

**STUDENTS' SPOKEN ENGLISH COMFORTABILITY IN FINNISH
UNIVERSITY CLASSROOMS**

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Tiivistelmä – Abstract <p>Kieliahdistus on kielenoppimiseen liittyvää ja sille ominaista ahdistusta, joka ilmenee negatiivisina tuntemuksina kielestä ja sen käytöstä. Sitä on tutkittu jo ennestään melko paljon, mm. Horwitz ja muut (1986) ja myöhemmin Härmälä (2022), mutta tutkimus on yleensä keskittynyt alempiin kouluasteisiin ja ei-kielenopiskelijoihin. Kielenopiskelijoiden tuntemuksia mahdollisesta kieliahdistuksesta on tutkittu huomattavasti vähemmän, ja tällöinkin on tutkittu erityisesti alempien asteiden opiskelijoita. Tässä tutkimuksessa pyritään selvittämään, millaisia tuntemuksia yliopistotason kielenopiskelijoilla on englannin kielestä ja sen puhumisesta, ja miten nämä näkyvät heidän kieliahdistuksensa tasoissa. Lisäksi tutkimuksessa painotetaan erityisesti puhuttua kieltä, ja keskitytään erityisesti sen liitännäisyyksiin kieliahdistukseen.</p> <p>Tutkimus toteutettiin nettikyselyllä, jossa englannin kielen pääaineopiskelijoilta kysyttiin kysymyksiä liittyen yleiseen kieliahdistukseen sekä kielen puhumiseen ja siihen suhtautumiseen. Kysely perustui Horwitzin (1986) Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) kyselyyn, jossa vastaajille annetaan pisteitä 33 kysymyksen perusteella, jotka pisteytetään (korkeampi pistetulos=matalampi ahdistuneisuus) ja lopputuloksen mukaan heidän kieliahdistustasoaan arvioidaan. Tässä tutkimuksessa kyselyä muutettiin hieman modernisoimalla Horwitzin alkuperäisiä kysymyksiä, sekä lisäämällä joukkoon muitakin kysymyksiä. Puhutun kielen ahdistuksen tasoa mitattaessa keskityttiin vain kysymyksiin, jotka liittyivät puhutun englannin kysymyksiin, ja yleistasoa mitattaessa analysoitiin Horwitzin alkuperäiseen kyselyyn perustettuja kysymyksiä.</p> <p>Tutkimuksesta selvisi, että kaiken kaikkiaan englannin kielen pääaineopiskelijoiden kieliahdistuneisuustasot ovat hyvin matalat, ja lisäksi puhutun kielen ahdistuneisuustaso (0,77) oli lähes sama Horwitzin (1986) FLCAS:n antaman yleistason kanssa (0,79), eli tämän tutkimuksen perusteella puhuttu englanti ei aiheuta ylimääräistä ahdistusta englannin kielen opiskelijoille. Tuloksista lisäksi nousi esille mahdollinen yleisesti vallitseva luokkahuoneahdistuneisuus, jonka jatkotutkimisesta tulevaisuudessa olisi suuri hyöty.</p>	
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1 INTRODUCTION

English being a global lingua franca means it is widely studied in many countries around the world as a way for two people with different language backgrounds to communicate. Most of the people learning English learn it alongside many other subjects quite early on in their school lives, and to some, using a foreign language can be very difficult and therefore a cause for anxiety. This anxiety may manifest as negative feelings towards the language, whether that means using the language or being exposed to it. There has been a decent amount of research conducted on attitudes towards English and especially foreign language anxiety (FLA) in Finland due to the ever-rising prevalence and importance of English in the world, but the research has had the tendency to focus on upper secondary school students or younger learners. There has however been very little research on the subject on higher levels of education, and especially with students majoring in the FL (foreign language). It feels easy to disregard potential FLA levels of these students since they have chosen to major in the language, and while it is to be expected that their FLA levels will be lower than the general population, I still am curious to find out exactly how language students themselves perceive aspects of FLA. It is noteworthy that in Finland university students that want to study English as their major are required to either undergo an entrance exam or to have had success in high school in English in order to get into university. I am additionally especially intrigued about spoken English in general and will also attempt to gauge students' feelings about spoken English and its potential correlations to further feelings of FLA as well, since during the pandemic when classes were online, there arose some occasions where people felt reluctant to speak English on Zoom and other video conferencing applications.

Previous studies have had a tendency to focus on already established FLA, and then trying to figure out causes and solutions to the problem, like Woodrow (2006) and MacIntyre (1991). In the present study, however, we must start by gauging the FLA levels of the students and then

adjusting the analysis accordingly, because our expectations for the FLA levels of language major students are low. In such a case, it will then be more important to analyze the few possible cases and causes for anxiety where they show up in larger clusters, or in a case, albeit unlikely, where no real anxiety is apparent in any area, then try to find causes and differences that cause this split between language students and students that only study the language as “just another subject”.

In the present study, I will aim to answer these questions about the comfortability of specifically university level students in their English language skills and focus especially on spoken English and speaking skills when analyzing them. The data was collected using an online questionnaire distributed to English major students that has been based on the FLCAS by Horwitz (1986), while adding and modernizing some items on the original scale. The purpose of this study is to gain knowledge of the FLA levels of English language students as well as to learn of their feelings about spoken English in general to enable the creation of even more efficient language classrooms, as well as to gauge the overall FLA levels of higher-level language students.

2 ENGLISH USE AND FOREIGN LANGUAGE ANXIETY

2.1 Spoken English Use

In this section, we will explore the usage of spoken English in Finland. We will explore why and how it tends to be used in both everyday life and in a school setting, in addition to analyzing code-switching between English and Finnish as well. Code-switching refers to alternating between multiple languages, or varieties of language.

2.1.1 Casual English use and Finglish

Due to media among other factors increasing the exposure of younger and younger individuals, the overall level of English language skills in Finland is constantly expanding (Leppänen 2017: 3 & Taavitsainen and Pahta 2008: 5). Also, according to Leppänen, media contributes to changes in identities as well as lifestyles and trends, which she notes are less bound by nationality, and thus are more open to be adapted into foreign cultures. Language tends to be quite ingrained in culture, and as a result has also been widely adapted in addition to these other cultural trends. It can be widely heard in most young adults' and teens' everyday speech, often in the form of English words phonetically transformed to work in Finnish (Leppänen 2017: 11), for example 'I was in a loop' in Finglish could be 'Mä olin loopissa', instead of using the proper translation, in this case, 'kierteessä'.

Finglish, a combination of English and Finnish, is also widely used. We already referred to this above but let us analyze it a little further. The circumstances for this form of code-switching

vary; sometimes it is used because the other language's equivalent of a word has been lost or forgotten, and sometimes there is no equivalent at all. Regardless, this showcases adaptation of a foreign language, and is especially commonly heard in younger people's conversations. Finglish is one of the many forms of language playfulness and creativity described by Leppänen (2017: 4). In some of her examples, code-switching occurs quite contextually, for example in games and music, and tends to occur either as complete replacements of a word in the other language, for example, using curse words from another language, but often tends to be used in the form of the earlier example about a 'loop' being used in a Finnish sentence, just phonetically altered to work in that language.

In addition to adaptations from media, English is also increasingly spoken due to its status as a global lingua franca (Smokotin et al. 2014). Due to Finland's relatively high status when it comes to the level of education, a decent number of students come to Finland from abroad to study. According to Mathies and Karhunen (2021: 2), over 20 000 students came to Finland to study for a degree in 2016, and it is reasonable to assume that this number has only gone up in the past seven (7) years. English works as an intermediary for Finnish and foreign students when communicating, and thus enables two often non-native English speakers to understand each other.

All of these are but scratching the surface of English use in Finland, and some examples, like having bi- or multilingual parents and talking English to them, were not discussed at all. However, the scope of the present study is not wide enough to fully dive into this topic, and so we will focus more on the bigger picture overall. Next, let us explore the usage of English in a classroom setting as well as dive into the core issue with language learning overall, foreign language anxiety.

2.1.2 Spoken English use in a classroom setting

With constant exposure from previously mentioned media amongst other factors that starts from a young age, people tend to get better readiness these days when it comes to learning English, and thus tend to perform better at schools as well. The overall proficiency level of English language learners in Finland has consistently been in the global top 10 according to

the EF EPI (English Proficiency Index) the past 10 years, and has been listed as ‘very high’ throughout, but even still there has been a constant increase in the starting level of students due to media’s and the environment’s influence and constant exposure to English, even prior to these young learners starting to officially learn the language.

While English is widely learned in schools, the focus tends to be on written English. In the Finnish Matriculation Examination, the students are tested on their listening comprehension in addition to their writing skills, but their speaking skills are not tested at all. While spoken English is usually taught to some degree, there is a clear lack of emphasis on spoken English skills in comparison to the other two areas. This is quite surprising, since it is safe to assume that most people want to learn a language to communicate in said language, and this hypothesis is supported by Yli-Renko’s (1991) conducted study, where the students participating seconded the above statement, as well as under half of the participants being satisfied with the level of oral skill teaching. Now, as also stated by Keränen (2017: 8), this study is quite dated. However, this is backed by more recent data as well. In a more recent study by Hauta-aho (2013), she compared IB (International Baccalaureate, usually higher-level studies) and national upper secondary school students’ attitudes towards oral skills. In her study, two-thirds of IB students and 81% of national students claimed there should be more oral skills teaching in upper secondary schools (Hauta-aho 2013: 77), and while this is only about upper secondary schools, the data is still valuable. The participants in the study were also near unanimous in agreeing with oral skills teaching being important, but also around 47% thought that preparation for the matriculation exam was more important than practicing oral skills, which poses a clear problem.

In a study conducted by Durer and Sayar (2013), over 80% of the participants expressed desire to be fluent in English. There is thus clear evidence towards a willingness to be able to speak good English, but the problem posed by the results of Hauta-aho’s study is quite troublesome. Oral skills not being tested on the matriculation exam lowers their value in the students’ eyes, and in turn affects then the students’ readiness for speaking English since they will be less motivated to use it, thus resulting in lower overall level of spoken English.

2.2 Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA)

In this section, we will look at previous research concerning FL anxiety, which has been studied quite extensively. Most of the studies lean on, or at least use the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale, or FLCAS, as a baseline, which came from Horwitz', Horwitz' and Cope's (1986) theory, and it consists of 33 statements, regarding test anxiety and fear of negative evaluation and feedback, among other things. The FLCAS uses a Likert scale from 1 to 5, where statements range from strongly disagree to strongly agree, and points then correlate accordingly, where a lower score total points to higher anxiety levels. This theory is not perfect and has been challenged to some degree by researchers like Spielmann and Radnofsky (2001) as well as more recently Tran (2012) but is still universally accepted as a theory that "has played a vital role in language anxiety research with a large number of studies using it as theoretical framework" (Tran 2012: 5).

2.2.1 FLA in practice

While anxiety can work as a driving force, and there are people who perform better under pressure and could thus benefit from feeling anxious to a certain degree, FLA has still traditionally been associated with negative feelings and as something that actively hinders the individual's performance and ability to learn, and we will thus be viewing it as such. Horwitz et al. (1986: 70) categorizes feelings of FLA in a language learning setting as specific reactions that may only occur during language learning classes, and this statement is also backed by Härmälä (2022: 6).

Woodrow (2006) and Young (1990) suggest various causes for FLA in a classroom setting. These include but are not limited to supposed expectations set by the teacher and their peers being too high, as well as various tests (Young 1990), and also many different situations where students have to speak in the FL, like oral presentations (Woodrow 2006). Woodrow also presents a correlation between FLA levels and performance in the FL (2006: 7), and even suggests that according to some researchers, like MacIntyre (1999), anxiety might be the most impactful factor when it comes to successful learning of the FL, which makes it an important topic to research regarding language learning as a whole. Many situations regarding FLA have to do with spoken language, and we will analyze it from that specific context next.

2.2.2 FLA when speaking and how to decrease anxiety in a classroom

There have been studies concerning the effects FLA has on oral skills as well. According to Szyszka (2011), there is a clear correlation between the levels of anxiety and self-perceived pronunciation levels for learners of English. They state that this may lead to the learners being discouraged from developing their oral and overall skills in the foreign language in question due to the negative comparison they have between their own skills and other speakers/learners of the FL. Similar findings have been made by others, like Liu and Jackson (2008), where they found a correlation between the students' self-perceived skills and feelings of anxiety, but the students in question seemed to only feel anxiety in school, whereas during their free time when speaking English, there were no feelings of anxiousness (Liu and Jackson 2008: Härmälä, 2022).

Szyszka (2011: 13-14) states the importance of relaxation techniques and other methods as well in order to lower anxiety levels in pronunciation training. They also claim a need for development in self-evaluation abilities for teacher trainees to "provide the learners with the skills of self-evaluation and self-improvement through analysis of their own production" (Nowacka 2016: 108). According to Szyszka (2011: 14), encouraging active learning like this may increase the feeling of engagement to pronunciation practices, thus resulting in increased levels of confidence amongst other improvements.

Teachers also play a crucial role in reducing the feelings of FLA the students feel in a classroom. While they cannot remove FLA from the equation in its entirety, their attitudes and actions can vastly reduce the impact and feeling of FLA, thus resulting in a more encouraging and therefore efficient learning environment. Celce-Murcia's (2001: 4-7) nine approaches to language teaching offer somewhat dated and strict formats to the ways of teaching languages, but many aspects of these are present in today's language teaching as well and can thus be used as baselines for analysis. A few to point out for the sake of this analysis are solely using the FL or code-switching that and the mother tongue, viewing errors and inevitable and as a part of the learning process, emphasizing meaningful communication and groupwork and finally the teacher's role to primarily be a facilitator of communication rather than someone who corrects errors made by the students. There are obviously many other factors, like teacher attitudes, and the ways

they give feedback (constructive, positive, negative, how strict they are), but these are a few I wanted to take a closer look at when analyzing FLA facilitation and reduction.

Some of the pointed-out suggestions, like errors being part of the learning process as well as the teacher being a facilitator of (meaningful) communication first and someone who fixes errors second (Celce-Murcia 2001: 7) are quite self-explanatory and easy to follow, but for the most part, reducing FLA in a classroom is not as easy due to clashing attitudes, personalities, and views. As Horwitz (2001) points out, some students feel more comfortable than others in different activities. They give an example by the means of Young's (1990) study, where American secondary language students felt more comfortable in smaller group activities when practicing oral skills, rather than in bigger groups or the whole class (Horwitz 2001: 9). Similarly, solely using the FL when teaching will make it more natural for the learners to engage in that language and give them constant exposure to it, but for learners with weaker language skills, it might hinder their ability to learn by increasing their anxiety levels due to them not understanding instructions for example.

What is most important is trying and seeing what works, but also as proven by Palacios (1998) as well as Tricket and Moos (1995), student-perceived teacher support and feelings of mutual trust have a lot of impact on the levels of FLA in a classroom. Horwitz (2001: 10) pointed out the importance of instruction focus as well as being sensitive to student obligations out-of-class to students feeling comfortable. Overall, there are multiple factors to consider, and no method will work for every scenario.

3 PRESENT STUDY

3.1 Aims and research questions

The aim of the present study is to find out how high the perceived FLA level specifically is for the students studying the FL in question, and if there are specific aspects and areas of the language that cause anxiety. I am also especially interested in the possible differences between FLA levels when comparing spoken and written English. This is all done to gain an understanding of a potential difference between language students and students not majoring in the language, since the former group has historically not been studied much in this regard.

I am expecting the results to lean more towards the positive, since the target group for the study are specifically people, who have chosen to study the FL of their own volition, but I am still expecting there to be clear signs of FLA present in the results. I would also expect spoken and written English to have differences between them when looking at the data.

My research questions are:

1. Do English major students experience FLA and if they do, to which extent?
2. Are there differences between spoken language and written language as the causes for FLA of English major students?

3.2 Methods

For my primary data collection method, I used an online questionnaire (see appendix below) with questions based on the FLCAS survey by Horwitz (1986) mentioned and explained in section 2.2. Additionally, I added a few entirely original statements to the final questionnaire not only to modernize it according to the views of Tran (2012), but also to broaden my analysis and add more focus on spoken language and anxiety related to that aspect of the language. Data was collected anonymously via an online questionnaire distributed via email to students majoring in English, and 23 people elected to participate.

In the analysis itself I will be looking at both the results of the FLCAS as is, thus analyzing the results of the Likert scale when gauging potential overall FLA according to Horwitz, as well as the FLCAS results in tandem with the added statements to gauge student anxiety and comfortability. Finally, I will analyze the statements regarding spoken language in their own section, all of this done using statistical analysis.

I have changed the format of a few of the FLCAS statements to be either more fitting for a modern classroom setting or simply clearer and easier to understand. I have also changed some of the statements to use English as their example language instead of German. The FLCAS Likert scale normally results in a point total between 33 and 165, where a lower score indicates higher anxiety levels (Tran 2012: 71). In my study, I have decided to change this scale to 1-4, leaving out the neutral option, but instead there will be a different option, ‘do not know/do not want to answer’, that will have no effect on the scoring. This will result in a point total between 33 and 132 instead and will most likely result in a more interesting and accurate result in terms of the data, since this should greatly reduce the amount of neutral response bias. According to Edwards and Smith (2014), the inclusion of a neutral option or statement about no opinion falsifies the results, since many people with opinions about the topic will opt to pick these neutral options, instead of actually stating their opinion on the subject.

There is an argument to be made about the additional ‘do not know/do not want to answer’ option serving the same purpose, but it being separated from the rest of the answers as its own, instead of being the neutral answer, will hopefully discourage participants from choosing this option as often as they would a true neutral choice. This should hopefully result in the

participants considering their answers more carefully before giving them. I will also be scoring the added, non-FLCAS statements using the same methodology, 1-4, thus resulting in as cohesive analysis as possible across all aspects of the questionnaire, being able to compare statements and their results more directly to each other.

4 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The main goal of the study was to find out how comfortable English students specifically are with the language in general, with an emphasis on spoken English. The results of the modified Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) statements will be presented using the scoring system explained in section 4, and then the overall results will be analyzed while drawing some conclusions from the data. Finally, the focus will be on the statements related to spoken English specifically. The results of the FLCAS scoring system will be presented using a 0.0-1.0 scale instead of the point totals, since scores will have fluctuating maximums, due to the statements the participants chose not to answer not being calculated towards the total. This data was collected anonymously from 23 language students who major in English.

4.1 FLCAS

First and foremost, the overall mean score of all the participants' answers resulted in a total of 0.79 (in a case where every single participant scored a full 132/132, this number would be 1.0), which represents quite minor anxiety levels when analyzing it using the FLCAS metric (Horwitz, 1986). This coincides with the hypotheses presented before, since the participants have voluntarily chosen English as their primary subject of study. These results additionally align with Woodrow's (2006: 7) and MacIntyre's (1999) views, where they suggest that anxiety is one of the most important factors in learning an FL, and successful students of the language would showcase lower anxiety levels.

The results showcased some variance, but there were no drastic results towards higher anxiety levels. The lowest score total was 0.6, which still leans towards lower anxiety levels, which all still aligns with the presupposition that English students would have overall low levels of FLA. The results are also very consistent across the board, and the participants that tend to answer positively/negatively to statements about a specific topic, like spoken language, tend to do so in all those statements.

Some statements that got answers leaning more towards the side of higher FLA, can also be attributed to general anxiety as well, and do not necessarily point to FLA per se. Statements such as 4 (Figure 1.) and 24 that have to do with answering questions in class, could just as well apply to any other class situation, and the answer might stay the same. Presentation anxiety has been studied quite extensively, and researchers such as Elliot and Chong (2005) present that this anxiety can extend to hindering other studies as well due to the stress it causes on the individual. It is thus safe to assume that sudden questions in classrooms can cause anxiety as well.

Question 4: I get anxious when I know that I'm going to be asked a question in English class.

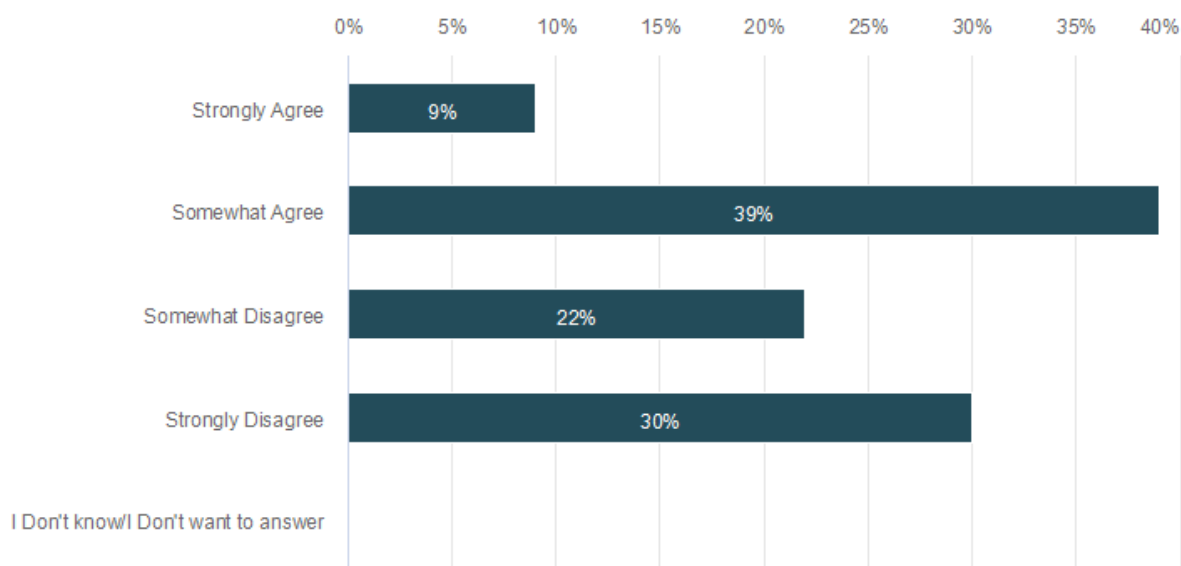
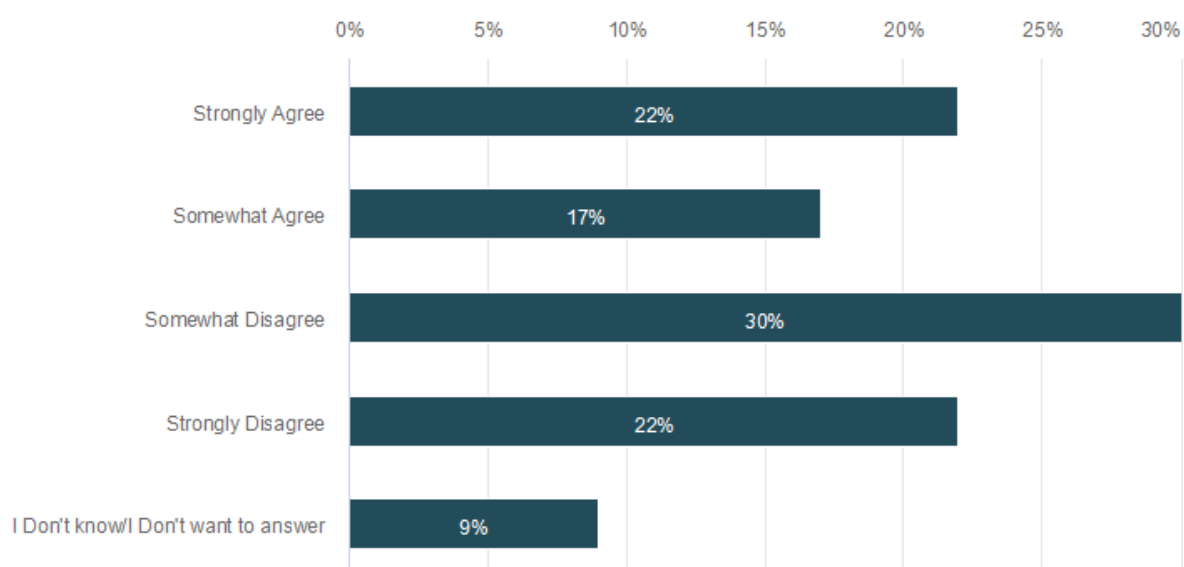


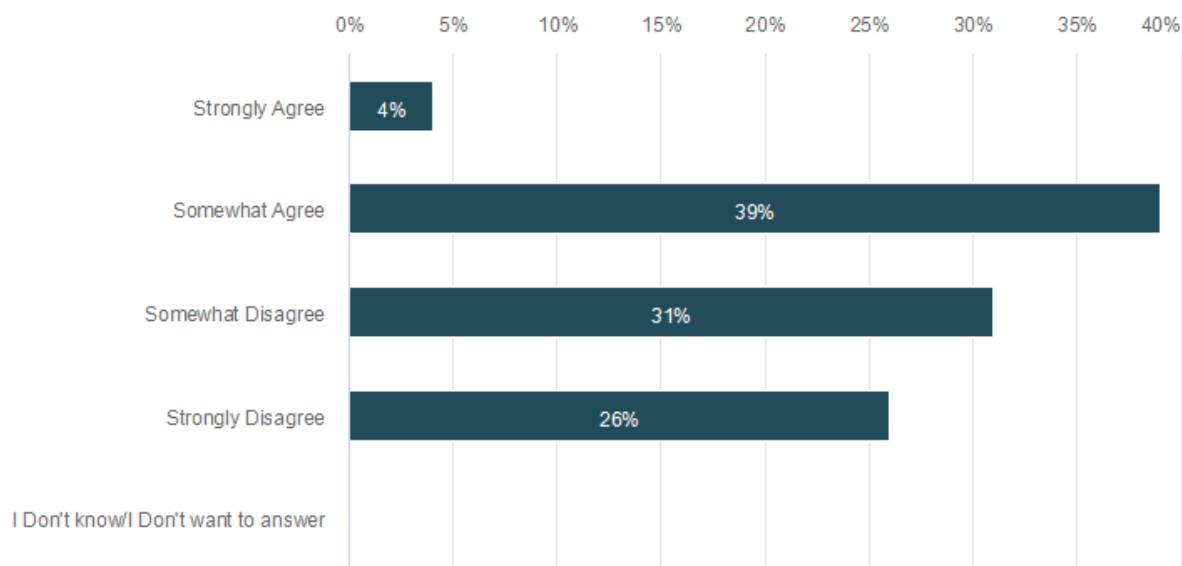
Figure 1. Results of question 4 in percentages.

For most of the items on the FLCAS that were included in the questionnaire, answers were quite positive as expected, and therefore need little explaining. It makes sense that English students would in general feel at ease when going to English class and would not feel much pressure to prepare in advance unless there was a test. Some statements with very varied responses we should take a deeper look at are 5, 8, 15 and 18, all presented in Figure 2. Statement 5 had some of the most variance in its answers out of all the statements in the questionnaire, and it asked students about their feelings, when they do not understand what the teacher is saying. Now part of the explanation could be general confusion around the question, since being in higher education teachers tend to be very good in their pronunciation, and majoring in English lessens the chances for students actually not understanding what the teacher is saying. Regardless, this also creates an atmosphere where in the instance of unfamiliarity, the feeling is then quite unfamiliar to the student, and thus creates a potentially anxiety-inducing situation. As for the data, there was very little consistency in the correlation between this statement and the answers to other statements, which further suggests that the variance in results could be due to confusion around the question. This was one of the statements from the original FLCAS that remained unchanged and does somewhat feel outdated by modern standards, as well as in the context of a questionnaire specifically for language students.

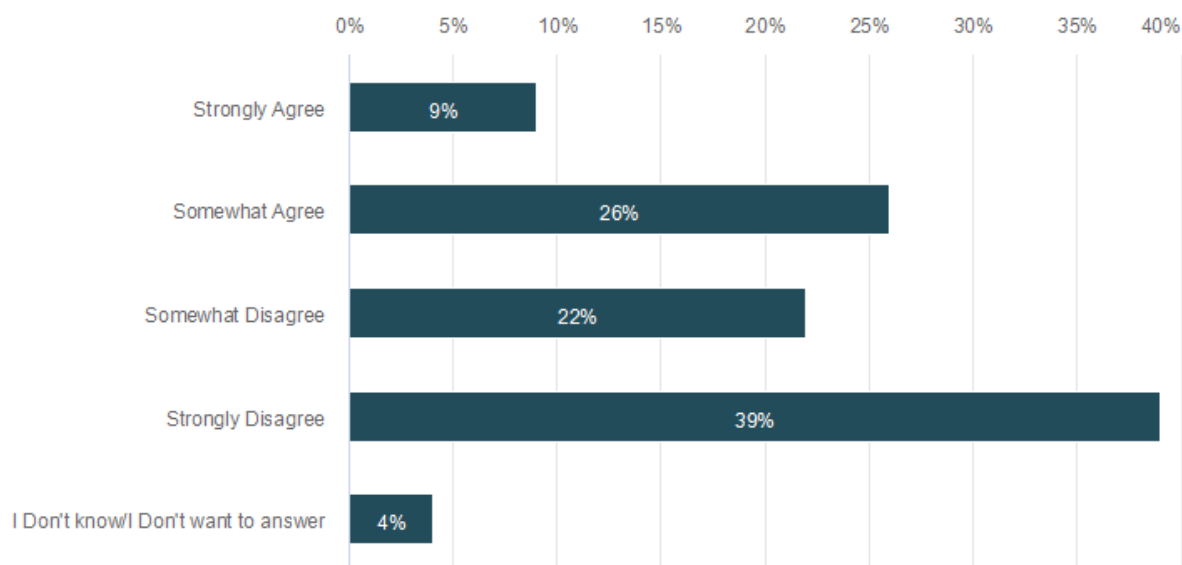
5. It frightens me when I do not understand what the teacher is saying in a foreign language.



8. I keep thinking that the other students are better at English than I am.



15. In English class, I can get so nervous that I forget things I know.



18. I get upset when I don't understand what the teacher is correcting.

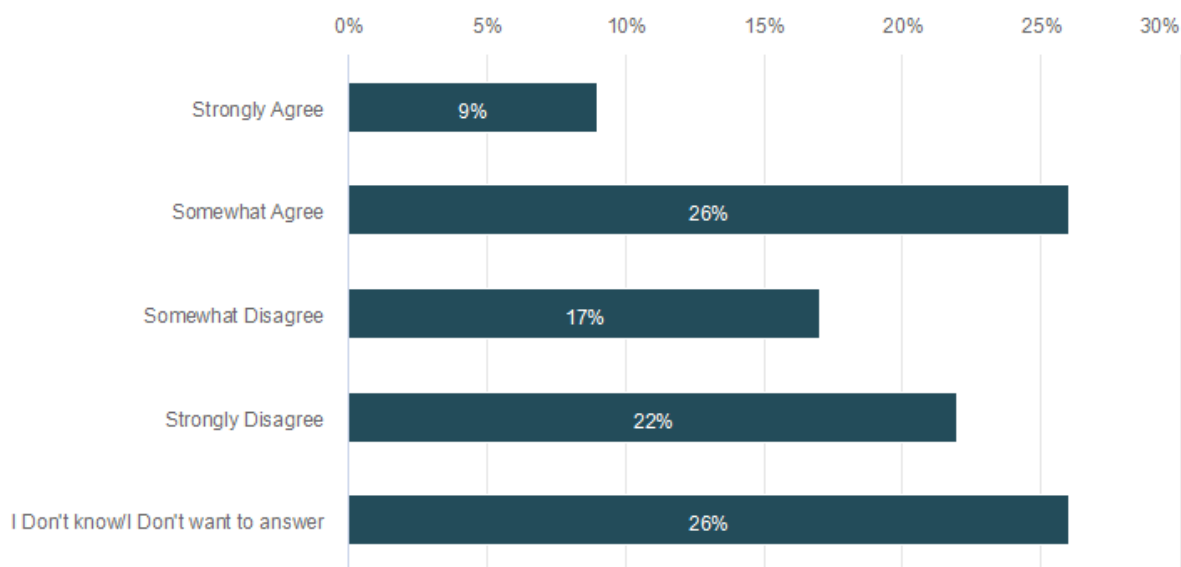


Figure 2. Students' attitudes and feelings towards English

As for statement 8, the data is much more consistent. For the most part, people who score higher and therefore have lower FLA according to the scale tended to disagree with the statement where they perceive the students around them as having better English skills, and the opposite was also true. There were once again instances where higher scorers perceived their peers as having better English skills, but these cases were infrequent.

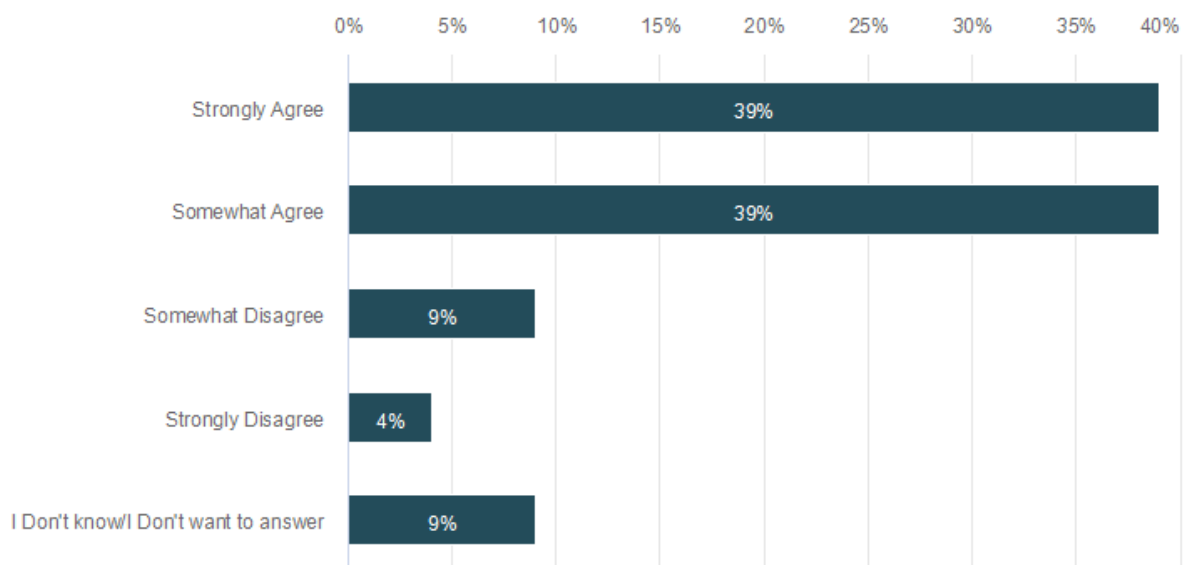
The final statements I want to highlight on the FLCAS are 15 and 18, both regarding feelings in the classroom. Both of these statements also got answers that were quite varied and seemed to have little consistency in terms of the correlation between them and other statements. However, both of these statements have to do with other aspects as well, where some of the answers to 15 could have to do with the respondent being more forgetful in general, and speaking a non-native language only further emphasizes this aspect of them. This could be especially true in the case of someone who despite being very adept at the language in general does not use it much in their free time. Thus, the language does not come to them naturally, and instead requires more thought to be put into producing said language, increasing the chance to forget even very basic words at times. Statement 18 feels even more tied to personality, having to do with perceived agitation. What a person deems to be enough for them to be upset varies vastly from one person to another, thus the inconsistency here makes sense. Despite all of that

however, there is some consistency in the percentage of people who answered the statement, but it is also noteworthy, that this was by a decent margin the statement where people elected not to answer the most. All of this makes the statement quite unreliable to analyze, but it is still safe to say that personality played quite a big role in the answers to this statement in particular. Finally, it is worth noting that this was also one of the original items from the Horwitz scale, that was not altered in any way.

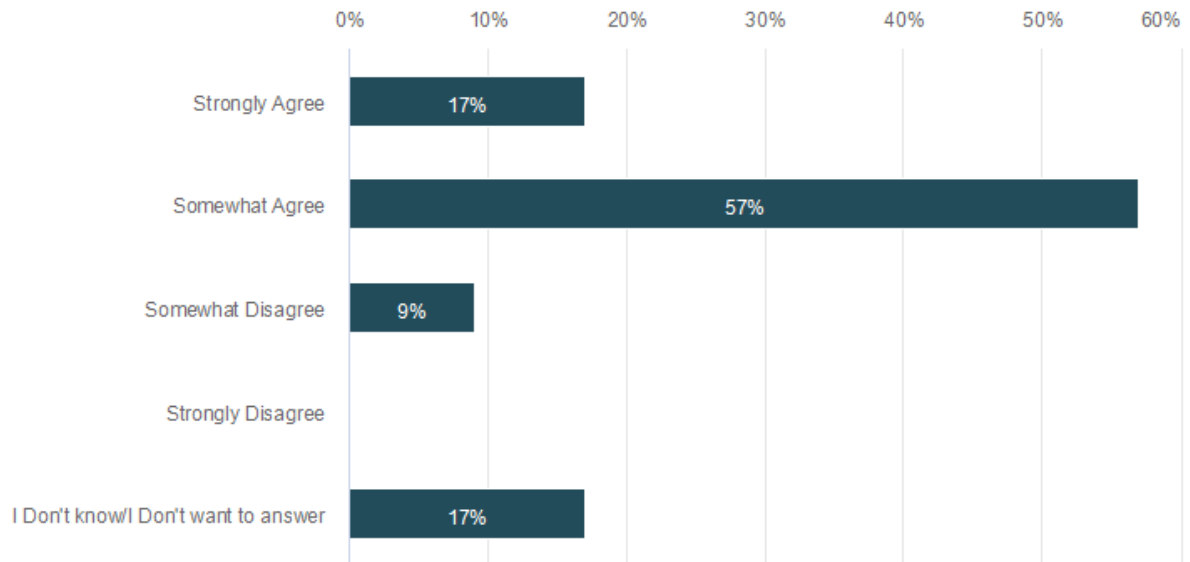
4.2 The Additional Statements

In addition to the items on the FLCAS by Horwitz, as well as additional statements pertaining to spoken language, there were a few more statements in the questionnaire added to specifically draw comparisons. Statements 10 and 19 are there to compare two aspects, usually related to the previous statement (9 and 18), and 41 was there for me to draw conclusions from the overall answers, although this data was quite inconsistent. All of these statements and their results are once again presented in Figure 3.

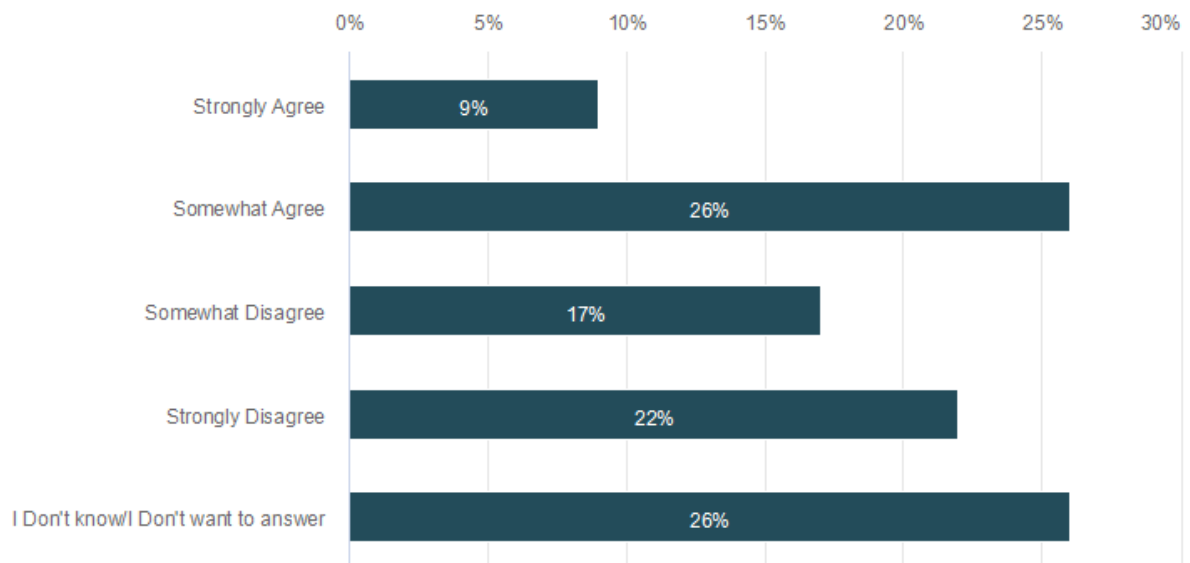
9. I am usually at ease during tests in my English class.



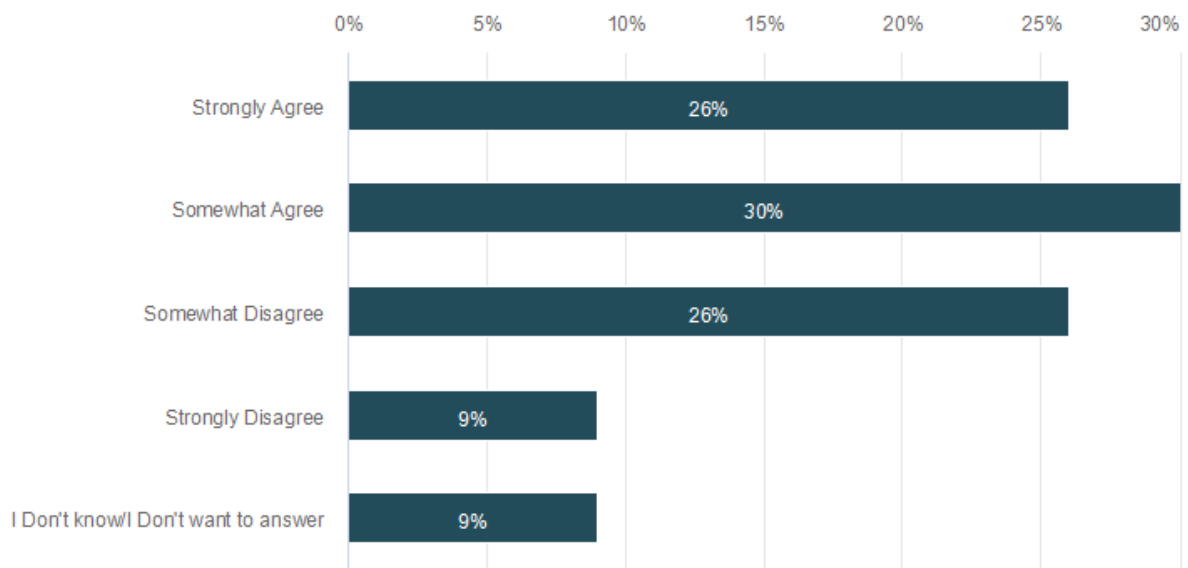
10. I feel less anxious in English class tests and exams than in other classes.



18. I get upset when I don't understand what the teacher is correcting.



19. I like the teacher correcting my mistakes when I make them, rather than ignoring them.



41. I have had problems learning a language in the past.

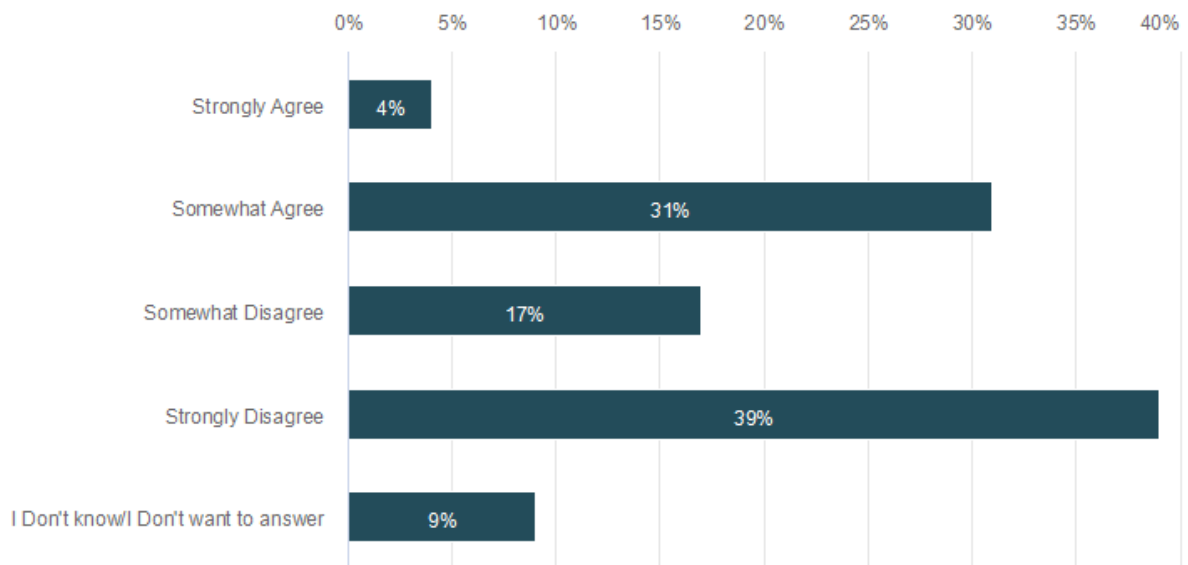


Figure 3. The additional items on the questionnaire

Although in some cases people who reported to having problems with language learning in the past did indeed showcase higher levels of FLA and people with reportedly no problems in the past tended to score high (meaning lower FLA levels), there were also around the same number of the opposite as well, meaning people with past problems scoring higher, and people with no

prior issues scoring lower. Overall, there was little correlation between FLA levels and prior language learning problems in the data collected in the study. With a higher sample size this could maybe be used as a resource for gauging FLA levels, but in the present study, it remains too inconsistent to draw any conclusions from.

As for the comparisons in statements 10 and 19, 10 was used to compare the differences between students' self-perceived levels of anxiety in English tests when compared to other subjects, and here the data was quite unanimous with almost 90% of the respondents agreed that English tests cause them less anxiety in general. This once again makes sense, given that it is their major. Statement 19, on the other hand, was one of the most controversial in the entire questionnaire, and it inquired the participants' thoughts on the teacher correcting their mistakes rather than ignoring them. Although there was some inconsistency in the answers, for the most part the people who tended to agree and wanted the teacher to correct their mistakes also tended to be quite confident and in general scored quite high on the FLCAS as well. The inconsistency could be explained with varying personalities, where some people who agreed with the statement were people who perceived their own English (usually speaking) skills low, but wanted to improve in that regard, while others who already felt more anxious when speaking might have felt like the teacher correcting them only further worsened their speaking anxiety. The biggest takeaway and draw from this to me was the importance of knowing the students and their personalities and seeing how to interact with them in order to not only help improve their language use, but also to keep them from getting discouraged.

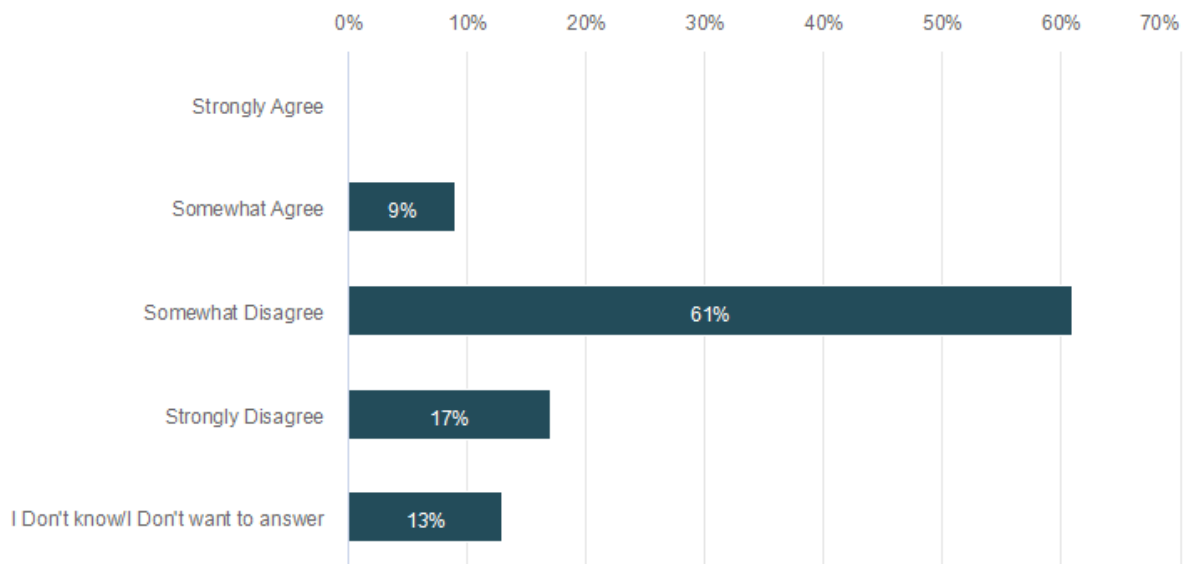
4.3 Spoken Language

What I was most interested in in the questionnaire, were especially students' thoughts on spoken English and their comfortability when engaging with spoken English. The mean score of the participants' answers when looking at only the items that had to do with spoken language was 0.77, very close to the mean score to the FLCAS items. The statements taken into account for this section were: 2, 5, 11, 16, 22, 25, 28, 29, 30, 33, 36, 37, 38 and 39. A few statements could be argued also belonging to this section (4, 35, 40), but I wanted to use only the clearly

related ones. Finally, 12 is a statement to consider as well when gauging spoken language, but that statement was more about the comparison between two equivalents, so scoring that would have been strange. It would not make sense to score speaking English in one place higher than another, when looking at speaking as a potential cause for anxiety, since both ends of the spectrum have to do with speaking the language. Thus, I ended up not scoring that statement in particular at all.

First, I would like to look at two statements in more detail, those being 12 and 38 (Figure 4). What is clear in statement 38 is the overwhelming positivity towards spoken English in students' free time. One person elected not to answer, but otherwise every answer was positive, and at least somewhat agreed with the statement "I like speaking English outside of English classes". However, when looking at statement 12, the majority feels more confident speaking English outside of class. Thus, there is clear evidence that something in a classroom setting puts more pressure on the students when speaking the FL and raises their anxiety levels when compared to their free time.

12. I feel more confident speaking English in school, than I do outside of it.



38. I like speaking English outside of English classes.

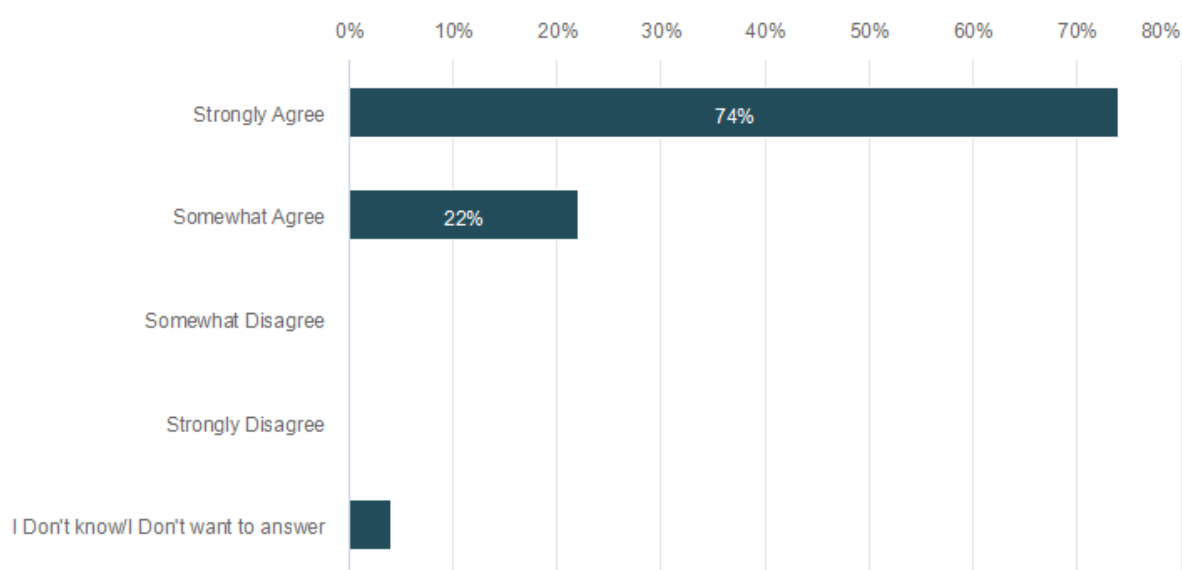


Figure 4. Students’ feelings towards speaking English outside of school

Some other items on the questionnaire, like statement 5, which we have already addressed in previous sections, and statements like 11 pertain to quite similar themes than something we have already looked at (in this case, statement 24). Interestingly enough, more people seemed to be okay with speaking English without preparation when compared to knowing they are going to be called on. Similar people reported feeling anxious in both scenarios, but there were also cases, where people who reported feeling anxious when they expect to be called on reported not feeling too anxious in situations where they are suddenly asked a question. While this could be the result of mildly stronger wording in the latter statement about suddenly having to speak, I am more inclined to believe that this is due to the effect that Elliot and Chong (2005) described, where knowing that you will have to present something builds up anxiety gradually. Not to mention, the respondents all being English majors at a higher educational level means their English proficiency levels are quite high by default, so in the instance where they are suddenly “forced” to speak, they are more likely to do just fine, and all the anxiety in the first place was for naught.

As for other statements pertaining to speaking in class in particular, the data remained quite consistent throughout all the statements. Higher anxiety levels were reported by 20-30% of the respondents throughout, and most of the time these were the same people. Most of the time the issue seemed to be about confidence when speaking in general, and this could be rooted in

general speaking anxiety or lack of speaking experience, although it is more likely a combination of both, former also studied quite extensively by Szyszka. They divide this sort of anxiety into oral communication anxiety and stage fright (Szyszka 2011: 285), depending on whether it is a classroom situation or a public space where the speaking and thus, anxiety, takes place. Around a quarter of the respondents reported to not feeling comfortable around native English speakers, and most of the time these people also tended to report higher levels of anxiety in other areas concerning spoken English as well. These people tended to be the same people that reported to feeling more confident speaking English in class than outside of it, further confirming most likely a lack of practice. Finally, interestingly enough, more people tended to feel more anxious presenting in English class when compared to other classes. This could be due to anxiety when speaking the foreign language, and the people who felt less comfortable around native speakers of English also tended to feel less comfortable presenting in English class and would prefer presenting in other classes.

As for the statements about speaking English in general, respondents tended to feel mostly comfortable around native speakers, and unanimously agreed to like speaking English outside of classes. Around 80% of respondents expressed a preference to speaking English in their free time when compared to speaking in class, which suggests classroom as a core cause for language anxiety. Despite all of this however it is clear that overall, the FLA levels of English language students are very low, and this then raises the question about classrooms raising the students' anxiety levels.

The data about spoken language was very consistent throughout the study, and most of the time students who responded one way to a statement about spoken language, they tended to answer similarly to most spoken language statements. This makes sense, since not only do these statements have to do with FLA, but also speaking anxiety in general. For the most part though, as reported at the start of this section, the mean score of the spoken language items was nearly identical to the FLCAS items, meaning that spoken language anxiety is not much higher when compared to FLA in general. Also interestingly enough, significantly more people agreed with the statement where they felt like other students were better than them at English in general (over 40%) when compared to speaking skills, where only 30% thought that way.

5 CONCLUSION

The aim of the study was to both gauge the FLA levels of English language students, as well as to find out, if there are major differences in spoken and written English as the causes for FLA. Overall, according to the results of the questionnaire, the FLA levels of English students were quite low as was expected. As addressed earlier, according to Szyszka (2011), self-perceived pronunciation levels and language skills overall tend to directly correlate to anxiety levels, and most of the respondents were quite positive about their own language skills, which makes sense, given they have chosen to major in English and have prior expressed success in English, whether through the entrance exam or through high school studies. This was one of the two main questions I had going into this study. Most of the questionnaire data remained quite consistent throughout, and some of the inconsistencies could be explained with the statements being either outdated or simply feeling out of place, when designated to English language majors. Horwitz (2001) also pointed out how different individuals feel more or less comfortable in different situations, which was further supported by some additional comments by the respondents that explained some of their answers.

Additionally, it was quite surprising that spoken English and the general FLCAS had almost similar results. Part of the motivation to conduct this study was the idea that people tended to not like speaking English as much. During the pandemic and classes being on Zoom, it was a common occurrence that people did not want to speak English in group discussions on Zoom, which was one of the original ideas and reasons to conduct this study. Now this statement about online classes in particular was not directly addressed in the questionnaire or in the present

study, and ultimately whether this was simply a case of a lack of motivation in online classrooms in general, or something else entirely, remains unclear.

For future studies, one core issue that rose that remains quite unresearched, is classroom anxiety as a whole. Most classroom anxiety studies, this one included, focus on foreign language classroom anxiety, and anxiety with language in general. Some statements in the FLCAS analysis section displayed the difficulty in discerning general classroom anxiety with FLA, and this is especially prevalent in spoken answers. By adapting parts of both FLA and presentation analysis there could be more research done of the field of anxiety pertaining to spoken answers, which in turn would help us develop a more comfortable classroom setting for students. Additionally, although it had already been quite a studied subject due to Covid, it would still be interesting to hear and see more on why online classrooms seem to spark less discussion in general, when compared to traditional face-to-face classroom discussions. All in all, classroom motivation is a core issue in the field of teaching that will become only increasingly prevalent with our ever-decreasing attention spans.

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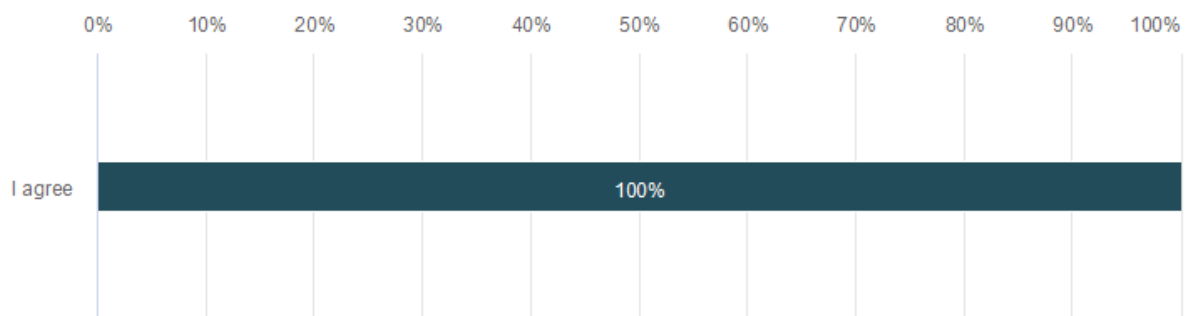
APPENDIX

QUESTIONNAIRE

BA Thesis - Students' (Spoken) English Comfortability In Finnish University Classrooms

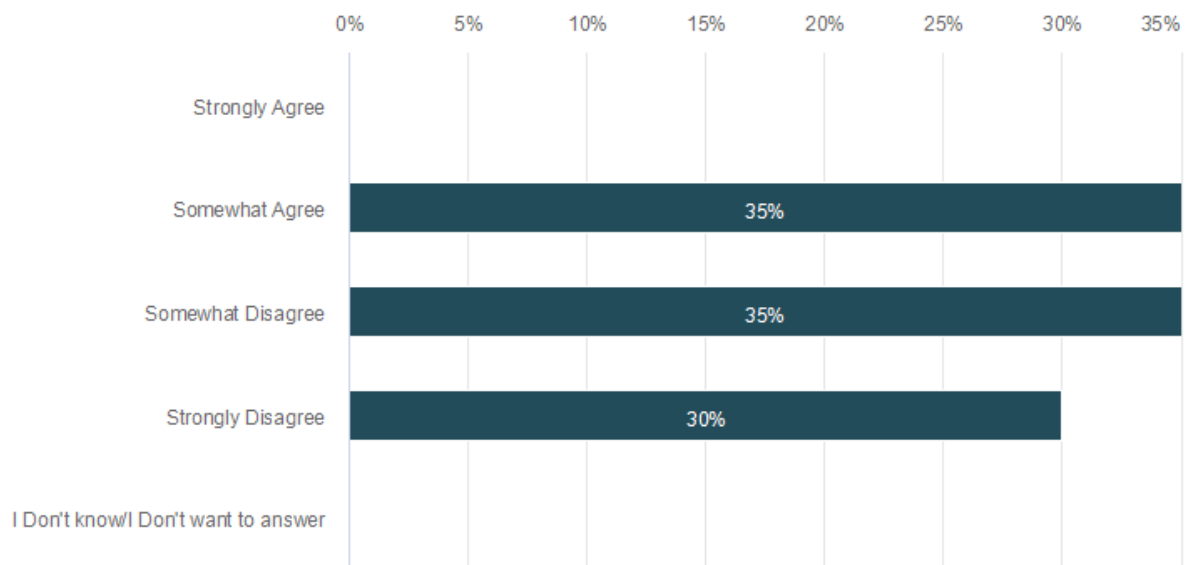
1. By answering, I assure that I am over 18 years old, agree to the above terms and permit my answers to be used as data in the thesis.

Vastaajien määrä: 23



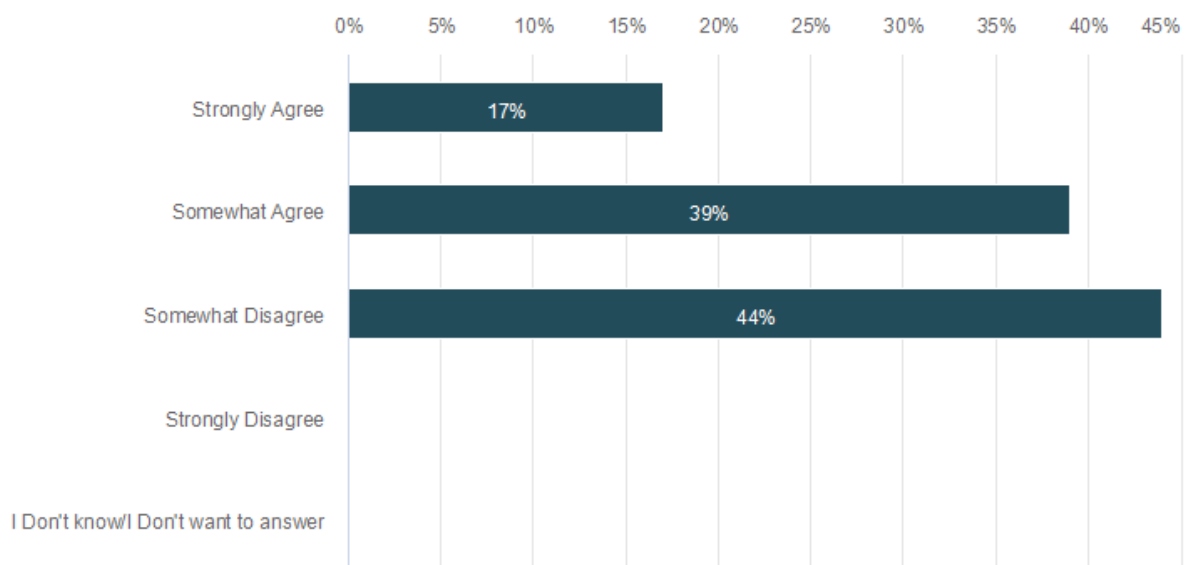
	n	Prosentti
I agree	23	100,0%

2. I never feel quite sure of myself when I am speaking in my English class.



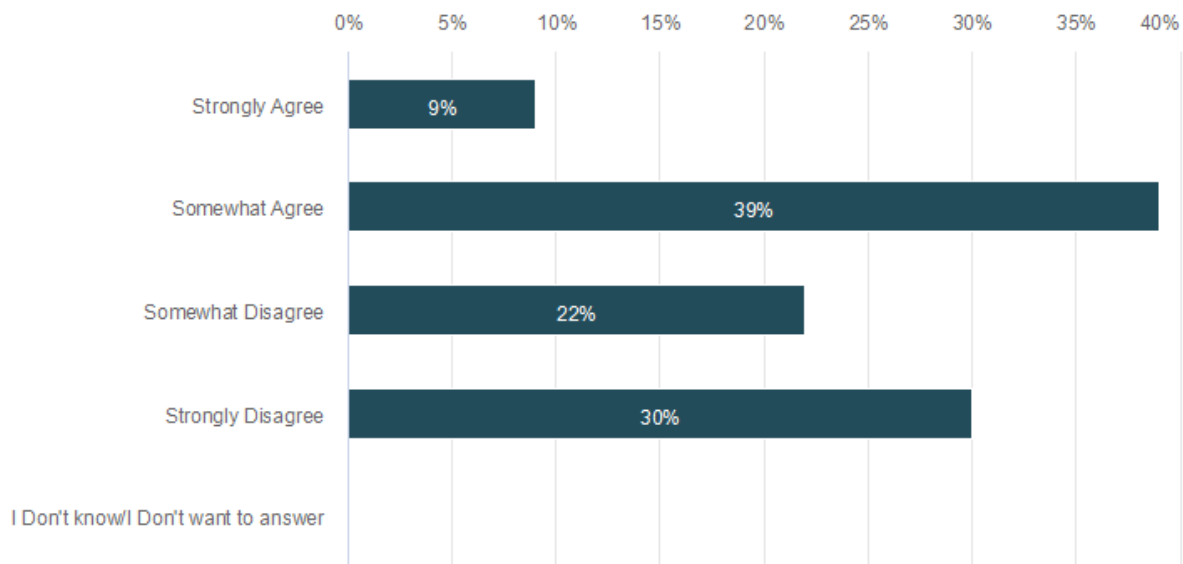
	n	Prosentti
Strongly Agree	0	0,0%
Somewhat Agree	8	34,8%
Somewhat Disagree	8	34,8%
Strongly Disagree	7	30,4%
I Don't know/I Don't want to answer	0	0,0%

3. I do not worry about making mistakes in English class.



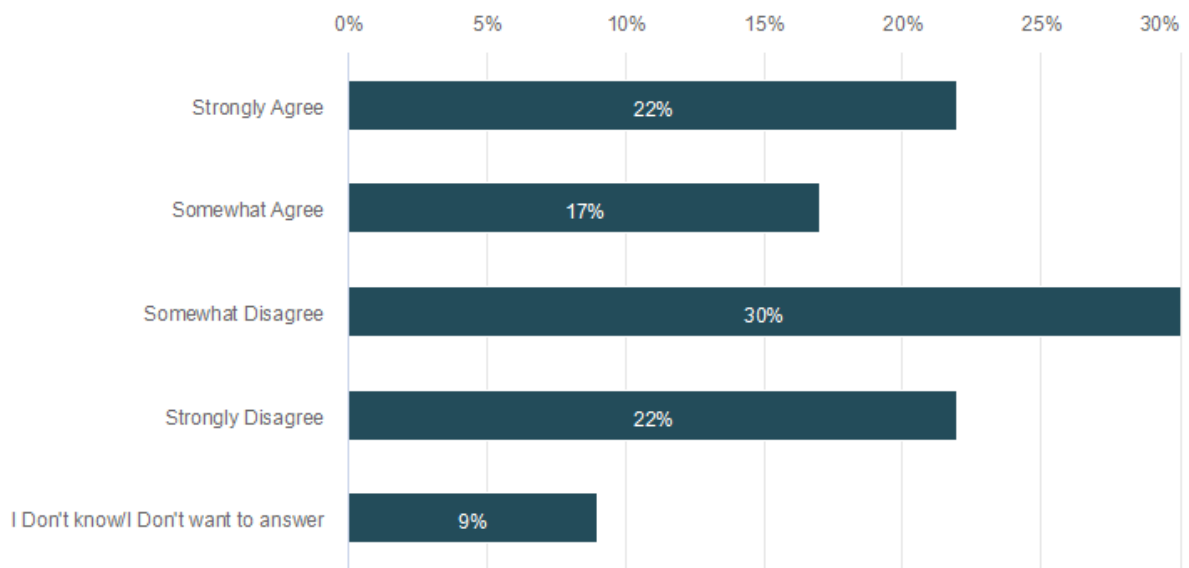
	n	Prosentti
Strongly Agree	4	17,4%
Somewhat Agree	9	39,1%
Somewhat Disagree	10	43,5%
Strongly Disagree	0	0,0%
I Don't know/I Don't want to answer	0	0,0%

4. I get anxious when I know that I'm going to be asked a question in English class.



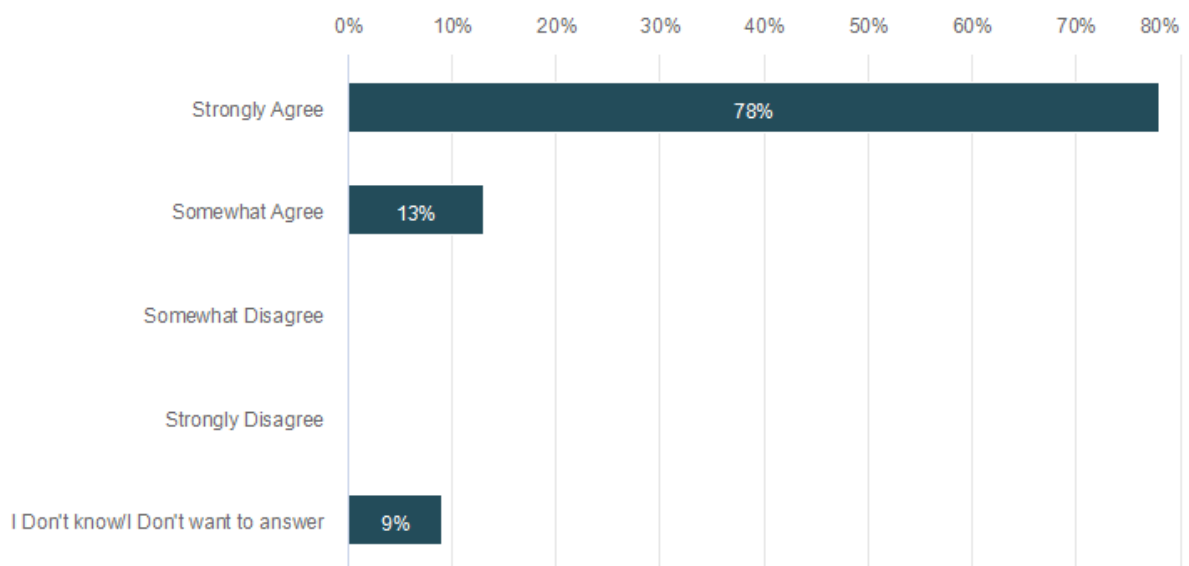
	n	Prosentti
Strongly Agree	2	8,7%
Somewhat Agree	9	39,1%
Somewhat Disagree	5	21,8%
Strongly Disagree	7	30,4%
I Don't know/I Don't want to answer	0	0,0%

5. It frightens me when I do not understand what the teacher is saying in a foreign language.



	n	Prosentti
Strongly Agree	5	21,8%
Somewhat Agree	4	17,4%
Somewhat Disagree	7	30,4%
Strongly Disagree	5	21,7%
I Don't know/I Don't want to answer	2	8,7%

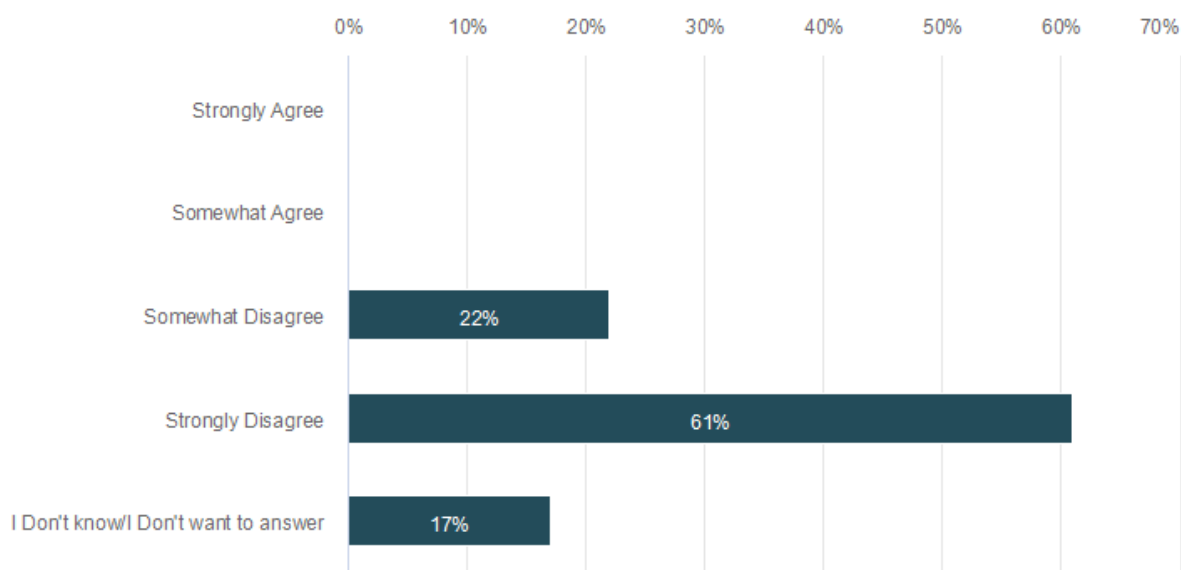
6. I don't mind studying foreign languages.



	n	Prosentti
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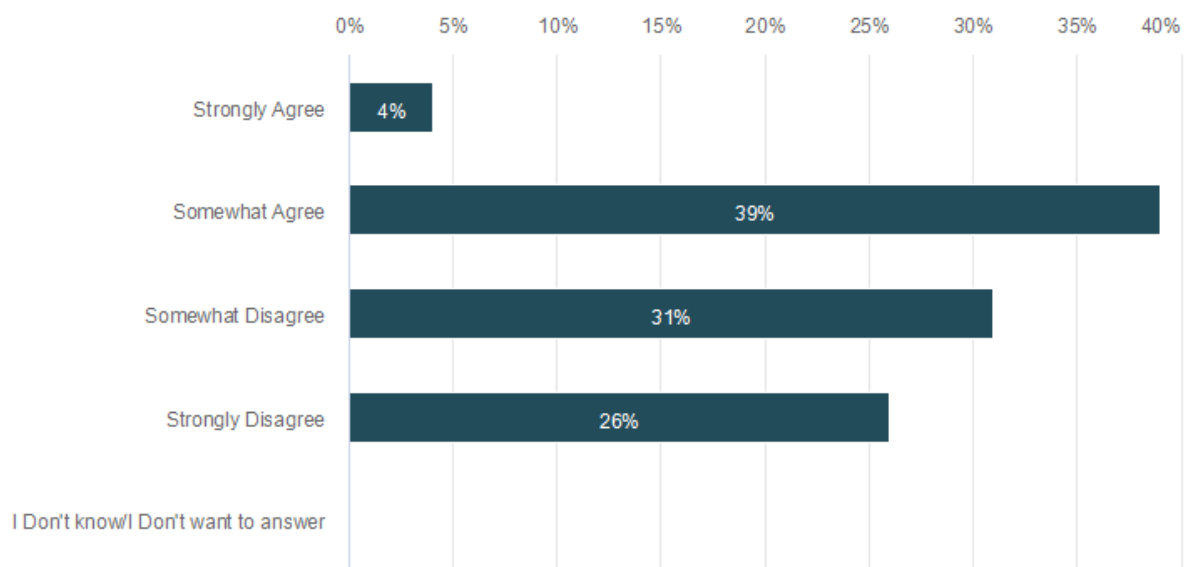
Strongly Agree	18	78,3%
Somewhat Agree	3	13,0%
Somewhat Disagree	0	0,0%
Strongly Disagree	0	0,0%
I Don't know/I Don't want to answer	2	8,7%

7. During English class, I find my mind wandering more than in other classes.



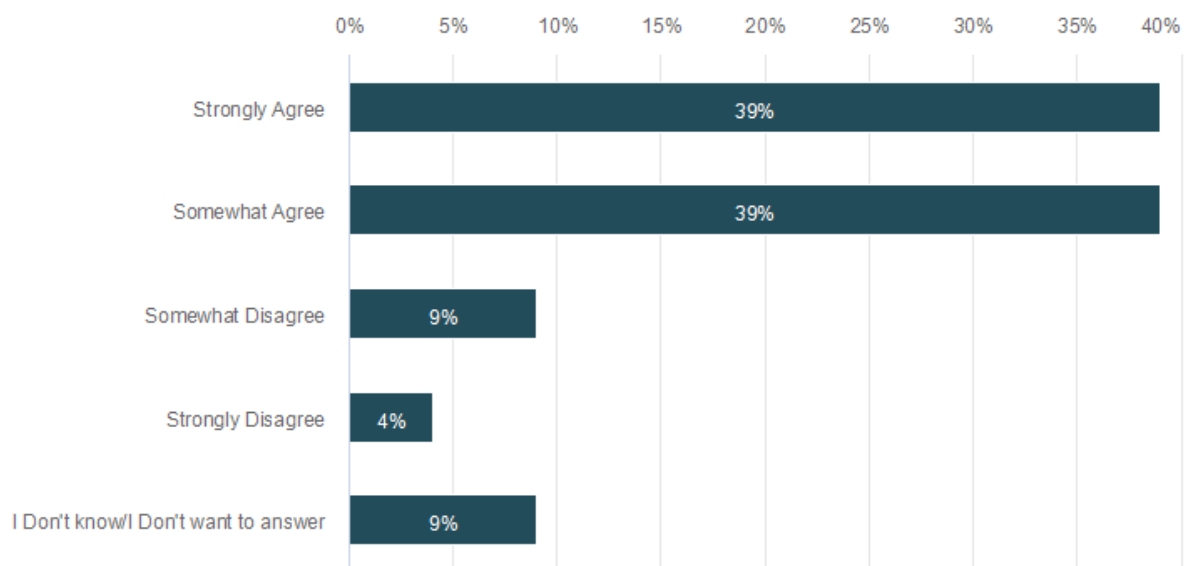
	n	Prosentti
Strongly Agree	0	0,0%
Somewhat Agree	0	0,0%
Somewhat Disagree	5	21,7%
Strongly Disagree	14	60,9%
I Don't know/I Don't want to answer	4	17,4%

8. I keep thinking that the other students are better at English than I am.



	n	Prosentti
Strongly Agree	1	4,4%
Somewhat Agree	9	39,1%
Somewhat Disagree	7	30,4%
Strongly Disagree	6	26,1%
I Don't know/I Don't want to answer	0	0,0%

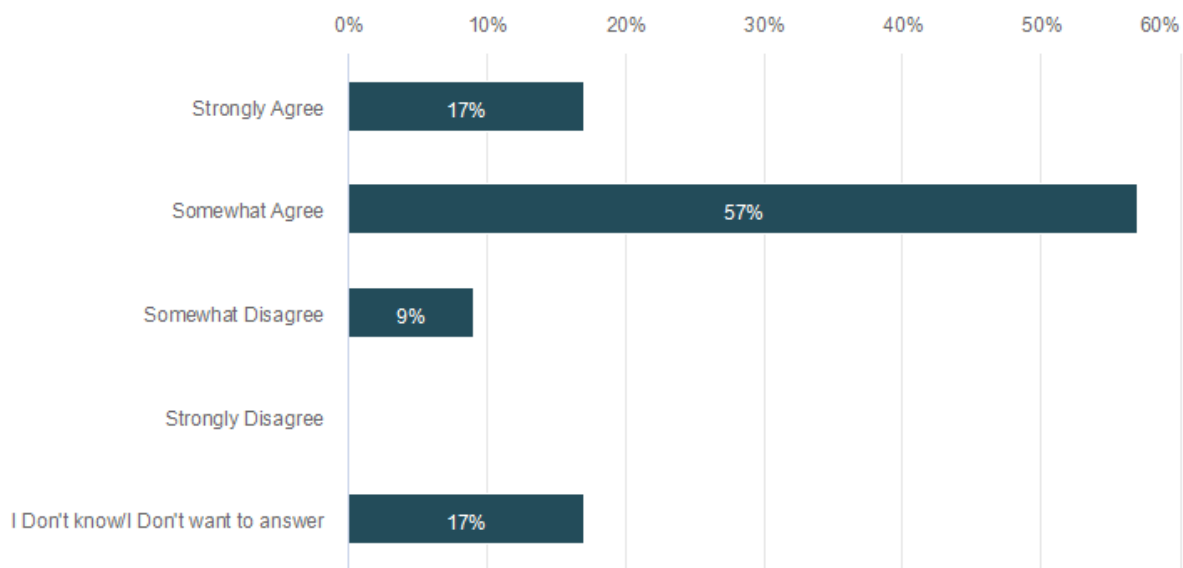
9. I am usually at ease during tests in my English class.



	n	Prosentti
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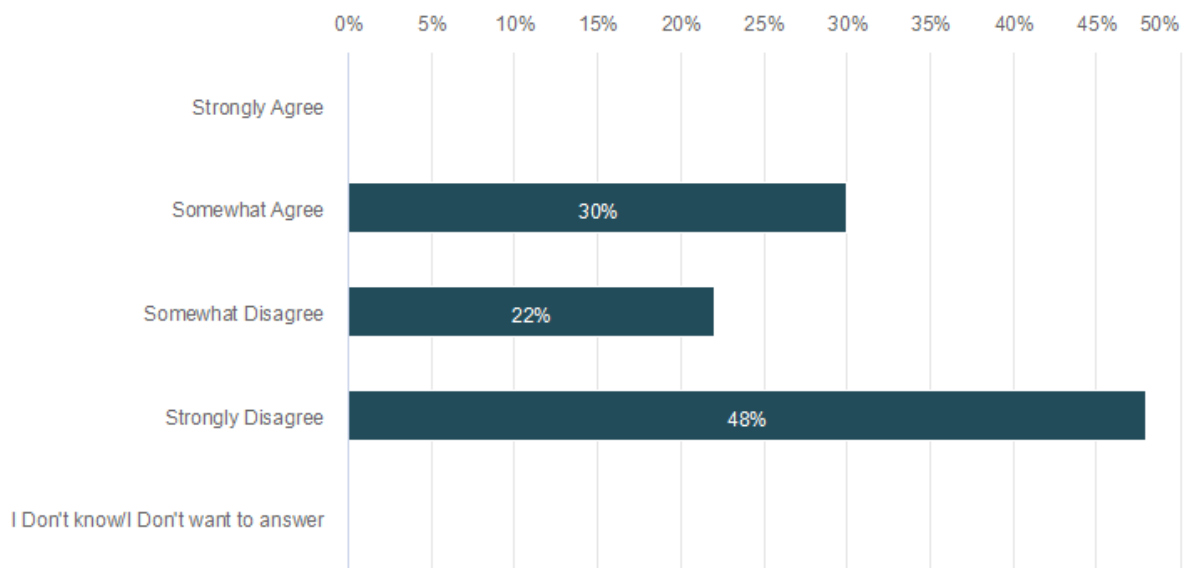
Strongly Agree	9	39,1%
Somewhat Agree	9	39,1%
Somewhat Disagree	2	8,7%
Strongly Disagree	1	4,4%
I Don't know/I Don't want to answer	2	8,7%

10. I feel less anxious in English class tests and exams than in other classes.



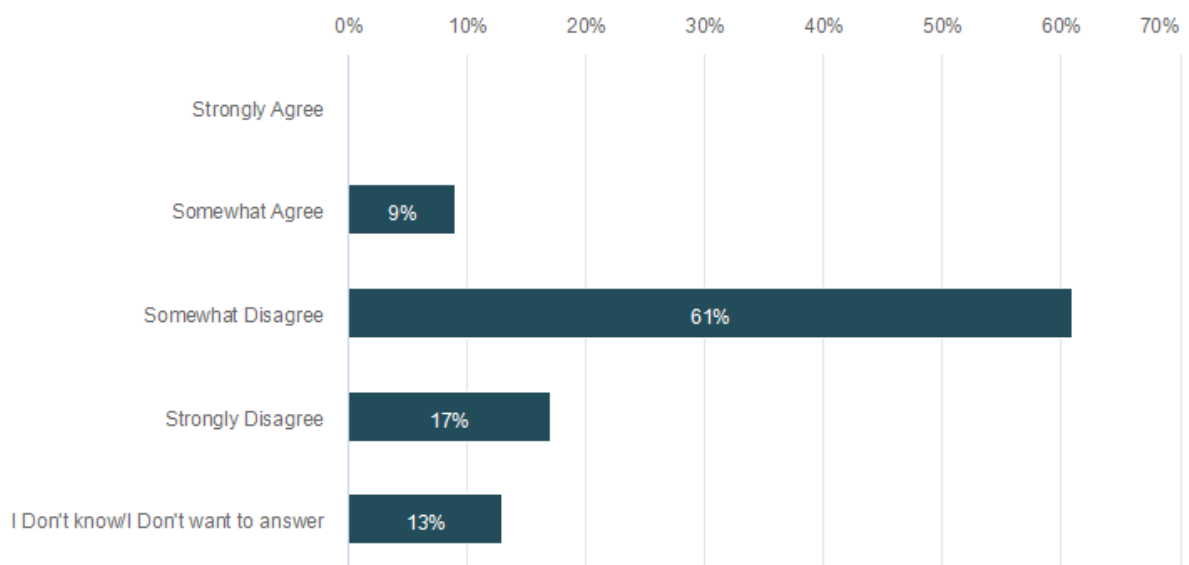
	n	Prosentti
Strongly Agree	4	17,4%
Somewhat Agree	13	56,5%
Somewhat Disagree	2	8,7%
Strongly Disagree	0	0,0%
I Don't know/I Don't want to answer	4	17,4%

11. I start to panic when I have to speak without preparation in English class.



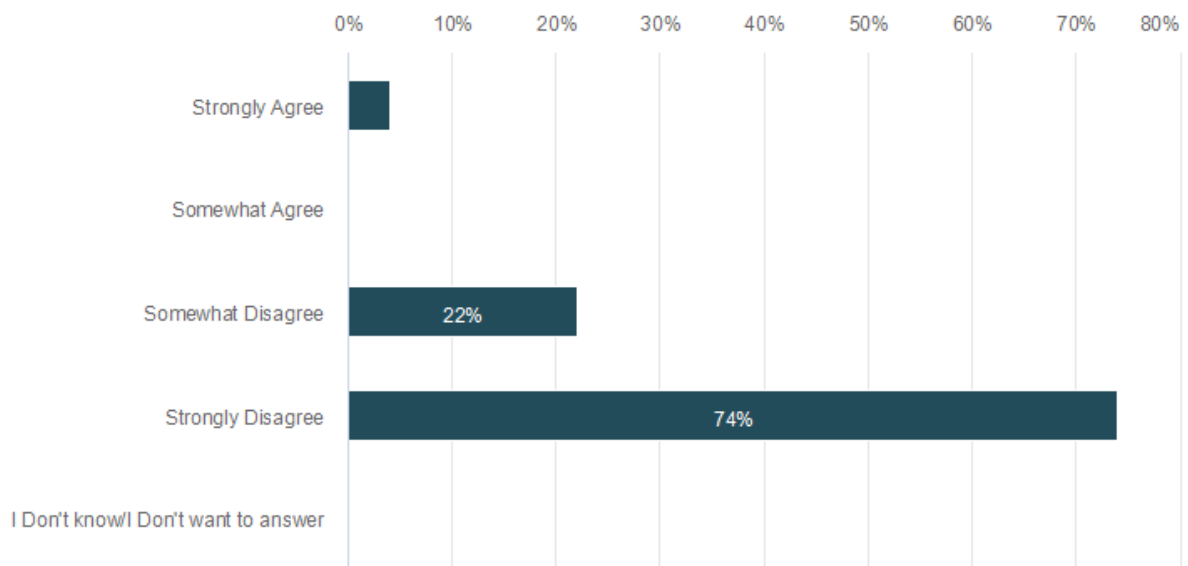
	n	Prosentti
Strongly Agree	0	0,0%
Somewhat Agree	7	30,4%
Somewhat Disagree	5	21,8%
Strongly Disagree	11	47,8%
I Don't know/I Don't want to answer	0	0,0%

12. I feel more confident speaking English in school, than I do outside of it.



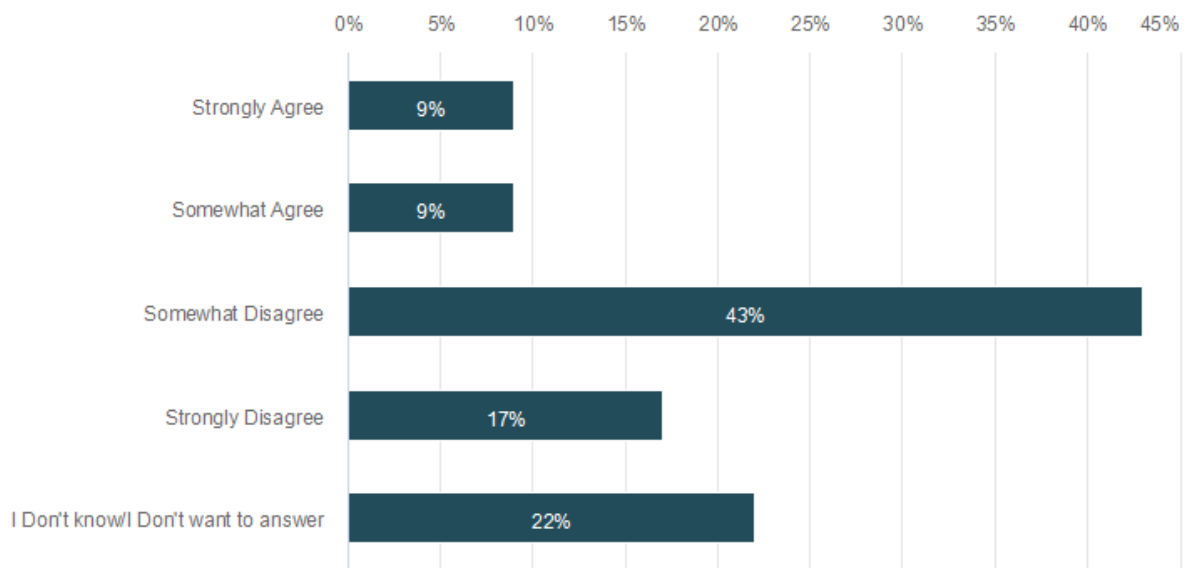
	n	Prosentti
Strongly Agree	0	0,0%
Somewhat Agree	2	8,7%
Somewhat Disagree	14	60,9%
Strongly Disagree	4	17,4%
I Don't know/I Don't want to answer	3	13,0%

13. I worry about failing my English class more than other classes.



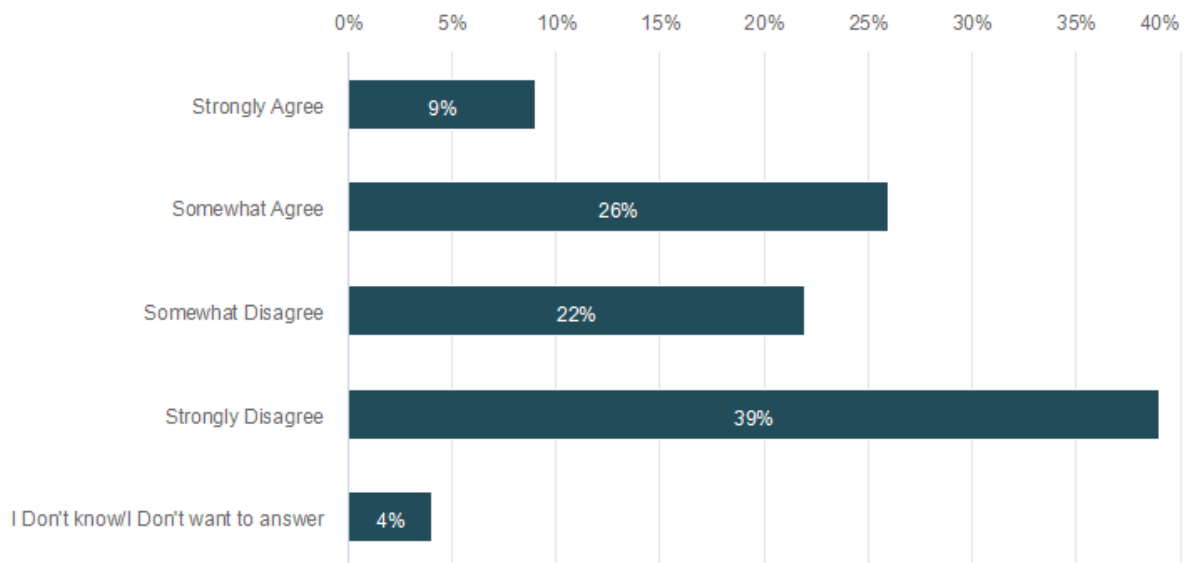
	n	Prosentti
Strongly Agree	1	4,4%
Somewhat Agree	0	0,0%
Somewhat Disagree	5	21,7%
Strongly Disagree	17	73,9%
I Don't know/I Don't want to answer	0	0,0%

14. I don't understand why some people get so upset or worried over English class.



	n	Prosentti
Strongly Agree	2	8,7%
Somewhat Agree	2	8,7%
Somewhat Disagree	10	43,5%
Strongly Disagree	4	17,4%
I Don't know/I Don't want to answer	5	21,7%

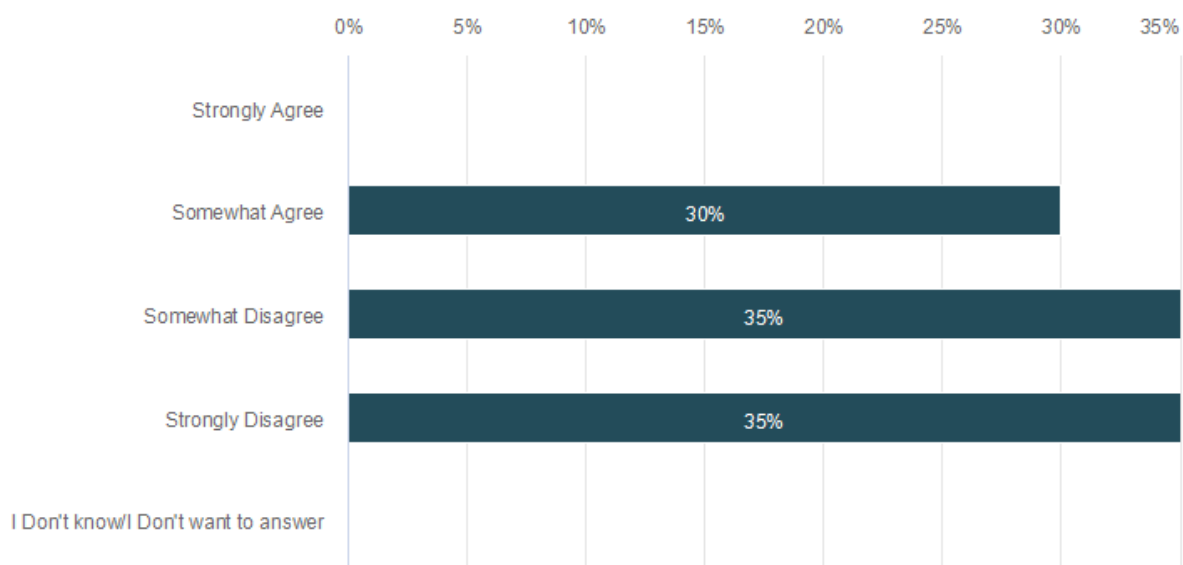
15. In English class, I can get so nervous that I forget things I know.



	n	Prosentti
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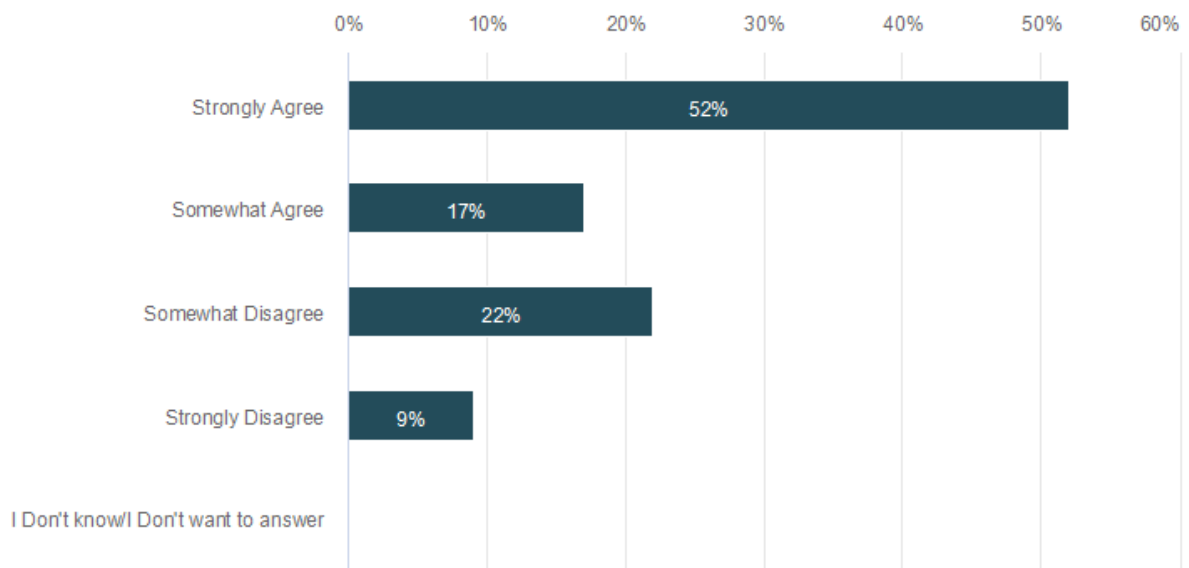
Strongly Agree	2	8,7%
Somewhat Agree	6	26,1%
Somewhat Disagree	5	21,7%
Strongly Disagree	9	39,1%
I Don't know/I Don't want to answer	1	4,4%

16. It embarrasses me to volunteer answers in my English class.



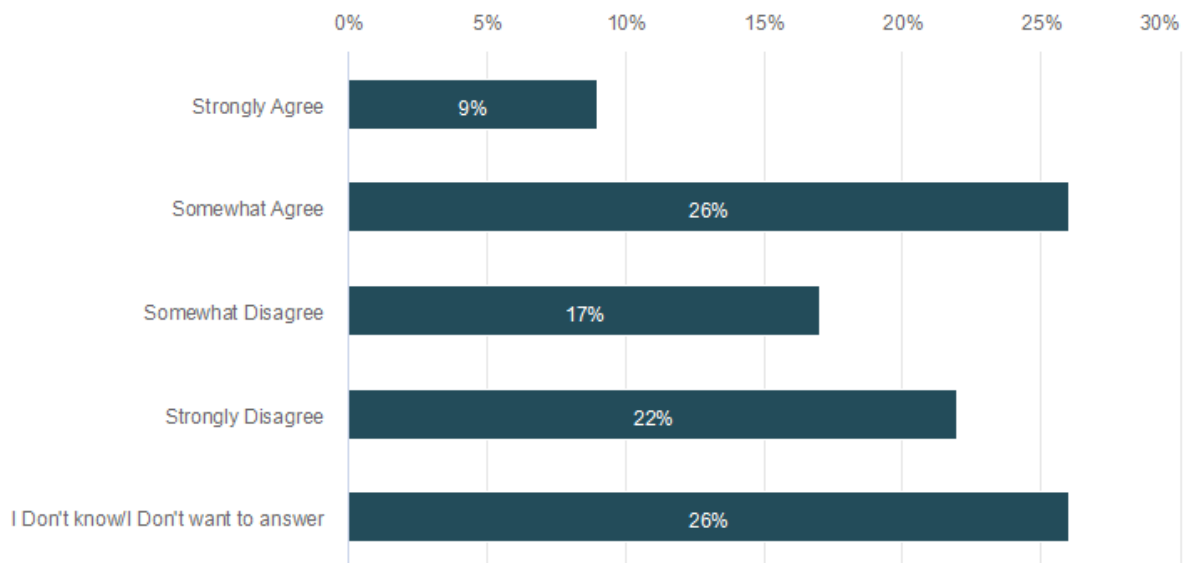
	n	Prosentti
Strongly Agree	0	0,0%
Somewhat Agree	7	30,4%
Somewhat Disagree	8	34,8%
Strongly Disagree	8	34,8%
I Don't know/I Don't want to answer	0	0,0%

17. I would not be nervous speaking English language with native speakers.



	n	Prosentti
Strongly Agree	12	52,2%
Somewhat Agree	4	17,4%
Somewhat Disagree	5	21,7%
Strongly Disagree	2	8,7%
I Don't know/I Don't want to answer	0	0,0%

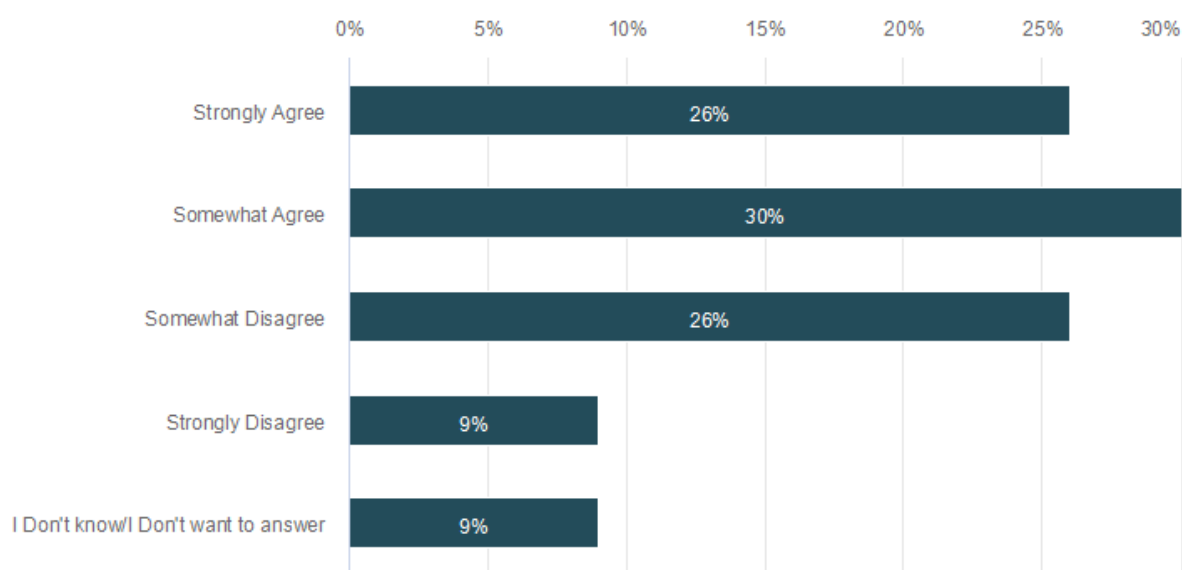
18. I get upset when I don't understand what the teacher is correcting.



	n	Prosentti
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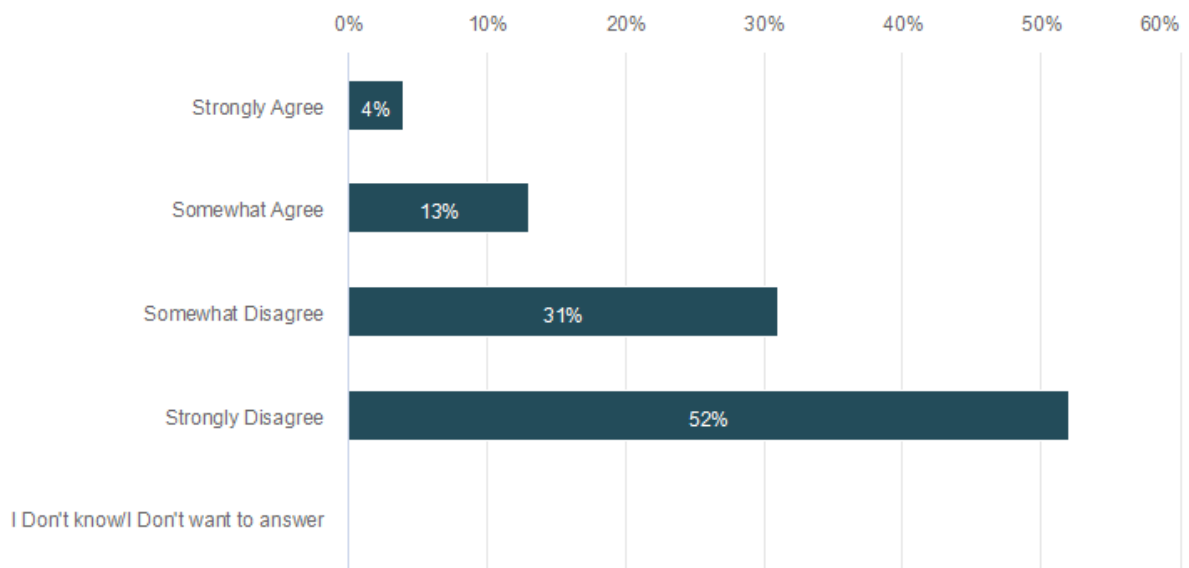
Strongly Agree	2	8,7%
Somewhat Agree	6	26,1%
Somewhat Disagree	4	17,4%
Strongly Disagree	5	21,7%
I Don't know/I Don't want to answer	6	26,1%

19. I like the teacher correcting my mistakes when I make them, rather than ignoring them.



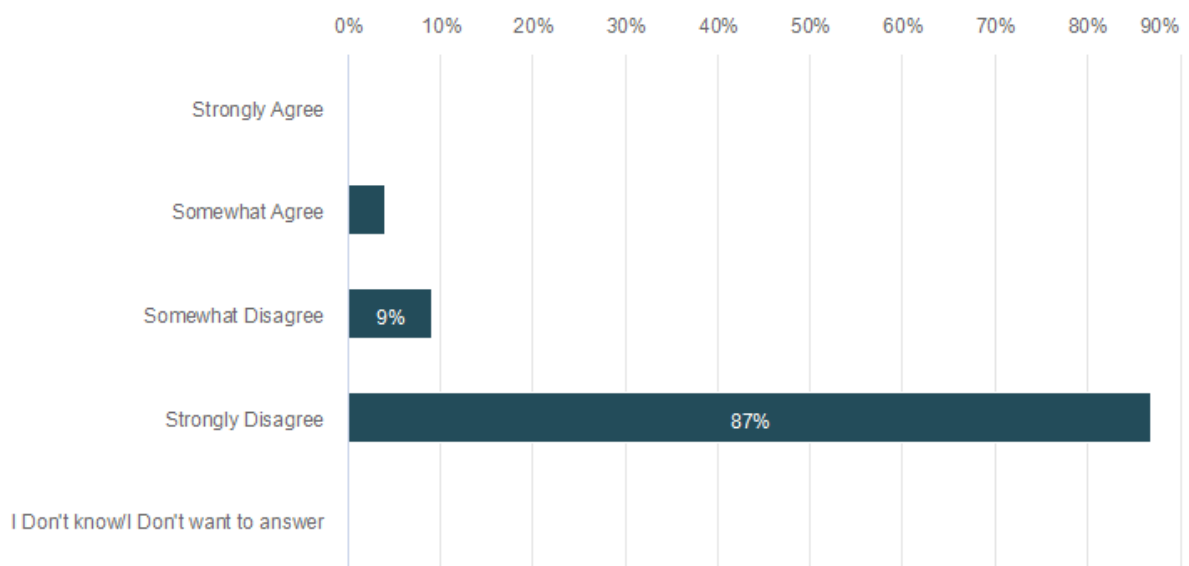
	n	Prosentti
Strongly Agree	6	26,1%
Somewhat Agree	7	30,4%
Somewhat Disagree	6	26,1%
Strongly Disagree	2	8,7%
I Don't know/I Don't want to answer	2	8,7%

20. Even if I am well prepared for English class, I still feel anxious about it



	n	Prosentti
Strongly Agree	1	4,4%
Somewhat Agree	3	13,0%
Somewhat Disagree	7	30,4%
Strongly Disagree	12	52,2%
I Don't know/I Don't want to answer	0	0,0%

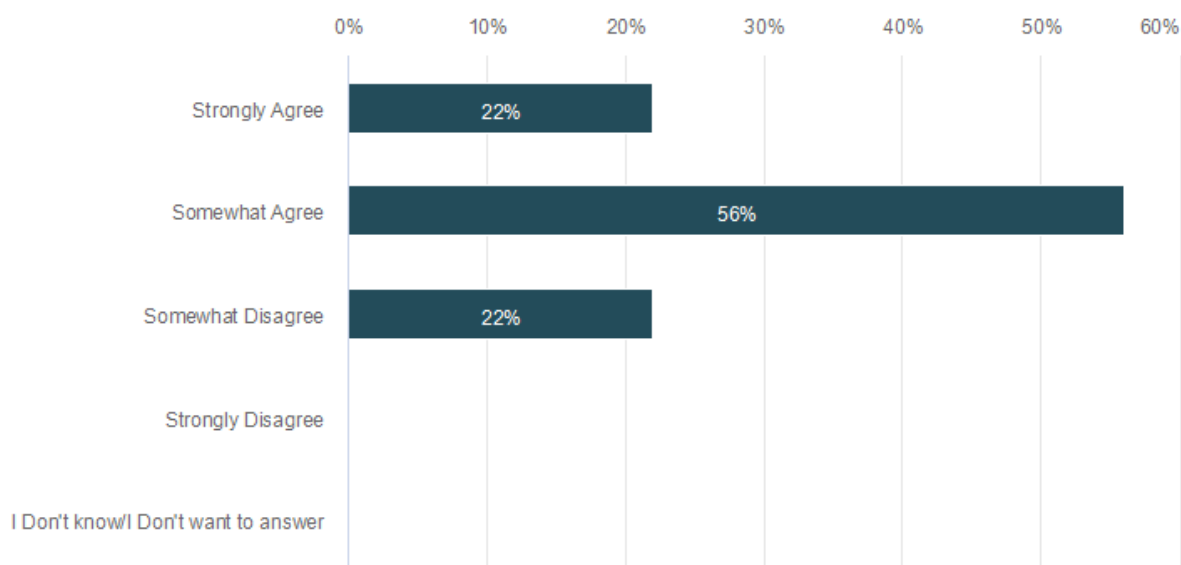
21. I dislike going to English class.



	n	Prosentti
Strongly Agree	0	0,0%
Somewhat Agree	0	0,0%
Somewhat Disagree	3	9,0%
Strongly Disagree	27	87,0%
I Don't know/I Don't want to answer	0	0,0%

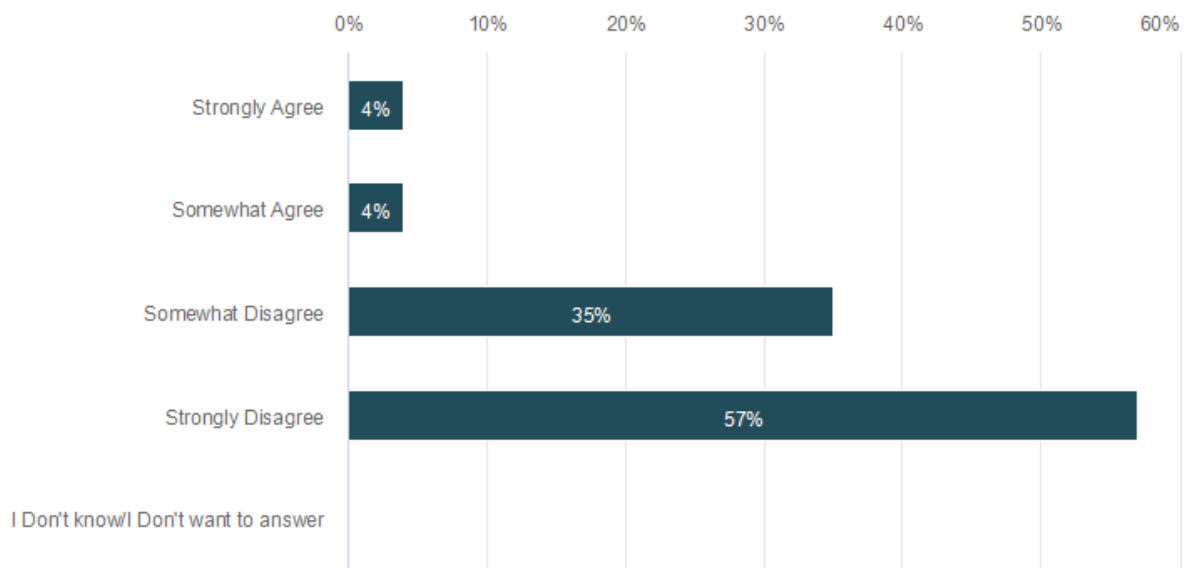
Strongly Agree	0	0,0%
Somewhat Agree	1	4,3%
Somewhat Disagree	2	8,7%
Strongly Disagree	20	87,0%
I Don't know/I Don't want to answer	0	0,0%

22. I feel confident when I speak in English class.



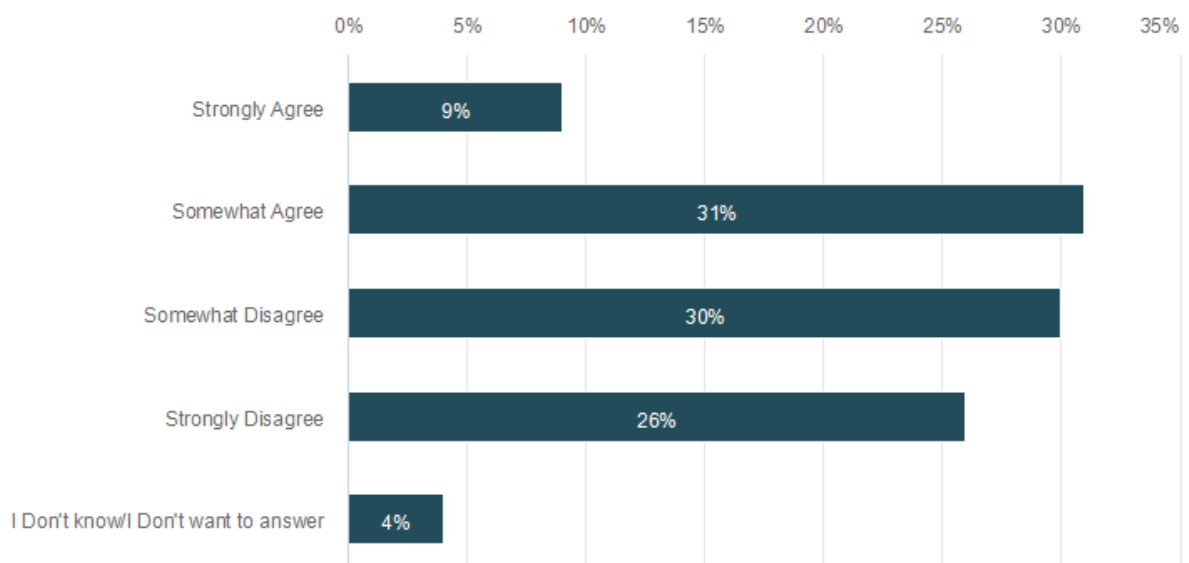
	n	Prosentti
Strongly Agree	5	21,8%
Somewhat Agree	13	56,5%
Somewhat Disagree	5	21,7%
Strongly Disagree	0	0,0%
I Don't know/I Don't want to answer	0	0,0%

23. I am afraid that my English teacher is ready to correct every mistake I make.



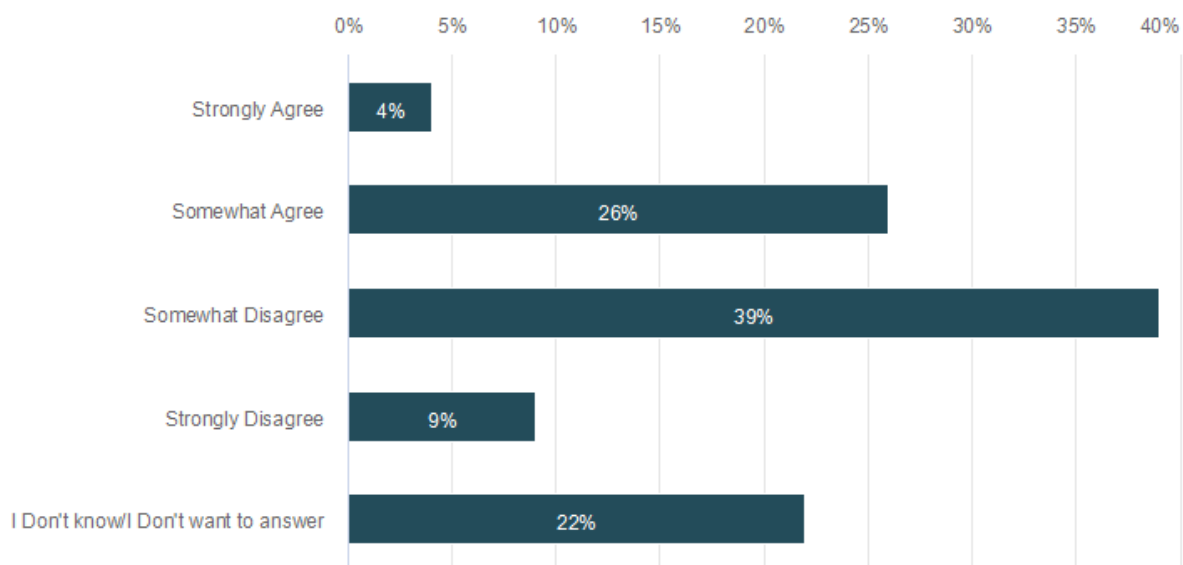
	n	Prosentti
Strongly Agree	1	4,4%
Somewhat Agree	1	4,3%
Somewhat Disagree	8	34,8%
Strongly Disagree	13	56,5%
I Don't know/I Don't want to answer	0	0,0%

24. I can feel my heart pounding when I'm going to be called on in English class.



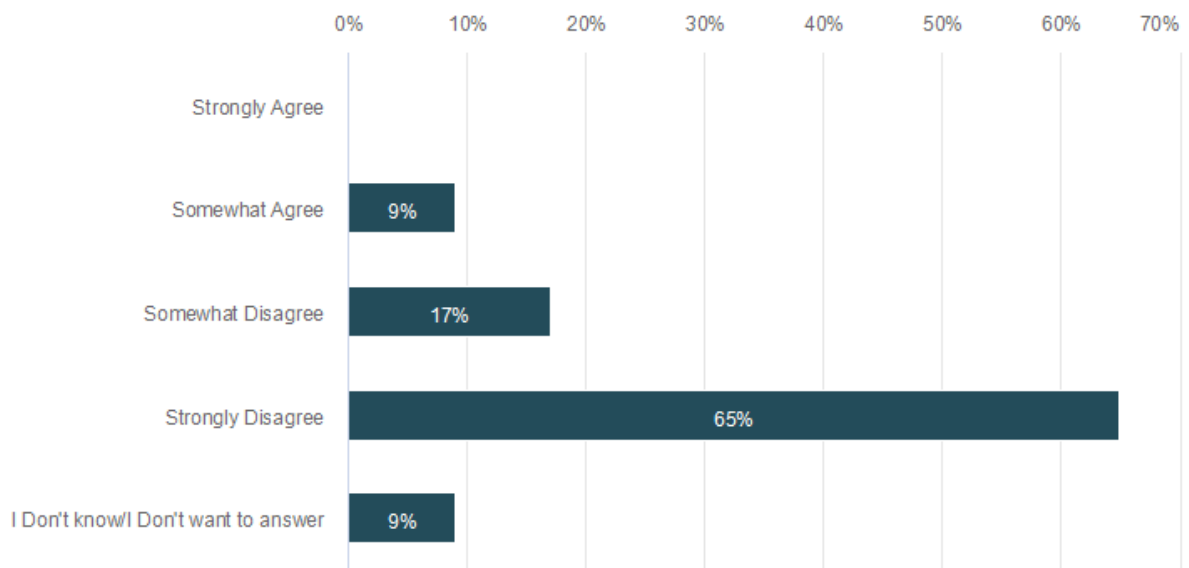
	n	Prosentti
Strongly Agree	2	8,7%
Somewhat Agree	7	30,4%
Somewhat Disagree	7	30,4%
Strongly Disagree	6	26,1%
I Don't know/I Don't want to answer	1	4,4%

25. I am less anxious presenting in English class than in other classes.



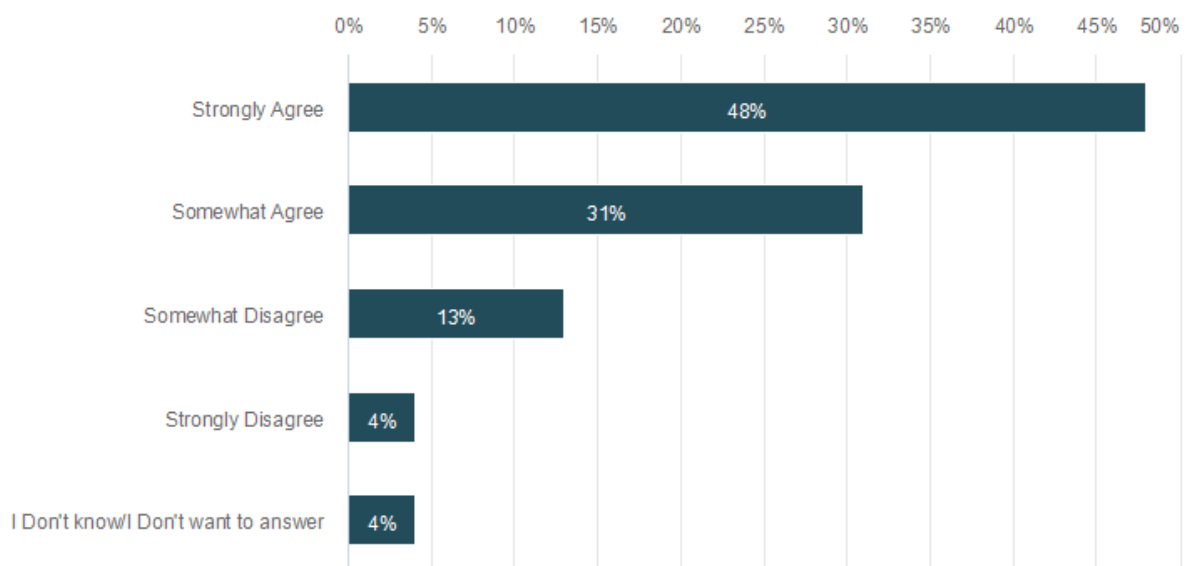
	n	Prosentti
Strongly Agree	1	4,4%
Somewhat Agree	6	26,1%
Somewhat Disagree	9	39,1%
Strongly Disagree	2	8,7%
I Don't know/I Don't want to answer	5	21,7%

26. The more I study for an English test, the more anxious I get.



	n	Prosentti
Strongly Agree	0	0,0%
Somewhat Agree	2	8,7%
Somewhat Disagree	4	17,4%
Strongly Disagree	15	65,2%
I Don't know/I Don't want to answer	2	8,7%

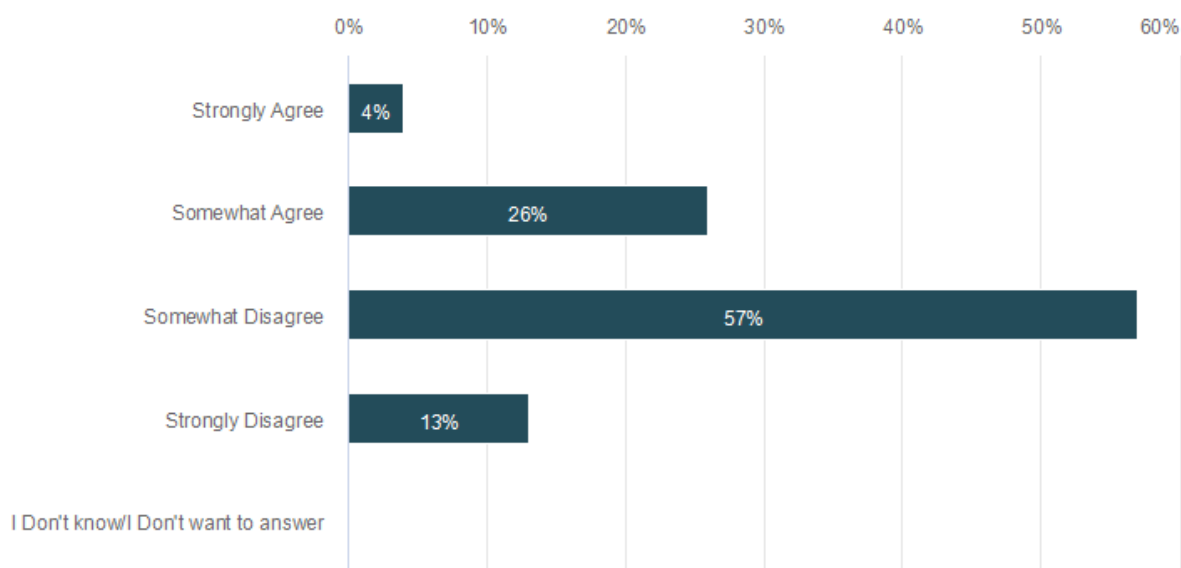
27. I don't feel pressure to prepare too much for English class.



	n	Prosentti
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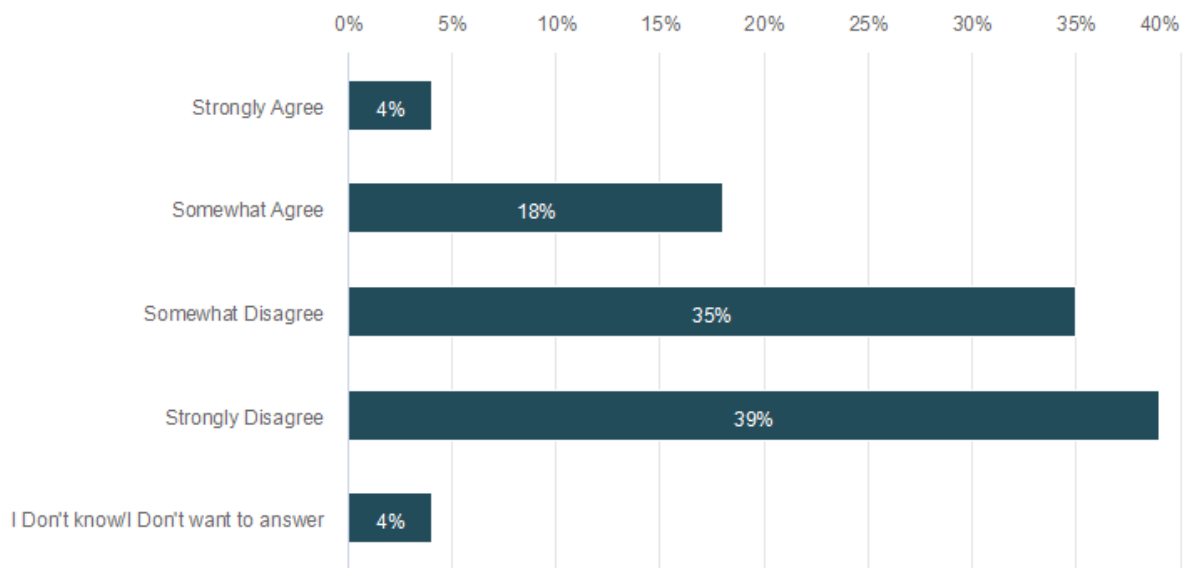
Strongly Agree	11	47,8%
Somewhat Agree	7	30,4%
Somewhat Disagree	3	13,0%
Strongly Disagree	1	4,4%
I Don't know/I Don't want to answer	1	4,4%

28. I always feel that the other students speak English better than I do.



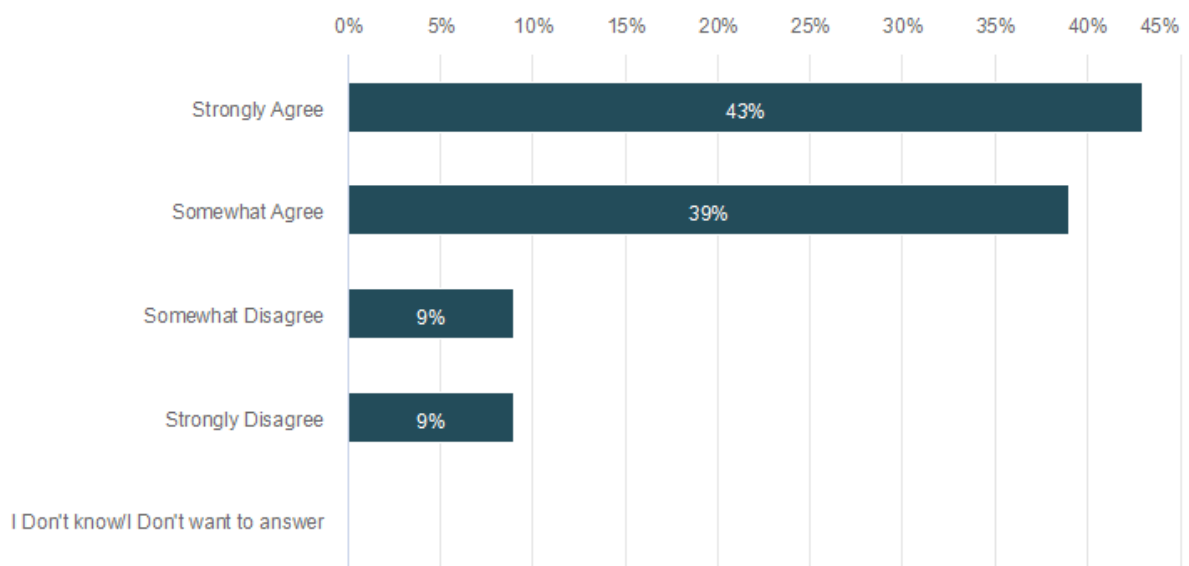
	n	Prosentti
Strongly Agree	1	4,4%
Somewhat Agree	6	26,1%
Somewhat Disagree	13	56,5%
Strongly Disagree	3	13,0%
I Don't know/I Don't want to answer	0	0,0%

29. I feel very self-conscious about speaking English in front of other students.



	n	Prosentti
Strongly Agree	1	4,4%
Somewhat Agree	4	17,4%
Somewhat Disagree	8	34,8%
Strongly Disagree	9	39,1%
I Don't know/I Don't want to answer	1	4,3%

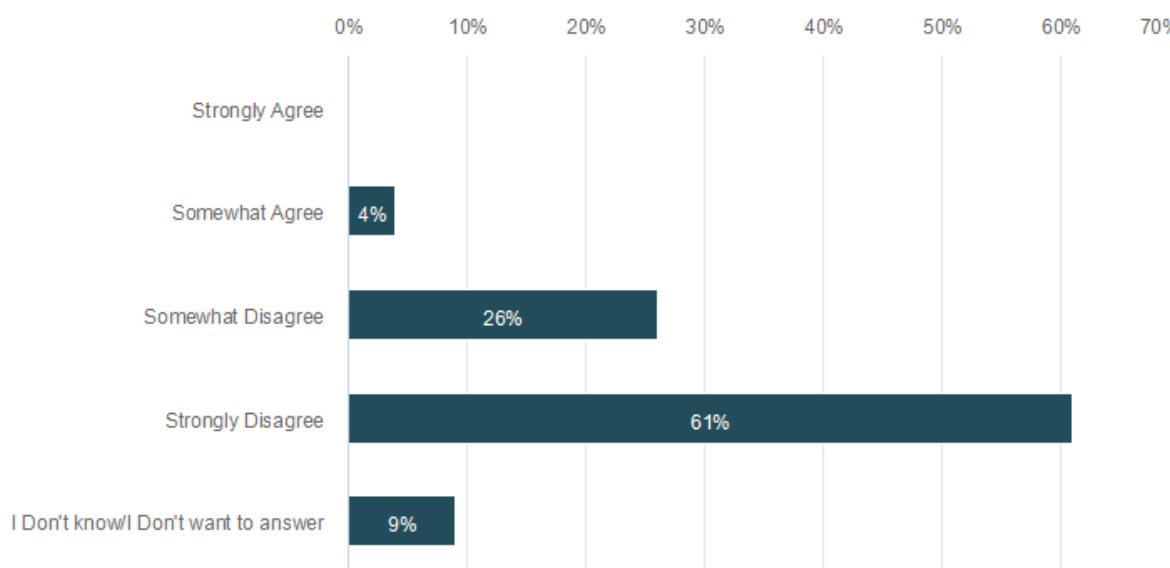
30. I like group discussions in English class.



	n	Prosentti
Strongly Agree	19	43%
Somewhat Agree	17	39%
Somewhat Disagree	4	9%
Strongly Disagree	4	9%
I Don't know/I Don't want to answer	0	0%

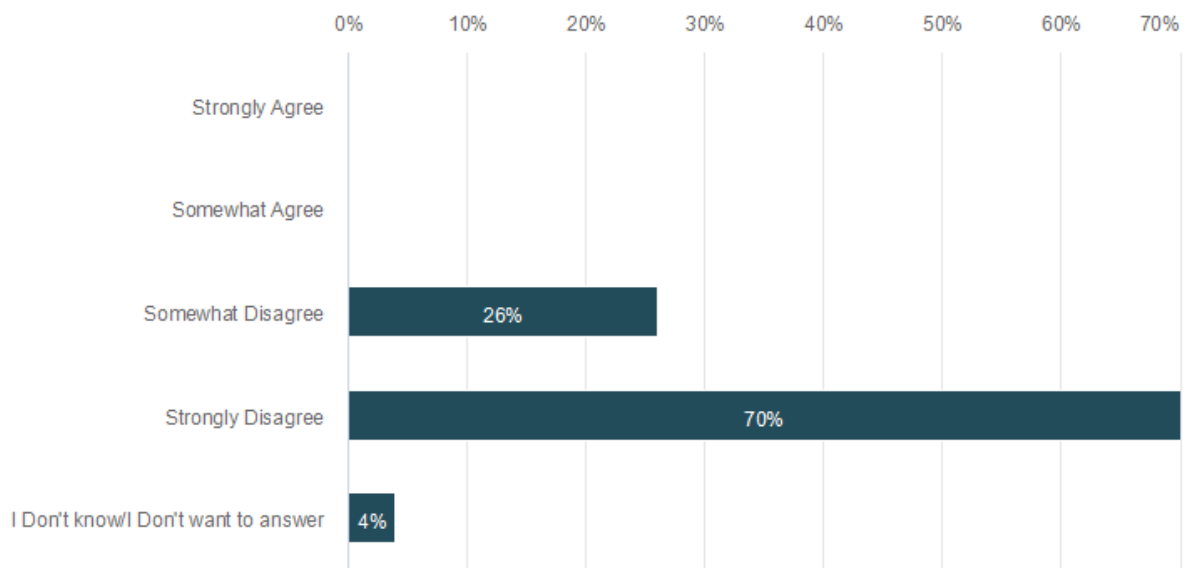
Strongly Agree	10	43,5%
Somewhat Agree	9	39,1%
Somewhat Disagree	2	8,7%
Strongly Disagree	2	8,7%
I Don't know/I Don't want to answer	0	0,0%

31. English class progresses so quickly I worry about getting left behind.



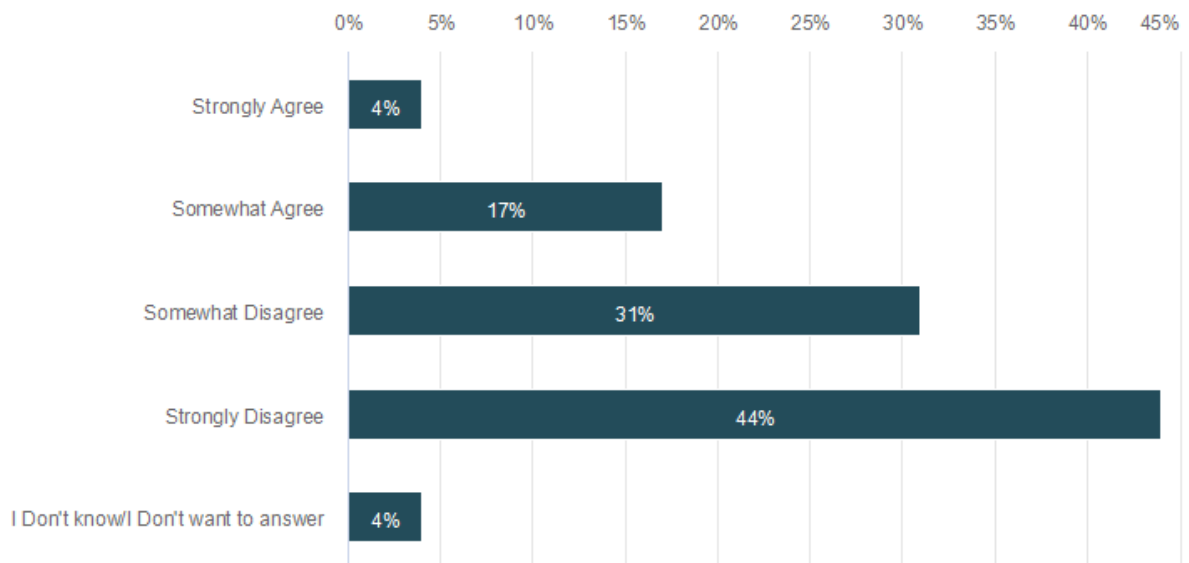
	n	Prosentti
Strongly Agree	0	0,0%
Somewhat Agree	1	4,3%
Somewhat Disagree	6	26,1%
Strongly Disagree	14	60,9%
I Don't know/I Don't want to answer	2	8,7%

32. I feel more tense and nervous overall in English class than in my other classes.



	n	Prosentti
Strongly Agree	0	0,0%
Somewhat Agree	0	0,0%
Somewhat Disagree	6	26,1%
Strongly Disagree	16	69,6%
I Don't know/I Don't want to answer	1	4,3%

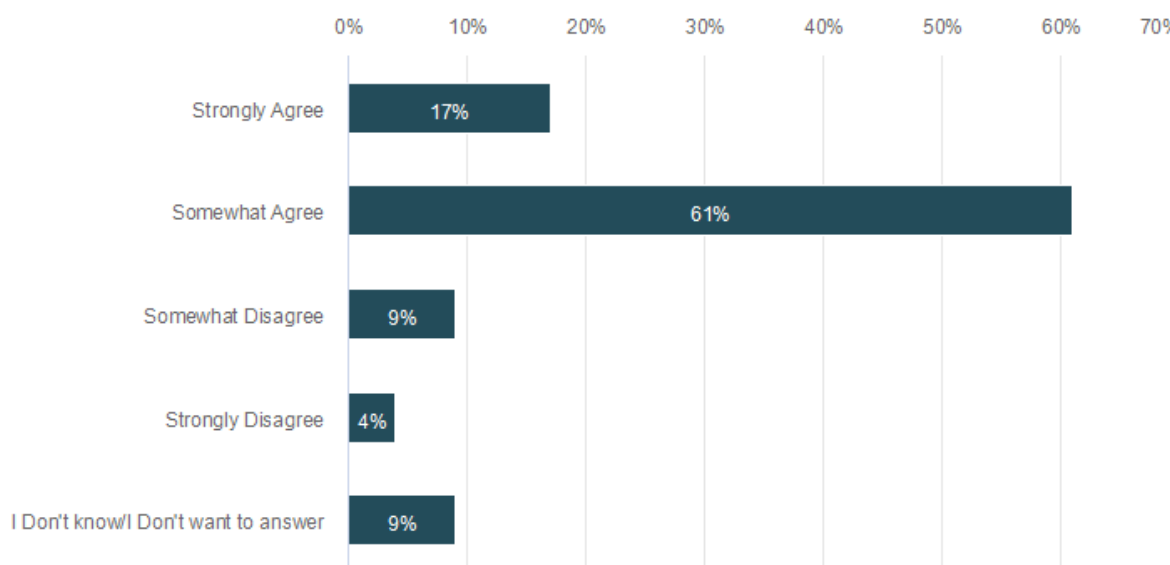
33. I get nervous and confused when I am speaking in English class.



	n	Prosentti
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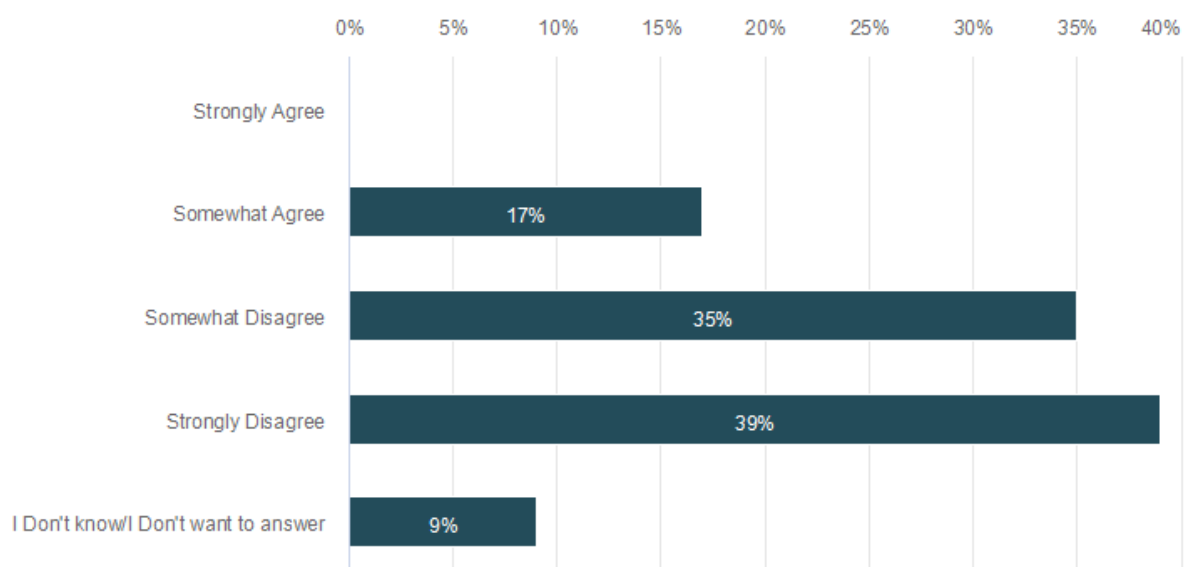
Strongly Agree	1	4,4%
Somewhat Agree	4	17,4%
Somewhat Disagree	7	30,4%
Strongly Disagree	10	43,5%
I Don't know/I Don't want to answer	1	4,3%

34. When I'm on my way to English class, I feel very sure and relaxed.



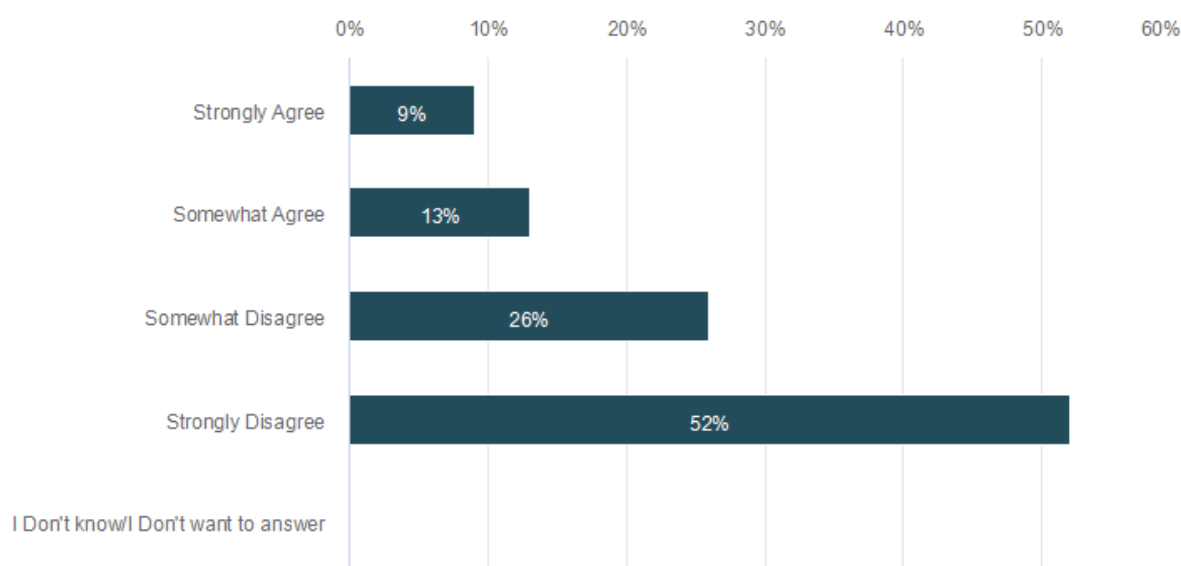
	n	Prosentti
Strongly Agree	4	17,4%
Somewhat Agree	14	60,9%
Somewhat Disagree	2	8,7%
Strongly Disagree	1	4,3%
I Don't know/I Don't want to answer	2	8,7%

35. I get nervous when I don't understand every word the English teacher says.



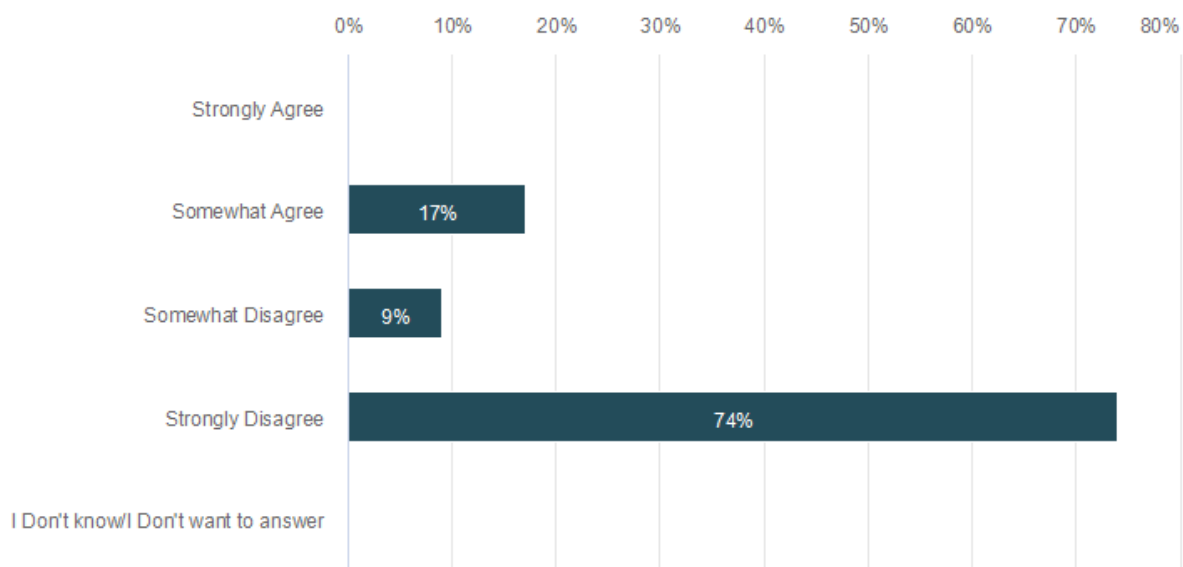
	n	Prosentti
Strongly Agree	0	0,0%
Somewhat Agree	4	17,4%
Somewhat Disagree	8	34,8%
Strongly Disagree	9	39,1%
I Don't know/ I Don't want to answer	2	8,7%

36. I feel overwhelmed by the number of rules in English pronunciation.



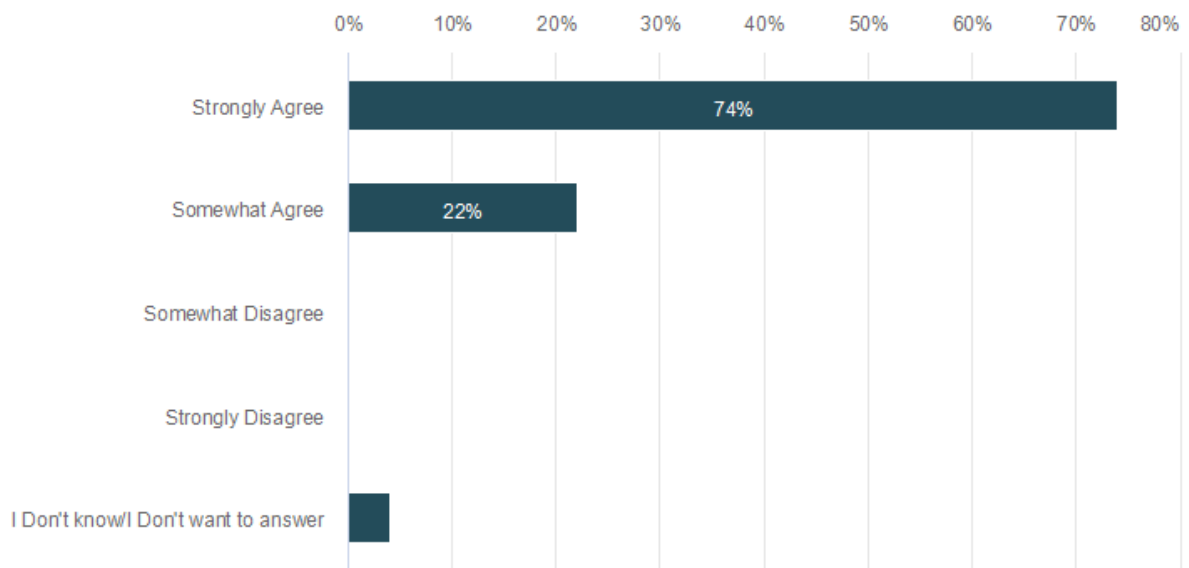
	n	Prosentti
Strongly Agree	2	8,7%
Somewhat Agree	3	13,0%
Somewhat Disagree	6	26,1%
Strongly Disagree	12	52,2%
I Don't know/I Don't want to answer	0	0,0%

37. I am afraid that the other students will laugh at me when I speak English.



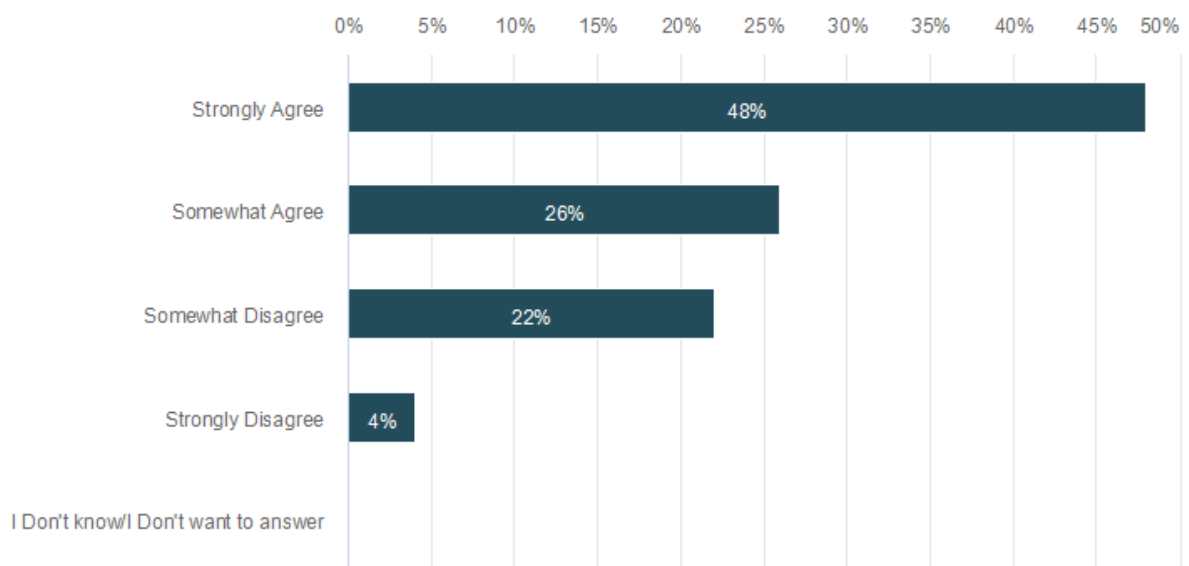
	n	Prosentti
Strongly Agree	0	0,0%
Somewhat Agree	4	17,4%
Somewhat Disagree	2	8,7%
Strongly Disagree	17	73,9%
I Don't know/I Don't want to answer	0	0,0%

38. I like speaking English outside of English classes.



	n	Prosentti
Strongly Agree	17	73,9%
Somewhat Agree	5	21,7%
Somewhat Disagree	0	0,0%
Strongly Disagree	0	0,0%
I Don't know/I Don't want to answer	1	4,4%

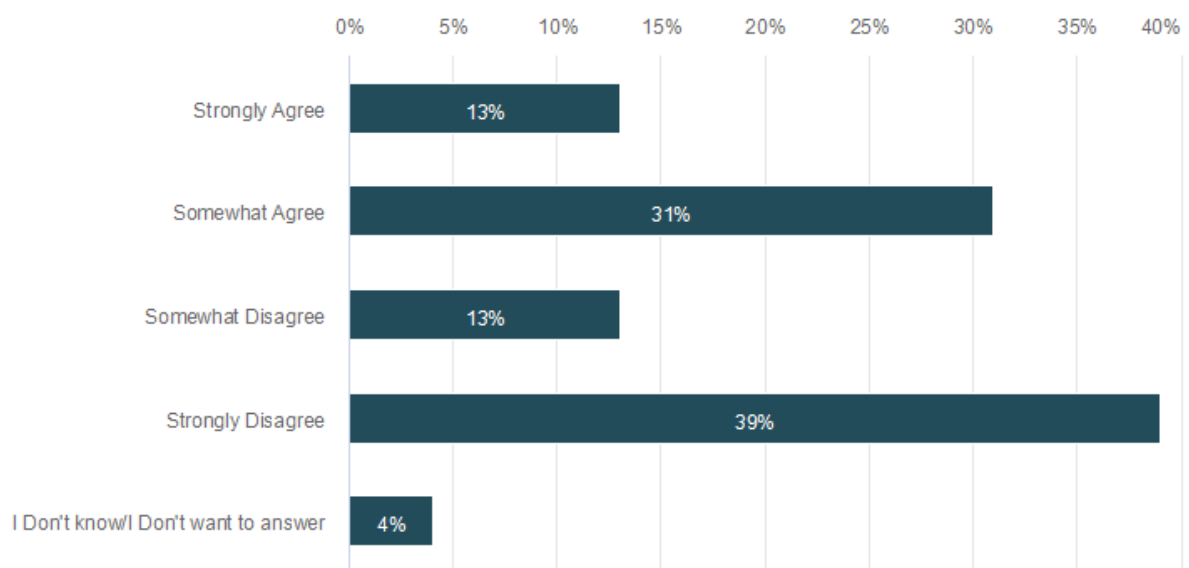
39. I feel comfortable around native speakers of English.



	n	Prosentti
Strongly Agree	17	48%
Somewhat Agree	10	26%
Somewhat Disagree	9	22%
Strongly Disagree	2	4%
I Don't know/I Don't want to answer	0	0%

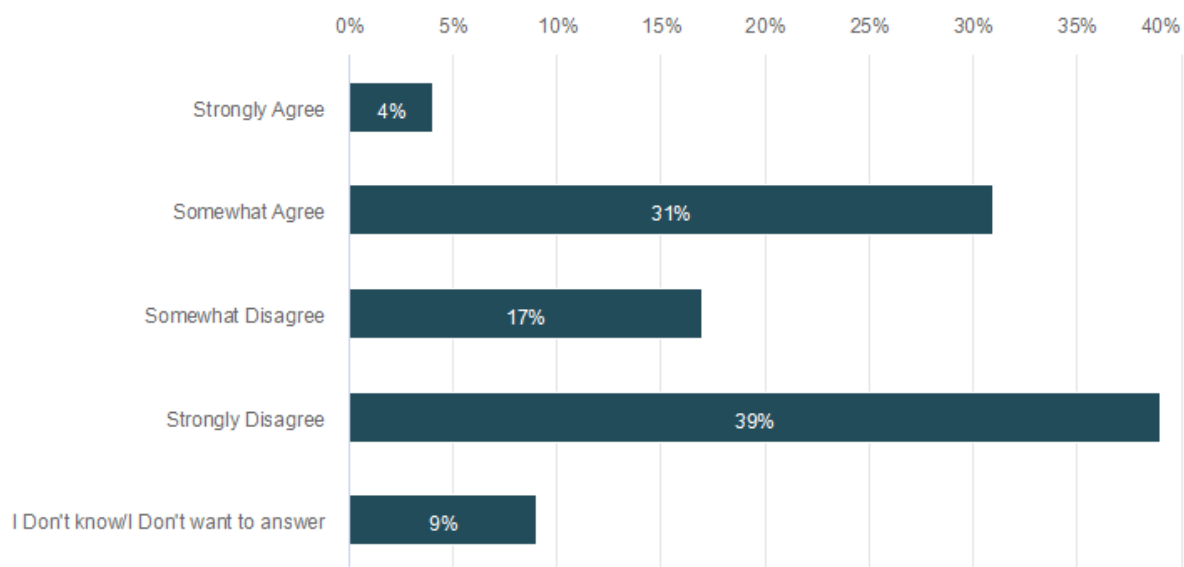
Strongly Agree	11	47,8%
Somewhat Agree	6	26,1%
Somewhat Disagree	5	21,7%
Strongly Disagree	1	4,4%
I Don't know/I Don't want to answer	0	0,0%

40. I get nervous when the English teacher asks questions which I haven't prepared for in advance.



	n	Prosentti
Strongly Agree	3	13,1%
Somewhat Agree	7	30,4%
Somewhat Disagree	3	13,0%
Strongly Disagree	9	39,1%
I Don't know/I Don't want to answer	1	4,4%

41. I have had problems learning a language in the past.



	n	Prosentti
Strongly Agree	1	4,4%
Somewhat Agree	7	30,4%
Somewhat Disagree	4	17,4%
Strongly Disagree	9	39,1%
I Don't know/I Don't want to answer	2	8,7%