class. However, in the context of the present study it should be noted that the introduced study was conducted in a speaking class and students in normal classroom may have rather differing opinions as they may not be as focused on developing their oral skills.

Zhang and Rahimi (2014) have also studied students' perceptions about feedback in oral communication classes. In addition, they researched the connection between student's anxiety level and their preferences for corrective feedback. The results of their study show that students hope to receive corrective feedback for their mistakes rather frequently to make their learning more efficient, regardless of their level of anxiety. Zhang and Rahami (2014) also state that students consider that it is most important to get feedback for mistakes that hinder understanding of their utterance. However, they emphasize that the fact that the students participating in the study were participating an oral communication course might influence their positive attitudes towards corrective feedback and the emphasis on their utterances being understandable the possible effect of which for the present study was highlighted also above.

In the Finnish context, for instance, Pollari (2017) and Ilola (2018) have studied the role of feedback in EFL learning. Pollari (2017) has studied the issue of feedback in EFL learning and teaching from a general point of view. According to her, about a majority of students hope to get more feedback about their language and studying skills. In addition, the results of the study show that students hope that the feedback that they get would be individual and help them develop their language skills. However, the results of the study do not specify if there is a specific part of language skills, like oral skills, that the students would hope to get more feedback for. Ilola (2018) focused her study on oral skills and assessment and feedback for them. The results of her study show that students would like to have feedback about their strengths and weaknesses regarding their oral skills. According to the students participating in

her study, for example pronunciation and the ability to answer and explain should be considered when assessing oral skills.

In short, based on the research presented in this section it can be said that many studies conducted from students' perspective have focused on corrective feedback, especially with regard to oral skills. The findings of the studies presented above demonstrate that students in speaking classes consider oral corrective feedback to be a positive factor for their learning (Ananda et al. 2017, Zhang and Rahimi 2014). Moreover, in Finland, students' conceptions about feedback have been studied also from other perspectives than corrective feedback. The results of those studies show that students prefer feedback that assists their development individually but also points out their strengths (Pollari 2017, Ilola 2018). However, neither Pollari's (2017) nor Ilola's (2018) study reveal whether students feel they get enough feedback for their oral skills. Hence, in my study I will explore whether students in upper secondary school feel that they get enough feedback for their oral skills and if they feel that they do not, how would they like to get more of it.

4 THE PRESENT STUDY

In this chapter, the aim and research questions of this study will be presented along with the methodological choices concerning data collection and analysis. Reasoning for the choices of methods will also be provided.

4.1 Aim and research questions

As seen in the two previous chapters, the concepts of oral skills and feedback have been studied rather widely, separately, but fewer studies combining these concepts from a student's point of view have been conducted, at least in Finland. Hence, the aim of this study is to clarify first year upper secondary school students' views on feedback for oral skills. For the present study, the students' viewpoint was chosen since students know best whether feedback practices should be developed so that they support their learning in the best possible way. Thus, the present study will explore whether students feel that they get enough feedback for their oral skills and if not, how could the feedback practices be improved to support their learning the best possible way. To explore these issues my study will focus on the following questions:

1. Do first year students in upper secondary school feel that they get enough feedback for English oral skills?
2. How do they get feedback for English oral skills?
3. How would they like to get more feedback and are there specific skills within oral skills that they would like to get more feedback for?

4.2 Method

To gather information about the students' views on feedback for oral skills a questionnaire (See Appendix) was used. The questionnaire was used, since it suits well for studying for example people's views or opinions and gathering data from a larger group is a lot faster using a questionnaire than using an interview, for instance (Fink 2003: 1-29). The questionnaire was in Finnish since it was important that the questions were understood correctly by the students answering it. In addition, the questionnaire was answered anonymously.

The questionnaire was answered by two groups of first year upper secondary school students in a school in Central Finland, and in total, the questionnaire was answered by 49 students. First year students were chosen since I wanted to see whether they receive enough feedback from the beginning of their studies in upper secondary school. Moreover, it might be possible to develop the feedback practices already during their three-year studies if a need for improving

appeared. The questionnaire was answered in the spring term, so the students answered it based on their experiences based on a few courses. One group answered the questionnaire in the end of January 2020 in the end of their second English course in upper secondary school and the other group in the beginning of February during the second week of their third English course. Certainly, the generalizability of this study is not high since the number of answers is rather low and the study does not cover a geographically wide area. However, it should be noted that in this kind of a small-scale study, generalizability was not an aim.

The questionnaire included 11 questions, seven of which were multiple-choice questions and four open-ended questions. The multiple-choice questions were mostly about different models and ways of receiving feedback for instance written feedback, oral feedback, peer feedback and corrective feedback which was introduced to the participants as ‘immediate feedback after an incorrect utterance’. The given alternatives for possible ways to receive corrective feedback were based on Lyster and Ranta’s (1997) model of corrective feedback and interactional feedback explained by Nassaji (2016). Open-ended questions were used to give the students a possibility to express their experiences and opinions more freely regarding, for example, the meaning of positive and constructive feedback and feedback on different parts of oral skills. In addition, some of the multiple-choice questions included an alternative ‘something else, what?’ so that the students could also make their own additions if they felt that there was no suitable option in the provided list. In the beginning of the questionnaire there was a yes-no question regarding the participants’ contentment for received feedback for oral skills. The question was formulated ‘yes, at least most often’ and ‘no, at least not often’ to facilitate the choice, and depending on the answer for that question the students answered to separate sets of questions.

4.3. Methods of analysis

The collected data was analyzed both quantitatively and qualitatively since the questionnaire included multiple-choice questions and open questions. Percentages of the answers for the multiple-choice questions were calculated to observe whether any specific alternatives were emphasized in the participants’ answers. Open ended questions were analyzed using content analysis to identify similarities and themes that could be analyzed further. In other words, concerning the analysis of the open-ended questions the aim was not to make any statistical generalizations but to see if any common themes could be found from the participants’ answers.

5 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In this chapter, the findings of this study will be presented. In addition, some implications of the results will be introduced. Firstly, students' conceptions about oral skills are discussed. Secondly, the ways in which students receive feedback for English oral skills will be presented. Lastly, I will focus on how the students would like to get more feedback for English oral skills.

5.1 The participants' views on oral skills

The participants were asked to define the concept of oral skills by choosing the alternative or alternatives that they thought were part of oral skills. This information was relevant since they were also asked to specify whether some of the parts are or should be emphasized in feedback for oral skills. In other words, their definition of the concept of oral skills supported analyzing other themes of this study. The alternatives that were given were formulated based on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (2001) and the National Core Curriculum for comprehensive schools (POPS 2014) and the aim was to present as concrete alternatives as possible to guarantee that the participants understand them. In addition, they had an option to add a part or parts of oral skills if they felt that the provided list was lacking something. All the alternatives given in the question and the percentages of the participants' answers can be seen in Figure 1, in the order from most chosen to least chosen.

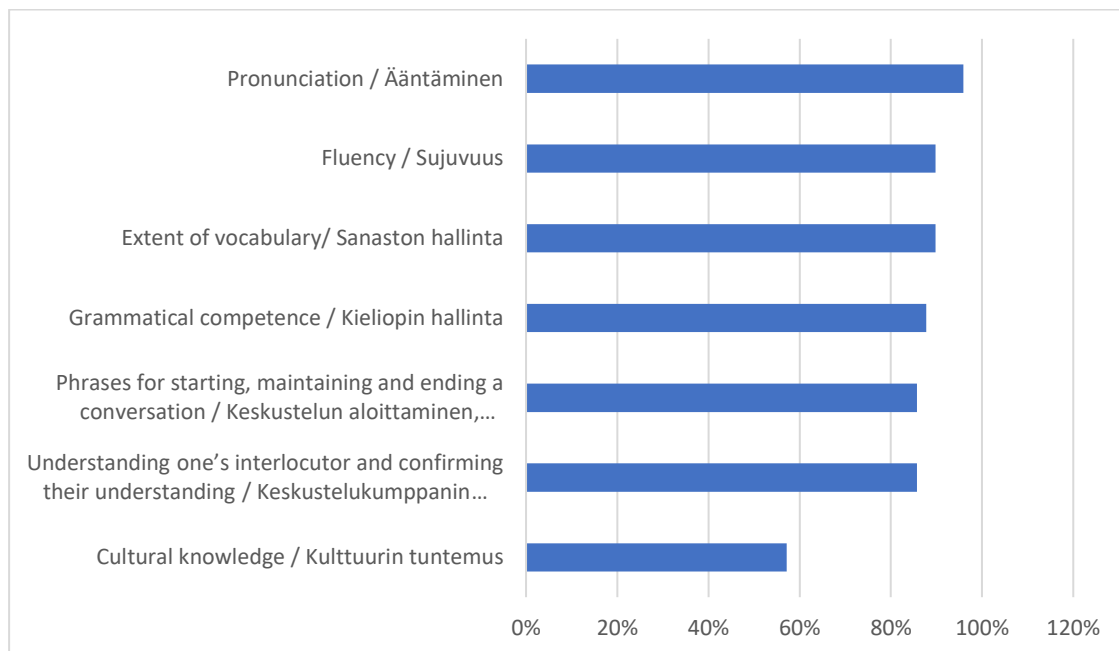


Figure 1. The popularity of the areas of oral skills according to the participants' answers, in percentages.

Reviewing Figure 1, it can be deduced that most participants consider oral skills to consist of many parts and most of the alternatives were chosen rather evenly. Pronunciation, being the alternative that was selected the most, was considered to be a part of oral skills by 96% of the participants. This seems to be in accordance with the results of Ilola's (2018) dissertation in which she emphasizes that students consider pronunciation to be the most important part of oral skills. In addition, 90% of the participants answered that fluency and extent of vocabulary are parts of oral skills. The alternative 'grammatical competence' was chosen by 88% of the participants. Moreover, the same number of participants, 86%, chose phrases for starting, maintaining and ending a conversation and understanding one's interlocutor and confirming their understanding. Cultural knowledge, including pragmatic issues such as politeness rules, was answered least, by 57% of the participants. Concentration ("keskittyminen"), intonation ("intonaatio"), non-verbal language for example when speaking Italian ("elekieli esim italiassa") and general habitus ("yleinen olemus") were mentioned once each as parts of oral skills that the provided list was lacking.

Considering the results mentioned above, it may be possible that the opportunities to teach different skills in a language classroom affect the results; cultural knowledge is perhaps something that is learned more in practice and such situations can be challenging to demonstrate during a lesson. In other words, grammar and vocabulary, for instance, are taught also for the purposes of written production and listening comprehension which may be easier to teach in a classroom. Thus, the amount of teaching grammar and vocabulary is often more significant as is the amount of feedback for these areas.

In the following sections, the rest of the results of this study will be presented in two parts reviewing the views of the two groups that were created based on the participants' contentedness for the amount of feedback they receive for English oral skills. The participants who answered that they are mostly content with the amount of feedback from the first group, and the participants who answered that they are not, at least often, content with the amount of feedback from the second group. The former includes 32 participants and the latter 17 participants. In the following sections the views of these groups will be presented and analyzed separately.

5.2 Views of the mostly content participants

A majority, 32 of the 49 participants of the present study (65%) were mostly content with the amount of feedback they receive for their English oral skills. In this section, this group's views

on the feedback they get will be discussed. It should be noted that the percentages mentioned in this chapter have been calculated with 32 as the maximum.

Within the group of mostly content participants, 91%, meaning 29 out of 32 participants, were also content with the amount of positive and constructive feedback. However, some participants still wished for more feedback which will be discussed later in this section, but I will begin this section by explaining how the participants of the present study reported to receive feedback in English teaching. A vast majority (94%) reported receiving written feedback from the teacher, which can be seen in Figure 2. When giving additional information, some students reported that the feedback is generally received after an oral exam and a few students mentioned that the feedback is often a grade or grades for different parts of oral skills.

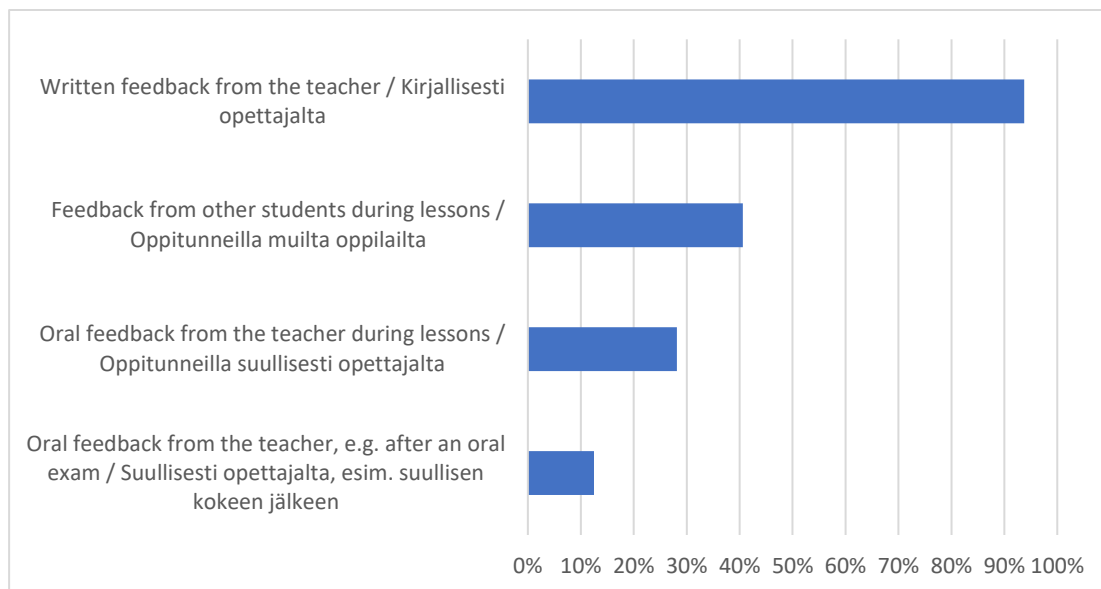


Figure 2. Answers to the question “How do you receive feedback?”.

Receiving feedback from other students was answered by 13 students out of the 32 (41%) and receiving oral feedback from the teacher during lessons by 9 participants (28%). One participant also specified that the feedback from other students often concerns pronunciation of words. Only four participants out of the 32 (13%) reported to have received oral feedback from the teacher for example after an oral exam.

The questionnaire also included a question about feedback that is received immediately after an incorrect utterance, meaning corrective feedback. According to the participants, the teacher explaining what was incorrect in an utterance is the most used means of corrective feedback being selected by 53% of the participants. Moreover, half of the participants (50%) reported that the corrective feedback that they receive is the teacher saying the correct option. In turn,

47% answered that the teacher remarks the error and gives the students a chance to correct the utterance and 22% opted that they do not receive corrective feedback. It should be noted that the total of the mentioned percentages is more than 100% because the participants could choose more than one alternative, which was done by 50% of the 32 respondents.

Considering that only 28% (9 participants of the 32) reported to receive feedback from the teacher during classes, the above-mentioned percentages about immediately received feedback for incorrect utterances are interestingly high. This could be explained with the fact that the question did not explicitly say that this kind of feedback should be considered to happen during lessons and thus, the students may receive corrective feedback during oral exams, for instance. In addition, it could be that students generally perceive the concept of feedback in a narrower way and do not consider corrections of their speech as feedback.

The respondents who were mostly content with the amount of feedback for oral skills were also asked whether they feel that they receive significantly more or less feedback for any specific part of oral skills. No area was mentioned by a clear majority, but pronunciation and fluency were emphasized for both less and more feedback, at least to some extent. Besides, 11 participants said that their feedback concerns all parts of oral skills evenly and some specified that after an oral exam grades are given for every part of oral skills. However, slight uncertainty could be seen in some answers like “quite evenly” (“Aika tasaisesti”). Furthermore, there were also some polarized answers since a couple of participants said that they receive more feedback for fluency than other parts of oral skills and one participant said that he or she receives feedback evenly for other parts of oral skills and perhaps less for general fluency. In addition, one participant mentioned that he or she receives least feedback concerning pronunciation and five participants stated that they receive most feedback for pronunciation. These contradictions could be due to individual differences in estimating what is significantly more or less than average. Ilola’s (2018) findings in her dissertation may also support this since she found that students perceive it challenging to distinguish separate areas within oral skills and hence, it may be challenging for them to distinguish whether the feedback concerns a specific area or the whole of oral skills.

In addition to pronunciation and fluency, several other parts of oral skills were mentioned both in terms of receiving more and less feedback than for other parts of oral skills. Four participants mentioned cultural knowledge, three participants phrases for starting, maintaining and ending a conversation, and two participants confirming one’s interlocutor’s understanding as areas for

which they feel they receive less feedback than other parts. It was also mentioned that feedback concerns more vocabulary and grammatical competence which were mentioned four times each. Even though it was emphasized to the participants that the study is about feedback for oral skills it may have to be considered if some of the participants have also considered feedback in a wider scale since one student mentions that generally, teachers give more feedback for written than spoken language use. In other words, mentioning that more feedback is received for grammar and vocabulary may be connected to seeing the concept of feedback from a wider perspective.

Moreover, this group was asked whether they wish that a specific area or specific areas of oral skills would be considered more when giving feedback. Twelve participants (38%) answered 'no', but again some uncertain answers such as "not really" / "enpä oikeastaan" were found in the data and on the contrary, one participant said that there could be more feedback in general. Similarly to the previous question, any majority answers could not be found, but pronunciation and fluency were the most frequently mentioned areas of oral skills; pronunciation being mentioned seven times (22% of the group) and fluency five times (16% of the group). In addition to these areas, grammatical competence, cultural knowledge and politeness rules were mentioned in terms of need for additional feedback. Importance of the mentioned area of knowledge is rather often the reason for the wish for additional feedback. The results also show that they wish for additional feedback to notice their mistakes better and to improve their skills.

5.3 Views of the discontented participants

This section discusses the ways in which the 17 participants (35%) in this study who answered that they do not, at least often, feel that they get enough feedback for English oral skills would like to get more feedback. The presented percentages in this section have been calculated with 17 as the maximum which is, as mentioned above, the number of students who wish to get more feedback for their English oral skills.

When asked whether they would like to receive more positive or constructive feedback, only a few participants specified between the two types of feedback. Most stated that they would like to receive more feedback in general so that they would know how they could improve or develop their oral skills. Pollari (2017) also found that students consider constructive feedback important in improving their skills. Furthermore, rather many seemed to wish for more concrete feedback saying "Joo välillä olisi kiva saada oikeita vinkkejä miten parantaa puhetta" / "Yes sometimes it would be nice to get real tips on how to improve speech" or "Silti joskus olisi

hyötyä laajemmasta arvioinnista, jossa käytäisiin läpi, mikä sujuu hyvin ja missä olisi kehitettävää” / “Still sometimes it would be useful to have a more extensive assessment in which it would be discussed what is going well and what should be developed”.

Based on the participants' answers, feedback was generally seen as important for development and because oral language skills are considered useful in everyday life. However, some polarized perspectives could also be distinguished from the data since developing one's skills for the next oral exam was also mentioned instead of referring to the usefulness of English oral skills in daily situations. These differences may indicate that some students have found a purpose for which the communicative function of oral skills is meaningful for them during their free time, whereas for some students oral skills are more significant in the school environment and improving their performance in the next exam is more meaningful to them.

Grades seemed to invoke divergent opinions in the participants in this group. Three participants stated that merely receiving grades for oral exams is not enough feedback since they do not tell what should be practiced more. Pollari's (2017) findings also convey similar views since she found that students wish to receive feedback that is individualized which grades are not. On the other hand, two participants who feel that they have received little or no feedback stated that any kind of feedback, even a grade, would be an improvement. These rather strong contradictions can be due to the fact that the first group which answered the questionnaire could have had an oral exam and grades after the exam during their second English course only after completing the questionnaire, whereas the second group completing the questionnaire in the beginning of their third course could have had an oral exam during their second course, before participating in this study.

In terms of different ways of receiving feedback, oral and written feedback from the teacher were wished for rather evenly by the participants of this group. In other words, 14 (82%) participants out of the 17 wished for written feedback from the teacher and 12 (71%) for oral feedback from the teacher for instance after an oral exam. Here it is noteworthy that only 13% of the participants who were mostly content with the amount of feedback reported to have received oral feedback from the teacher for example after an oral exam, whereas a majority of the discontented participants would like to get oral feedback from the teacher for example after an oral exam. On the other hand, the mostly content group of participants was not asked whether they wish to receive more feedback orally from the teacher in addition to written feedback and it was only mentioned by one participant that more diverse ways should be used. Thus, clear

conclusions cannot be drawn but it can be inferred that the participants feel that oral feedback would be important for their learning.

The concept of corrective feedback was introduced to the participants as ‘immediate feedback after an incorrect utterance’. In general, this kind of immediate oral feedback was not wished for as much as written or oral feedback from the teacher for instance after an oral exam since receiving oral feedback from the teacher during lessons was something four (24%) participants wished for and feedback from other students was something that only two (12%) participants wished for. Compared to, for instance, the results of the study conducted in an oral communication class by Zhang and Rahimi (2014), the participants of this study did not wish to get corrective feedback in the classrooms as much as the students in the speaking class most of whom considered corrective feedback a convenient way to make their learning more efficient.

Regarding different ways of receiving corrective feedback, the alternatives included the teacher rephrasing the utterance correctly, the teacher remarking the error and giving the student a chance to rephrase the utterance and the teacher explaining what was incorrect in the utterance. Based on the results, which are presented in Figure 3, participants seemed to prefer metalinguistic feedback since 9 participants (52%) answered that they wished the teacher to explain what was incorrect in an utterance. In turn, 5 participants (29%) wished that the teacher would offer them a chance to rephrase and 4 (24%) wished the teacher to rephrase the utterance correctly, which according to Nassaji (2016), are called prompts and reformulations.

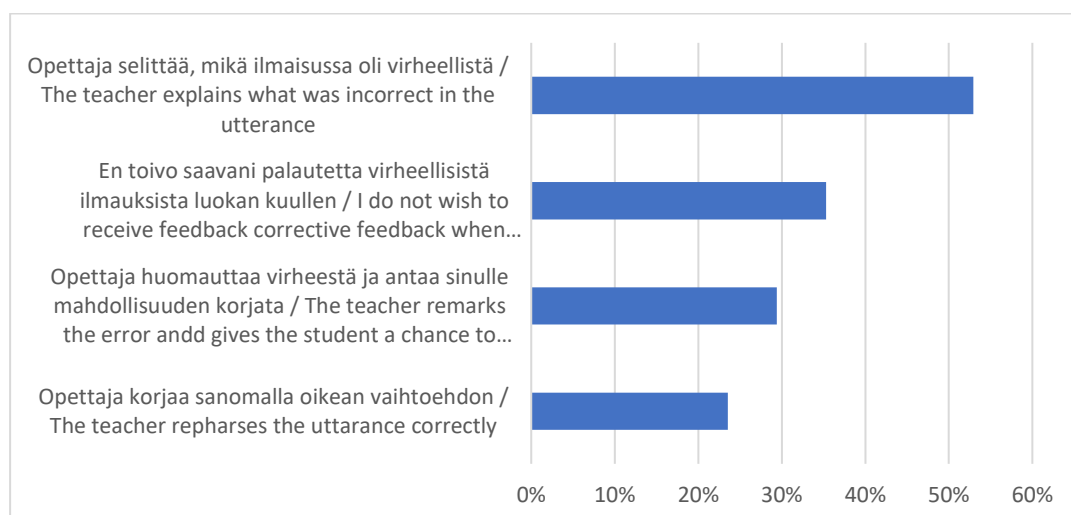


Figure 3. Division of the answers to the question “How do you wish to receive immediate feedback after an incorrect utterance?”.

Moreover, 35% of the group answered that they do not wish to receive immediate corrective feedback during classes. One of those participants also suggested a way how their challenges with pronunciation could be taken into account in the teaching. He or she proposed that the teacher would gather a list of words the pronunciation of which he or she has noticed to cause challenges to students and then the pronunciation of these words would be practiced together on a lesson. This could also imply a wish for metalinguistic feedback which means that the students are explained how or why, for instance, the way in which they pronounce a word is incorrect.

In addition, the results imply that the concept of corrective feedback may be a little challenging to some students, since six participants (35%) answered that they do not wish to receive corrective feedback when other students can hear and four of those participants also answered a way in which they would like to receive corrective feedback, or immediate feedback in this context. In other words, when a participant answers both that they do not wish to receive corrective feedback during lessons and suggests a way in which they would like to receive corrective feedback, the answers are in contradiction. Lintunen (2015) states that research has shown students to react more strongly to corrective feedback when the feedback focuses on pronunciation compared to other language skills. Hence, this contradiction could be due to that students easily are afraid of being laughed at which could be caused by the teacher remarking a pronunciation error, but they still consider it useful to notice their mistakes. In addition, the participants may associate corrective feedback precisely with pronunciations errors even though a teacher could also remark an error concerning pragmatics or grammar.

This group was also asked whether they think that a specific area or areas of oral skills should be considered more when giving feedback. In these answers, pronunciation, fluency and grammatical competence were each mentioned three times and were the most mentioned areas of oral skills. In addition to those three, extent of vocabulary and cultural knowledge were mentioned. Five participants stated that they do not wish any area to be considered more in feedback and in turn, two participants said that they wish to get more feedback for all areas in general. Written production was also mentioned once similarly to the answers of the participants who were mostly content with the amount of feedback. In general, the reason students wished for more feedback for some specific area seemed to be that they feel they do not know how good their skills in that area are. One student also said, “sillä näiden asioiden arvioimisen koen itse vaikeaksi”/ “for I feel that it is difficult to assess these things myself”. Another reason for

the need of more feedback was that the participants feel that the area they mention is the most important one when considering oral skills.

5.4 Summary

In short, the results of the study show that most participants are content with the amount of feedback they receive for their English oral skills, but some dissatisfaction could also be seen from the participants' answers. The participants reported that they mostly receive written feedback from the teacher but also oral feedback from the teacher and peers were reported to be used even though in a significantly smaller scale. One difference between the group of participants that were mostly content with the amount of feedback and the group that was discontented with the amount of feedback is that the latter group wished for oral feedback from the teacher for example after an oral exam relatively more than the former group reported to receive it. Thus, as expected the contentedness with the amount of feedback is a strongly subjective matter. In other words, it is challenging to objectively define what amount of feedback is a good or a sufficient amount of it.

In both groups pronunciation and fluency are areas of oral skills that were emphasized in the answers. In other words, participants stated that those areas are or should be emphasized when giving feedback for oral skills. However, most participants are content with the way in which feedback concerns all areas evenly. Moreover, participants in both groups seem to appreciate written feedback from the teacher and oral feedback from the teacher privately more than immediate oral corrective feedback in the classroom. Another view in common with the two groups is that feedback is appreciated since the participants feel that it helps them develop and improve their learning which is in accordance with the National Core Curriculum for general upper secondary schools (Lukion opetussuunnitelman perusteet 2015: 228) since it is stated in the Core Curriculum that one purpose of feedback is to tell students how their skills are improving.

6 CONCLUSION

Regarding previous research on oral skills, it has been found that students consider oral skills to be an important part of language skills which is also a shared view with the Finnish National Core Curriculum (POPS 2014). In addition, research has shown that oral skills are practiced in language classes using multiple kinds of tasks and exercises, such as presentations, discussion tasks and pronunciation exercises (Kaski-Akhawan 2013). With regard to feedback, previous research has shown that students appreciate feedback that helps them develop their skills (Pollari 2017). However, studies on students' preferences for feedback on oral skills have previously focused on corrective feedback and it has been found that in oral communication classes students consider corrective feedback a good way to make their learning more effective (Zhang and Rahimi 2014).

Thus, the aim of this bachelor's thesis was to acquire insight into Finnish first year upper secondary school students' views on feedback for English oral skills. The research questions aimed at finding out whether students feel that they receive enough feedback for English oral skills, the ways in which they receive and would possibly like to receive more feedback for their English oral skills.

The results of the study showed that most of the participants (65%) were content with the amount of feedback for oral skills they received. The participants reported to have received feedback in multiple ways but feedback from the teacher in written form was emphasized clearly. Moreover, fluency and pronunciation are, in some participants' opinion, areas of oral skills that are emphasized in feedback for oral skills and, in some participants' opinion, should be considered more in feedback. In accordance with Pollari's (2017) results, students wish for constructive feedback to develop their skills. Moreover, feedback for oral skills is seen useful since it helps to improve these skills which are considered important in everyday life.

A majority of the participants who reported not being, at least often, content with the amount of feedback wished for both written and oral feedback from the teacher for example after an oral exam. Corrective feedback was not wished for as much, but of the means of corrective feedback, metalinguistic feedback, meaning the teacher explaining what was incorrect in an utterance, was wished for the most.

It is important to consider that due to the small amount of data that was gathered in only two groups in one school, the results of this study cannot be widely generalized. In addition, because of some rather strongly polarized answers, it may be considered whether part of the questions

in the used questionnaire were formulated so that the students struggled to understand them or whether the concept of feedback was rather abstract to them. Moreover, regardless of emphasizing that the study was about feedback for specifically oral skills, there arose some doubt that some of the participants considered feedback in general when answering the questionnaire since feedback for written production was mentioned a few times. Despite the limitations of the present study, it offers some insight into students' view on the matter of feedback for oral skills and answered the set research questions.

In the future, the themes of this study could be studied in a wider scale so that the results would be more generalizable. In addition, using an interview, for instance, could provide more depth to students' views. Since the present study focused only on the views of first year upper secondary school students who based their answers on the experiences that they had from their first two English courses, it might be beneficial to research second or third year students as well. This would help to see whether they also have rather strongly differing opinions about received feedback or whether the polarized answers of the first year students participating in this study were, at least partially, due to the fact that their experiences are based on rather few courses.

In sum, since communicative language skills are highly appreciated nowadays, it is important to support students learning those skills for instance by giving encouraging and constructive feedback. Hence, studying students' preferences for feedback is important to support their learning in the most efficient ways.

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Appendix 1: The questionnaire

Hei! Tämä kysely koskee englannin suullisesta kielitaidosta lukio-opetuksessa saatavaa palautetta. Kyselyn vastaukset ovat aineistoa kandidaatintutkielmaani varten. Kyselyyn vastaaminen on vapaaehtoista, ja vastaamalla kysymyksiin annat suostumuksesi vastauksiesi käyttämiseen tutkielmaani varten. Kyselyyn vastataan nimettömänä, ilman henkilötietoja. Aineisto säilytetään Jyväskylän yliopiston tietosuojajohtajuuden mukaisesti. Kiitos vastauksistasi!

Vastaa kysymyksiin mahdollisimman tarkasti. Monivalintakysymyksiin voit valita yhden tai useamman vaihtoehdon.

1. Merkitse alle ympyröimällä osa-alueet, jotka mielestäsi kuuluvat suulliseen kielitaitoon

- a) Sanaston hallinta
 - b) Kieliopin hallinta
 - c) Ääntäminen
 - d) Sujuvuus
 - e) Kulttuurin tuntemus (esim. kohteliaisuus säännöt)
 - f) Keskustelun aloittaminen, ylläpitäminen ja lopettaminen (fraasit esim. tervehtimiseen ja hyvästelemiseen)
 - g) Keskustelukumppanin ymmärtäminen ja hänen ymmärtämisensä varmistaminen
 - h) Jotain muuta, mitä? -
-

2. Koetko saavasi tarpeeksi palautetta englannin suullisesta kielitaidostasi eli kysymykseen 1 merkitsemistäsi asioista?

Kyllä, ainakin useimmiten ____

En, ainakaan usein ____

Jos vastasit '**Kyllä, ainakin useimmiten**', siirry kysymykseen 7.

Vastaa kysymyksiin 3–6, jos vastasit '**En, ainakaan usein**'.

3. Haluaisitko saada enemmän positiivista tai rakentavaa/korjaavaa palautetta englannin suullisesta kielitaidostasi? Miksi?

4. Merkitse alle ympyröimällä, miten haluaisit saada lisää palautetta englannin suullisesta kielitaidostasi

- a) Kirjallisesti opettajalta
- b) Suullisesti opettajalta, esim. suullisen kokeen jälkeen
- c) Oppitunneilla suullisesti opettajalta
- d) Oppitunneilla muilta oppilailta
- e) Jotenkin muuten, miten? Tähän voit myös tarkentaa, miten ja millaista palautetta haluaisit saada englannin suullisesta kielitaidostasi.

5. Millaista palautetta haluaisit saada opettajalta välittömästi virheellisen ilmauksen jälkeen?

- a) Opettaja korjaa sanomalla oikean vaihtoehdon
- b) Opettaja huomauttaa virheestä ja antaa sinulle mahdollisuuden korjata
- c) Opettaja selittää, mikä ilmaisussa oli virheellistä
- d) En toivo saavani palautetta virheellisistä ilmauksista luokan kuullen
- e) Jotain muuta, mitä?

6. Haluaisitko saada enemmän palautetta jostakin tietystä osa-alueesta tai tietyistä osa-alueista, jotka merkitsit kysymykseen 1? Jos, mistä ja miksi?

Vastaa kysymyksiin 7–11, jos vastasit kysymykseen 2 'kyllä'

7. Miten saat palautetta englannin suullisesta kielitaidostasi?

- a) Kirjallisesti opettajalta
- b) Suullisesti opettajalta esim. suullisen kokeen jälkeen
- c) Oppitunneilla suullisesti opettajalta
- d) Oppitunneilla muilta oppilailta
- e) Jotenkin muuten, miten? Tähän voit myös tarkentaa, miten ja millaista palautetta saat englannin suullisesta kielitaidostasi.

8. Jos saat opettajalta palautetta välittömästi virheellisen ilmauksen jälkeen, millaista palaute on?

- a) Opettaja korjaa sanomalla oikean vaihtoehdon
- b) Opettaja huomauttaa virheestä ja antaa sinulle mahdollisuuden korjata
- c) Opettaja selittää, mikä ilmaisussa oli virheellistä
- d) En saa opettajalta palautetta virheellisten ilmausten jälkeen

e) Jotenkin muuten, miten?

9. Saatko tasaisesti palautetta kaikista kysymykseen 1 merkitsemistäsi osa-alueista tai saatko huomattavasti enemmän tai huomattavasti vähemmän palautetta jostakin tietystä osa-alueesta? Jos, mistä osa-alueesta?

10. Haluaisitko saada enemmän palautetta jostakin kysymykseen 1 merkitsemästäsi osa-alueesta tai osa-alueista? Jos, mistä ja miksi?

11. Saatko tarpeeksi sekä positiivista että rakentavaa/korjaavaa palautetta?

Kyllä____

En____

Vastaa seuraavaan kysymykseen, jos vastasit 'En'.

Haluaisin saada enemmän

- a) Positiivista
- b) Rakentavaa/korjaavaa palautetta.

Miksi?
