Finland-Swedish Upper Secondary School Students' Perspectives on
Development and Assessment of Speaking Skills:
A Case Study of the Effects of Pedagogical Intervention

Jannika Siimelä, 40432
Pro gradu-avhandling i engelska språket och litteraturen
Handledare: Martin Gill
Fakulteten för humaniora, psykologi och teologi
Åbo Akademi
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Author: Jannika Siimelä	
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Supervisor: Martin Gill	

Proficient speaking skills are highly valued in any language, although the skill of speaking tends to be somewhat neglected in the formal teaching context, with the written form at the forefront of development and assessment. The aim of this study is to provide an overview of Finland-Swedish upper secondary school students' perspectives on the development and assessment of speaking skills in English, as well as comparing these attitudes before and after an intervention of lessons focusing explicitly on two subskills of speaking, pronunciation and spoken fluency.

The data was collected via two surveys, one of which was distributed before the pedagogical intervention and the other one after, yielding 15 and 17 responses respectively. As such, the present study is somewhat exploratory in its design since the same group of students responded to both surveys. Circumstances did not permit a longer intervention, and the surveys were distributed in quick succession. Therefore, the results in this study are approached tentatively, as an indication of how these methods may be received by a specific group of students. As a case study with a small sample, the results were mainly analyzed via presenting the distribution in raw numbers and comparing the pre- and postsurvey responses on a 5-point Likert scale. A content analysis was also conducted for the open-ended questions in the postsurvey.

The class generally valued the development and assessment of speaking skills both before and after the intervention, motivated by intrinsic and extrinsic factors. The students also appreciated the systematic and explicit development of both pronunciation and fluency, with slightly more importance placed on fluency. It was also conveyed that different aspects of language anxiety can more easily arise in connection to the assessment of speaking, which calls for a wider incorporation of different subskills of speaking and their development over time, so as to avoid placing excessive pressure on one single opportunity of assessment as it may contribute to an unreliable evaluation.

The results also suggest that the students in this group believe in a more thorough implementation of a language skill as important as speaking into our education system, although the students' views on what speaking skills might entail remained somewhat unclear or influenced by the intervention. It is concluded that speaking and its subskills should be more systematically incorporated into language teaching from an earlier stage—alongside reading, writing, and listening—in order to provide the basis for more secure and confident development of all four major language skills.

Key words: EFL, L2, developing speaking, assessing speaking, English in Finland, upper secondary school, Finland-Swedish, case study, survey, attitude measurement		
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1. INTRODUCTION

Most people would agree that a central goal for learning a new language entails the development of good communicative skills in the language including, or even especially, the development of speaking skills. However, in the formal educational context, the written form has been at the forefront of development and assessment of productive language skills, even though one could argue that the written word is the secondary form of language when approached from the historical perspective of language development or from looking at children's processes of acquiring their first language: speaking develops before writing. This general lack of time spent on the development and assessment of a language skill as important as speaking sparked my interest in understanding how speaking skills could be approached more systematically in the classroom, as well as how English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students themselves would perceive this kind of approach.

1.1. Justification

While there have been various studies conducted on EFL learners' attitudes and perspectives in Finland, there is a clear lack of research on Finland-Swedish students' attitudes to and experiences of speaking skills in particular. The motivation for this study stems from this lack of research as well as the somewhat disproportionate focus on the written language in the assessment of the four major language skills in formal education. Moreover, since there are plans to include speaking assessment as a part of the matriculation exam (the final standardized test taken at the end of upper secondary school studies), it is important to map out the perspectives and attitudes of the group affected by those changes. In addition, teachers often lack clear models on how speaking skills are to be developed and assessed in comparison to other language skills, partly due to the fact that the cemented position of the written form in education has resulted in more methods, models and resources being available for language educators to approach the written form. The transitory nature of speaking also makes it more complex and time-consuming for educators to incorporate an approach to speaking into the context of formal development and assessment.

1.2. Aim and Scope

The aim of this thesis is to get an overview of how a group of Finland-Swedish students in their second year of upper secondary school perceive the development and assessment of speaking skills based on their opinions and previous experience of learning English, as well as their experience of the intervention carried out in this case study. The participants involved were a group of 26 upper secondary school Finland-Swedish students enrolled in an English course, taught during my teacher training period. Following an experimental pretest-posttest design with a limited intervention of six lessons, the group of students were introduced to a variety of segments, activities and explicit instruction of two specific features of speaking, pronunciation and fluency. The students in this case study were also assessed via various means, including formal teacher-based assessment (feedback and grades) as well as more informal self-assessment tasks for reflection.

The data for this study was collected through two surveys, the first one distributed before the intervention and the other distributed afterwards, respectively yielding 15 and 17 responses from the class. As such, the scope of the results and discussion will be somewhat limited by the brevity of the intervention and the limited number of responses. However, the results of this study will offer insights into further developments of systematic teaching and assessment of speaking skills in the Finnish upper secondary school system. The central questions that will support the aim of this thesis are the following:

1. What are the students' attitudes toward teaching and assessment of speaking skills?

2. In what ways do students' perspectives on speaking skills and assessment compare before and after pedagogical intervention?

3. How successful was the pedagogic intervention in making speaking skills an explicit part of lessons and assessment?

1.3. Chapter Overview

Having briefly presented the aim and scope of this thesis, an overview of the chapters is in order. Chapter 2 will address and narrow down the teaching context in more detail and clarify its relevance to the present study, whereas Chapter 3 will highlight some central theories concerning language acquisition with a focus on speaking, as well as examining previous research and sources concerning the development and assessment of speaking skills. In Chapter 4 the materials for collecting the data and the methods used to conduct the case study will be explained in detail, followed by the presentation and discussion of results in Chapter 5. The main conclusions from the discussion will be synthesized in Chapter 6, which also contains a summary of the limitations and the implications of those conclusions.

2. BACKGROUND

This chapter aims at mapping out the state of the English language and EFL teaching in Finland, as well as providing the sociocultural context for this thesis. A brief discussion of the national curricula and the matriculation exam is also included in order to provide a more concrete overview of EFL teaching in Finland. Their relevance to this thesis, concerning the development and assessment of speaking skills, will also be established.

2.1. English and EFL in Finland

English is an international language that is widely spoken across the globe. The number of varieties spoken is so vast it somewhat complicates the defining of what is, or should be, encompassed in the teaching of the English language. Most commonly within the literature of Second Language Acquisition (SLA) research, and in teaching contexts, the terms English as a foreign language (EFL) and English as a second language (ESL) are used. The distinction between a foreign and a second language is somewhat arbitrary in our contemporary globalized society, but in traditional terms a foreign language is taught outside the target language community, whereas a second language is taught inside the target language community within which it serves a social function (Forsman, 2004: 24).

Considering the widespread use of English and its presence in everyday life, English as a foreign language may sound somewhat outdated in the context of contemporary Finland. However, as the vast majority of research on English as a school subject within the Finnish context use EFL as the standard terminology, this study will also be using EFL when generally discussing the teaching of English in Finland. Due to its widespread use in Finland, English is more commonly regarded as a lingua franca (ELF) or as an international language (EIL), when considered outside of the educational context. It should be noted that non-native English-speakers actually outnumber native speakers of English (Tergujeff, 2013), which raises the question of ownership of language and the irony, or even problem, of the minority as the norm-providers in EFL and ESL teaching. Therefore, it is important to take English as an international language (EIL) and as a lingua franca (ELF) into consideration in the

teaching context, for instance through representing different varieties of English and emphasizing their global relevance.

Nowadays, research within language acquisition tends to favor the ELF model when it comes to speaking skills, especially pronunciation, over any kind of native models for speaking and pronunciation, as the former model allows for first language (L1) influence and traditionally non-native features (Lintunen & Dufva, 2017). Since a lingua franca is defined as a common language used between speakers in a communicative situation, the ELF model also places emphasis on speaking in order to be understood, instead of speaking in order to achieve features of some specific variety of English. This is an important aspect to take into account, especially since this thesis focuses on speaking skills, which are far more influenced by these ideological complexities than, for instance, the teaching of grammatical structures which are fairly standardized, and consequently less susceptible to individual differences and variations.

2.2. The Finland-Swedish Context

General attitudes toward English in Finland are positive, and proficiency in English is considered an important asset in the modern world (Leppänen et al. 2011). Within the span of a few decades, the amount of exposure to English has also steadily increased, via technological advancements and accessible media (Björklund, 2008), naturally resulting in increased familiarity with the target language and its culture(s), which may partly explain the generally positive attitudes toward English in Finland. Moreover, Finland is a multilingual country that recognizes two official languages, Finnish and Swedish, in addition to other minority languages spoken across the nation. In this section, a brief synthesis will be provided on some relevant previous studies concerning EFL teaching in the Finland-Swedish context, since the case study for this thesis was conducted in a Finland-Swedish upper secondary school class, meaning that most (or all) of the participants are registered as part of the minority (5.2%) population with Swedish as their mother tongue in Finland.

One key point that will be commented upon here, and elaborated on in Chapter 3, is the effect of the learners' first language (L1) in relation to their acquisition of a second language (L2), that is, the question of cross-linguistic influence. Generally, the

Swedish-speaking minority in Finland has some advantage when it comes to learning English due to the linguistic proximity of the two Germanic languages, whereas the Finnish-speaking majority cannot draw on their L1 in a similar way when learning English (Ringbom, 1986). This advantage seems to be more prominent in the earlier stages of learning English, whereas the higher the proficiency level the less of an influence of the different L1 language, suggesting that the importance of positive transfer from Swedish (or other more closely related languages) decreases over the years of learning English (Ringbom, 2006).

Moreover, in earlier stages of learning the language, Finnish speakers may have an advantage in avoiding negative transfer as they cannot rely on their L1 as much, and thus do not make similar negative transfer errors as L1 speakers of Swedish. For instance, Swedish and English sometimes share similar orthography that nevertheless carry very distinct meanings (e.g., Swedish *svamp* and English *swamp*), which can lead to transfer errors that L1 speakers of a less related language, such as Finnish, might not make. However, many different studies comparing Finnish-speaking and Swedish-speaking learners have arrived at the same conclusion that "Swedish speakers have a great advantage in learning English" and that fewer errors occur in their use of English across various levels of proficiency (Ringbom, 2006: 51). In spite of this fact, as also pointed out by Björklund (2008), both language groups follow the same national curriculum and are assessed on the same criteria on a national level in Finland.

In this present case study, the students all belong to the Swedish-speaking minority group, which is something to keep in mind as the cross-linguistic dimension may have an impact on the students' attitudes and opinions on learning English and what they perceive as important and/or complicated when it comes to developing speaking skills in English. Interestingly, a comparative study also found that Finnish-speaking university students were more apprehensive toward communicating orally in English than their peers at a Swedish-speaking university in Finland (Lindros, 1987, as cited in Ringbom, 2006), which implies that there may be some notable differences in other dimensions of language use even if the significance of the L1 on positive transfer and acquisition seems to become more subdued at higher proficiency levels.

In relation to the discussion on terminology in the previous section (EFL/ESL vs. ELF/EIL), Björklund also reports that "English cannot be regarded as a traditional foreign language for the vast majority of young pupils in the Finland-Swedish context"

due to the students' reported exposure to and interaction with English outside of the educational context (Björklund, 2008: 190). This increased exposure to English outside of school can add a positive dimension to EFL learning in the classroom as well, in the sense that the former increases the received input from the target language and culture in an informal setting, although it might in some cases also prompt a negative disposition toward formal language learning. Related to this paradigm of input received in a formal learning setting versus the exposure in informal contexts, Forsman's (2004) study of Finland-Swedish students' attitudes found that while the students may not necessarily understand differences between registers, they generally expressed an attitude of American English characterizing the more colloquial and familiar variety, whereas British English was considered to be the more standardized variety, partly due to its more visible presence in the formal educational context (Forsman, 2004).

Furthermore, most students felt either positive or neutral toward the mainly British English input received at school, although a clear preference for American English vocabulary was expressed in the questionnaire (Forsman, 2004), due to the larger input of American English from media. Generally, learner attitudes toward different varieties have been found to play a central role in the development of L2 skills, as the "variety-specific attitudes may influence access to input, as well as dictate the target language model the learner desires to emulate, ultimately shaping the language the learner produces." (Geeslin et al., 2018: 15). It seems reasonable to assume that attitudes and perspectives inevitably shape the way human beings view and interact with their surroundings and language learning is no exception to that tendency. Especially if the learner has a strong preference for one variety over another, they may be more disposed to accessing input from the preferred variety as well as using the variety as the preferred model for their own language production (Geeslin et al., 2018). Speculatively, one could suggest that oftentimes the preferred variety tends to be the one that the learner is more accustomed to hearing or one that the learner feels a more personal connection to.

Björklund (2008) raises an interesting question related to the increasing familiarity with English language and culture in Finland and its perceived effect on the attitudes toward the target language:

> In Swedish-Finland there is no guarantee that greater familiarity with English-speaking people automatically leads to more positive attitudes towards the target language cultures. What one could expect to be reached, however, is a less stereotypic, more realistic and varied view. A fact that further complicates the scene is that English is conceived of as an international lingua franca without reference to any particular culture.
>
> (Björklund, 2008: 93)

From the standpoint of acquiring L2 skills, the more input students get from various sources the better chances they have of developing their own language skills. The problem Björklund is commenting on is whether language and culture should, or even could, be detached from one another in an EFL teaching context that is steadily becoming more conscious of the status of English as an international lingua franca. While I believe that learning about the target culture alongside the language is important, it is also equally important to recognize the somewhat unique state of the English language as one of the most widely spoken languages across the globe and to challenge the notions of having to conform, as an L2 speaker of English, to some specific cultural or linguistic sphere of the language itself. Rather, language teaching should guide learners toward a wide understanding of the language and its cultures, including their origins as well as their current state in the world.

Overall, language teaching in Finland revolves around engaging the students as much as possible in activities during class and students are encouraged indirectly to practice and develop their speaking skills often, for instance through discussions and pair/group work, with a focus on intelligible communication. Nevertheless, the vast range of speaking skills and the development and consistent assessment of them seems to be lacking in many respects. The following section aims at contextualizing one dimension of this, through a discussion of how national educational policies and standards may to a certain extent govern the teaching and learning of specific skills in English.

2.3. The Role of National Standards

The National Core Curriculum for General Upper Secondary Schools aims at regulating teaching on a national level, although municipalities and individual schools also tend to devise their own curricula based on the outlines in the national core curriculum. In the national curriculum, general objectives for each subject are detailed

and directive descriptions of the courses are provided. English as a foreign language in upper secondary schools currently comprises six obligatory courses and two elective courses, one of which focuses on spoken communication, ENA8 (Utbildningsstyrelsen, 2015). In relation to the elective speaking course, the curriculum also outlines that speaking skills should be assessed with a graded (4-10) test, compiled by the Finnish National Agency for Education (Utbildningsstyrelsen, 2015). However, the assessment of speaking skills in the obligatory courses is not regulated by the current curriculum. Rather, it simply states that both spoken and written communication *should* be developed in varied ways during the courses (Utbildningsstyrelsen, 2015).

Although it presumably is beneficial that a separate course in speaking skills is offered to students, it might also pose a problem in a sense. If the students have never been assessed on their spoken skills during their 6-7 years of studying EFL, the one optional course cannot give the students the same kind of opportunity to develop their speaking skills as it would have, had the assessment been present in one way or another throughout their years of study. Additionally, assessing a student's speaking skills based on one optional course and one test raises issues of reliability and validity, as speaking encompasses a wide variety of subskills that cannot be evaluated and developed in a constructive manner through one course. There are, however, some indications that a change is taking place concerning the assessment of foreign language speaking skills, as the recently published new curriculum for upper secondary schools, to be put into use as of August 2021, states that speaking skills should both be developed *and* assessed throughout the obligatory and optional language courses (Utbildningsstyrelsen, 2019). This could influence the municipalities and individual schools to also develop more systematic methods for developing and assessing speaking skills in their own specified curricula.

One reason for this change in the curricula concerning the assessment of speaking skills is presumably the plans to introduce a spoken part in the language matriculation exams (Ylioppilastutkintolautakunta, 2017). Since much of the upper secondary school studies are focused on preparing the students for the matriculation exams, the lack of a speaking component in the exam also partly explains the lack of systematic development and assessment of speaking skills during the courses. Once a spoken part is introduced in the matriculation exam, speaking skills will presumably

also be given a more explicit presence in the classroom (Tergujeff & Kautonen, 2017: 16), which then requires new models of teaching and assessing speaking skills in a more consistent manner. This naturally requires teachers to be familiar with theories of L2 acquisition, but also to become more familiar with different methods and models of developing and assessing the wide range of speaking skills within an EFL teaching context.

3. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

In this chapter, relevant literature concerning the topic of this thesis will be reviewed and synthesized in order to provide an understanding of the theoretical background concerning central aspects of second language acquisition (SLA) with specific focus on L2 speaking skills. Sections 3.1. and 3.2. will cover relevant theories from the field of SLA, taking a closer look at some factors that affect the learner's process of acquisition and address possible implications for the development of L2 speaking skills.

In section 3.3. the discussion will center on more practical theories concerning the development of speaking skills, before moving on to discuss the assessment and evaluation of speaking skills in section 3.4. The aim of this chapter is to provide a thorough overview of the complex skill of speaking and contextualize relevant aspects that affect its development, as well as to discuss the implications for the teaching and assessment of speaking in the formal classroom setting.

3.1. The Role of the Learners' L1 and Cross-linguistic Transfer

Within the field of SLA it is common to use L1 acquisition as a reference point to that of the L2 acquisition process. Goh & Burns (2012) suggest that second language acquisition can largely benefit from the similar kinds of patterns for learning a language as when children first learn their L1: through input, feedback an output. This may be especially true when it comes to developing speaking skills in a second language as an L1 is primarily learnt through listening and speaking. The role of feedback in this process is equally important as the ability to understand and produce language, since it allows the learner to notice patterns and consequently produce more accurate language themselves through interaction with an expert speaker (Goh & Burns, 2012), which ultimately leads to proficiency in the language.

Although the development processes of an L1 and an L2 share some similarities, there are also significant differences that need to be accounted for. During the initial stage of development in an L1, it is assumed that a child possesses a seemingly innate capacity to learn language (Saville-Troike, 2012). This is explained by the fact that there are some age-related universal factors that govern children's acquisition of an L1 across the globe, regardless of the language in question (Saville-Troike, 2012). The

critical period hypothesis is often cited in SLA and refers to the period within which one can learn a language easily and completely, achieving native-speaker competence (Ellis, 1997). The critical period ranges from childhood to early puberty and the hypothesis claims that beyond that period the learner will struggle more and cannot reach a complete native-like competence or proficiency in the language (Ellis, 1997). Although the critical period has largely been accepted, the hypothesis is subject to exceptions as proven by case studies that attest to some L2 learners acquiring full command of a language, even when having been introduced to the language in adulthood (Ellis, 1997).

However, older learners' process of acquiring an L2 is more commonly supported by their previous language knowledge and learning experience, in addition to their general intelligence and world knowledge (Saville-Troike, 2012). Oftentimes, the more languages you know the easier it is to learn a new one since there are more models to rely on that can be transferred into the learning of a new L2. This transfer can be both positive, when features of the L1 transfer into the L2 'correctly', or negative, when features of the L1 transfers into the L2 'incorrectly' (Saville-Troike, 2012). Transfer is therefore a form of cross-linguistic influence, which aims at providing explanations for the ways in which a learner's knowledge of one or more languages shapes the development of an additional language (Kellerman & Sharwood Smith, 1986). Generally speaking, the linguistic closeness of the learner's L1 to the L2 facilitates the processing of input and usually also supports the learner's ability to employ strategies to produce speech with more ease (Sajavaara, 1986). For instance, the previously mentioned study by Ringbom (1986) noted that in the Finnish context, Swedish-speakers tend to have fewer issues with English speech production than Finnish-speakers, since Swedish and English are both Germanic languages, which allows the Swedish-speaking learner to rely more heavily on the positive cross-linguistic transfer from their L1 when learning English.

3.2. Cognitive, Conative and Affective Factors on L2 Acquisition

This section will examine some of the internal factors that affect a learner's acquisition of a new language, specifically the cognitive dimension of language aptitude, the conative dimension of motivation, as well as some central affective dimensions of learning an L2. Within the field of SLA, research on these individual differences

naturally involves other fields of research as well; perhaps most prominently psychology, as it offers theories and models that can be usefully applied to the context of how human beings learn and process information when acquiring language skills.

> **Cognition** refers to how information is processed and learned by the human mind; **conation** addresses how humans use will and freedom to make choices that result in new behaviours; and **affect** encompasses issues of temperament, emotions and how humans feel towards information, people, objects, actions and thoughts.

(Ortega, 2008: 146)

It is important to note that although separated in the discussion below, these individual factors are always at interplay with one another in the learning process and cannot as such be separated from the context of understanding how these individual factors simultaneously affect the L2 learner's process of acquiring the language. Nor can they be considered as independent from the sociocultural environment and external factors within which they occur.

3.2.1. The Cognitive Dimension of Language Aptitude

Human cognition is a vast and complex structure that lies behind all intellectual human activity, both conscious and unconscious. As such, it is impossible to discuss the cognitive dimension in its entirety, nor is it possible to address all possible relations and implications between cognition and language learning. Rather, the ensuing discussion will examine some of the most central relations between cognitive functions and L2 acquisition, and their implications for developing skills in a second language, especially those related to speech production.

One of the central relations between cognition and second language acquisition is the concept of language aptitude, defined as the natural ability, or gift, of certain people to acquire additional languages more easily than others (Ortega, 2008). Research has shown that this innate cognitive ability for learning a language does indeed correlate with the general success of acquiring an L2 (Ellis, 1997). Some components of language aptitude include the ability to identify phonemic, grammatical and lexical patterns, as well as inductive abilities that help the learner to see relations between form and meaning (Ellis, 1997). Notably, research has also concluded that second language aptitude overlaps to an extent with other cognitive functions, such as

general intelligence and competence in a first language, as they are all fundamentally developed by the same general academic inclination and linguistic sensitivity (Ortega, 2008).

The commonly used Modern Language Aptitude Test (MLAT), developed by John Carroll, tests grammatical sensitivity, phonetic coding ability and memory capacity (Ortega, 2008), asserting that these cognitive functions are also central parts of what language aptitude encompasses. Recently, memory capacity has been given special attention when it comes to explaining the differences in acquisition and success of L2 learners (Ortega, 2008). These aspects of language aptitude are important to take into account since they may give insights into why learners develop at a different pace to that of their peers and, more specifically, in a practical teaching context they highlight the importance of differentiation. Moreover, a learner's aptitude, or lack thereof, may also have an impact on other factors affecting their success in L2 acquisition. For instance, it is generally more likely for a learner with high levels of language aptitude to consequently also feel more personally motivated and positively disposed toward learning and using the language more, thus giving them an advantage in developing further skills in the L2.

As for the pedagogical implications of language aptitude, general cognitive theories have emphasized that aptitude will most likely be of greatest support to learners under implicit conditions outside of the classroom, when no external or explicit input is received, and the learner needs to rely on their own cognitive strategies and strengths to obtain and process information (Ortega, 2008). This observation can be tied to the positive effect of metacognition, which according to Goh & Burns (2012) is one of the key elements to successful language acquisition, as it places focus on the learner's agency in developing awareness and control of the process itself:

> An important part of speaking instruction should, therefore, be in the form of raising learners' meta-cognitive awareness through introspection and guided self-directed learning. Learners should be encouraged to plan, monitor, and evaluate their speaking development.
>
> (Goh & Burns, 2012: 141-142)

Therefore, it is important to develop methods and models for guiding students toward self-directed learning, in order to further support the development of L2 speaking skills. As this kind of approach also emphasizes learner agency and thus increases the

students' feeling of responsibility over their own learning process, metacognitive awareness-raising activities may play an essential role in the EFL classroom, for instance through addressing different learning strategies or self-evaluation methods.

3.2.2. The Conative Dimension of Motivation

Motivation also plays an important role in the learner's success in acquiring an L2. As opposed to the cognitive ability of language aptitude, motivation stems from the individual attitudes and affective states in the learner (Ellis, 1997). As previously mentioned, an L2 learner's positive attitudes toward the language and its culture usually also correlate with success in the acquisition process (Geeslin et al., 2018), as individual attitudes are connected with motivation.

Different types of motivation have been identified. For instance, Ellis (1997) distinguishes between instrumental, integrative, resultative, and intrinsic motivation. Instrumental motivation refers to a learner's efforts to acquire an L2 for functional reasons (e.g., to pass an exam or to further career possibilities), whereas integrative motivation is typified by the learner's interest in the target language and/or culture. Resultative motivation can be caused by the learner's previous success in the L2 and intrinsic motivation usually stems from curiosity and the act of learning itself, rather than personal attitudes or opinions about the language (Ellis, 1997).

Similarly, Ortega (2008) distinguishes between intrinsic and extrinsic types of motivation, the former being considered optimal as it stems from the learner's own positive orientation toward the language and learning process. Intrinsic motivation has also been "consistently associated to higher levels of achievement" (Ortega, 2008: 176), whereas extrinsic motivational factors, stemming from outside requirements and/or expectations, seem to have a vaguer connection to the same high levels of success in the L2 (Ortega, 2008). Additionally, there are some learners who may suffer from amotivation, which is when they are completely unmotivated to spend time on learning the language as they do not see any value in it, neither intrinsic nor extrinsic, and thus their performance and rate of success in the acquisition process is expected to be lowered (Ortega, 2008).

These aspects of motivation are essential to take into account in the teaching context, as they can serve as models for teachers to motivate students in a more effective manner to increase their success in second language development. Quite

often many students are motivated by extrinsic factors, such as performing well in an exam and getting a good grade. However, the discussion above attests that students' acquisition of an L2 would in fact be more effective if they were motivated by intrinsic factors as well. It is evident that all learners are different; they are interested in different subjects and some are more inclined toward pursuing knowledge and exercising their academic skills than others. Nevertheless, educators can in various ways attempt to increase learner motivation through their instruction (Ortega: 2008), although to do this effectively, having an overview of the learners' current motivational state and their attitudes toward learning the language may be required.

Especially when it comes to unmotivated students, clarifying the objectives, goals, and benefits of language learning may help increase their motivation levels to some extent. As motivation is a highly individual and multi-dimensional factor, it is important to approach motivation as something that is dynamic rather than static and consider the fluctuation of motivation depending on a variety of contextual factors, such as the content and quality of instruction as well.

3.2.3. Affective Dimensions and Language Anxiety

This section will look at some affective dimensions that influence second language acquisition, with specific focus on how they affect the language learner's predisposition to speak in the L2. Since the term *affect* is generally used in psychology to describe an individual's temperament, emotions and feelings toward certain things, the affective dimension of the learner's personality is also central to the context of learning. Some personality traits seem to provide an advantage when it comes to developing successful language skills in an L2, such as extraversion, which is a trait that has been proven to positively affect short-term memory and extraverts also seem less susceptible to anxiety and stress in any given situation, as opposed to introverts (Ortega, 2008). The consequence is that these two 'side-effects' of extraversion "…translate into a critical advantage when it comes to L2 speech production, namely more available and more efficiently allocated cognitive resources, which alone may explain the third asset of an oral fluency advantage." (Ortega, 2008: 197).

Naturally, other personality traits like curiosity and sociability also add to the opportunities to develop one's proficiency in an L2, as people in possession of these traits tend to be more inclined to seek out contact and exposure to the L2 (Ortega,

2008). These general conclusions may seem self-evident; that the more social and extraverted a person is, the more they tend to speak and communicate in any given situation—including the EFL classroom. Nevertheless, these facts are crucial to consider in the formal context of developing and evaluating speaking skills in a second language, especially since speaking skills have often been assessed solely as part of spoken classroom participation, which consequently places less sociable students at a clear disadvantage (Ahola, 2017).

This issue is further related to another central affective factor, that of language anxiety. It is quite common for all L2 learners to feel some level of language anxiety, especially when speaking. However, introverted students may suffer from it more acutely than extraverted students: "Learners who suffer from language anxiety perceive speaking in a second language to be an uncomfortable experience and are not prepared to make mistakes because of perceived social pressure" (Goh & Burns, 2012: 27). For instance, many learners tend to place excessive focus on what they cannot say or do, and often also worry about others' negative opinions, thus avoiding speaking by not placing themselves in the 'vulnerable' position (Goh & Burns, 2012).

It is clear that these aspects are important to take into account in an L2 teaching context. For instance, one could try to anticipate what kinds of situations may produce feelings of excessive anxiety in the learners, and attempt to find ways of overcoming these obstacles in order to provide the best support for each student. It is equally important to realize that all students are different, and that language anxiety also does not come in one form and is not simply synonymous with nervousness to speak. For instance, Horwitz et al. (1986) developed the Foreign Language Communication Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) that suggests the following forms of performance anxiety as forming part of language anxiety: communication apprehension, test anxiety and fear of negative evaluation (Horwitz et al. 1986).

Communication apprehension can generally take on many forms of anxiety in social situations, for instance stage fright or difficulty speaking to larger groups, which presumably only gets worse when placed in an L2 speaking context as the speaker's language repertoire is more limited. Test anxiety also needs to be taken into account, as some learners place unrealistic focus on a perfect performance in a test and consider anything short of that a failure. Similarly, fear of negative evaluation can also hinder the development process as it can make some students highly sensitive of peer/teacher

feedback in any given communicative situation (Horwitz et al., 1986). These dimensions of language anxiety and their connection to developing and evaluating speaking skills are important to take into account in an EFL setting, especially to be aware of the fact that a student's unwillingness or inability to speak in the foreign language classroom may be caused by a variety of factors that are not necessarily tied to lack of motivation or language proficiency. This fact becomes increasingly more important when considering methods of optimizing the development of speaking skills and discussing forms of evaluation and assessment of the skill, as these seem to be central components of language anxiety.

3.3. Developing Speaking Skills

This section will examine the concept of speaking skills in more detail, with focus on reviewing central theories and previous research concerning both the nature and the development of L2 speaking skills. From a historic perspective, speaking can be defined as the primary form of producing language due to its longer existence than the written form, which developed from the spoken medium and is therefore dependent on it to an extent (Hughes, 2010; Tergujeff & Kautonen, 2017). This can be seen in the fact that the spoken medium is essential to innovation and language change; new words and expressions are constantly developed through spoken discourse and sometimes accepted into the written language system (Hughes, 2010).

This dynamic nature of speech provides certain challenges for the teaching context. From a pedagogical standpoint, speaking skills and oral interaction have traditionally been considered the tools that support language acquisition, rather than forming part of the curricular goals (Bygate, 2018). One of the reasons is often the dynamic nature of speech, as well as its high degree of variability and the fact that speaking encompasses a wide set of skills, any of which could be the center of attention in the teaching and assessment of speaking (Lowie, Verspoor & Van Dijk, 2018). The following discussion will aim to contextualize some of these issues and synthesize relevant theories concerning the development of speaking.

3.3.1. Defining Speaking as a Skill

As previously discussed, speaking cannot be defined as a single isolated skill. Rather, it involves a variety of subskills that need to be addressed in the EFL context, much in the same way that students are also receiving instruction on different subskills of writing, such as content, structure, coherence, spelling, etc. One way of defining and narrowing down the vastness of the skill of speaking could be through looking at the different scales that focus on speaking in the Common European Framework of Reference Companion Volume (2018), which distinguishes between a wide variety of subskills that compose the skill of speaking. For instance, spoken production entails different scales for specific speaking tasks such as the ability to share information, describe experience and address audiences. Spoken interaction on the other hand, distinguishes between different registers (informal and formal), as well as the ability to understand your conversational partner (listening as part of speaking skills). Interaction strategies are also included, with turn-taking, cooperation and asking for clarification included in separate scales. Phonological control and spoken fluency are also some features of speaking that are included in the CEFR Companion Volume (Council of Europe, 2018).

Another model of the skill of speaking, as proposed by Goh & Burns (2012), distinguishes between 1) core speaking skills (e.g., pronunciation, speech function, managing interaction) 2) communication strategies and 3) knowledge of language and discourse (e.g., grammar, lexis, discourse). Notably, when it comes to learner speech production, Goh & Burns (2012) point out that while the cognitive and social demands of speaking may negatively affect the fluency, grammatical accuracy or complexity of the speech, the process is also often facilitated by compensating with effective use of communicative and discursive strategies, resulting in speech that is overall of high quality. If speaking is approached from a wider variety of perspectives in the classroom with regard to the different subskills of speaking, there might also be room for more students to develop their language in new areas, such as more effective communication strategies, an increased vocabulary range, or improved phonological control while speaking. When approaching speaking skills in an L2, it is essential to recognize this multi-faceted nature of speaking, as it has clear implications for the development of the various subskills, which may also serve as general guidelines for what can, or should, be evaluated when it comes to speaking skills.

3.3.2. Producing Speech and the Nature of Speaking

While the act of speaking can generally seem effortless, the underlying cognitive processes are in fact highly complex and multidimensional in nature. Before the actual speaking takes place, the speaker goes through stages of deciding and defining the topic and content of speech (conceptual preparation), choosing the appropriate lexicon and forms of expression for the topic (formulation), and producing the speech itself (articulation) (Goh & Burns, 2012), not to mention the interactive context within which these processes commonly take place which simultaneously requires the speaker to process their conversational partners' speech as well. These basic stages of producing speech indicate the complex nature of speech since speaking in any language involves a vast dimension of interrelated cognitive and socio-environmental processes that perhaps become even more complex when it comes to developing speaking skills in a second language.

Speaking, in its most common everyday form, is always spontaneous and thus dependent on a variety of contextual and environmental factors. Hughes (2010) outlines three basic elements of spontaneous speech: interaction, real-time processing, and individuality. The interactive element describes the dynamic nature of speech as something that is created in interaction with others, and thus naturally entails certain conversational features, such as overlaps and corrections. Speaking is also produced and processed transitorily, meaning that the spoken message is not tangible and static in the same way that written language is (of course, with the exception of recorded spoken production). As a result, simpler and more repetitive constructions are to be expected in spoken language, as well as the use of discourse markers to buy processing time while in the midst of speaking. Finally, speaking is always highly related to the individual that utters the words, and a higher frequency of personal pronouns and stance-taking verbs are more commonly used in speaking, as opposed to more mediated forms of communication such as writing (Hughes, 2010).

Similarly, Bygate (2018) also stresses that spoken production is in general syntactically simple and fragmented, and the speaker also tends to use more frequent features and repetitive phrases within the same turn of speaking. These elements of spoken language are important to highlight here, as they have direct pedagogical implications in an L2 teaching context as many students may run the risk of "striving, and failing, to speak in the complete, grammatically standard, and impersonal

discourse that is quite untypical of naturally occurring speech" (Hughes, 2010: 156). Making students aware of these elements may be essential to their confidence in producing speech in a second language and promote their understanding of what speaking skills really entail and encourage them toward development.

3.3.3. Models for Speaking: Principles of Nativeness and Intelligibility

In pedagogical contexts different kinds of models are often used to facilitate task design, the execution of a task, as well as the evaluation of the learning process. However, when it comes to speaking skills, these models may not be as easily or clearly defined as with writing skills for example, which can more easily set a standard variety as the model for writing in order to ensure consistency in the text. This is partly due to the inherent nature of speech as dynamic, transitory and highly variable depending on the context. In this section, two key principles that have been at the core of the discussion concerning models and goals for developing L2 speaking skills will be presented briefly to provide insight into what kinds of basic models have been prioritized in language learning.

The nativeness principle is based on the assumption that L2 learners' goal should be the achievement of native-like speaking skills, using the native-speaker of the L2 as the model for instruction and development of oral production (Levis, 2018). However, the nativeness principle in second language research and teaching is problematic because it is regarded as embodying a goal that is both unnecessary and unattainable for many, if not most, L2 learners (Ortega, 2008). Attempting to define one model based on the concept of a native speaker of such a widely used global language as English will only result in an arbitrary definition that does not provide any meaningful benefits to language learning and teaching. Moreover, purely terminologically, it is important to highlight that *native speaker* does not equal *proficient speaker;* in fact, some L2 speakers might be more proficient language users than an L1 speaker of that same language.

Closely related to the nativeness principle is the notion of non-native speech as influenced by the speaker's L1, and thus accented. The accentedness of spoken production often has some effect on the listener's evaluation of the speaker's background, both cultural and social, and generally the notion of a 'foreign' accent includes some dimension of othering and separation of one speaker from another

(Halonen, 2017). Some L2 learners, not to mention some teachers, might view this separation as undesirable and therefore want to get rid of their accent, which leads to the pursuit of sounding more native-like when speaking in the target language.

Learners might also consider native-like speech as synonymous with more intelligible speech, and therefore express a preference for it (Levis, 2018). However, the intelligibility principle does not really rely on the native-speaker model as a prerequisite for easily understandable speech. Rather, the intelligibility principle has been given more emphasis in language teaching, not only as a more realistic goal for learners, but also as being more central to the inherent nature of speaking as a form of communication between people. In fact, one study on pronunciation teaching in Finland found that most of the students' aim is fluent and intelligible pronunciation rather than the achievement of a native-like accent (Tergujeff, 2013), suggesting that the students in question place more value on the communicative aspects of speech over pursuing a certain standard or variety of spoken production. In contrast, a recent survey on teacher attitudes and opinions concerning the teaching of speaking skills in Finland found that "half of the teachers wanted their students to aim for native-like accents while the other half maintained that comprehensibility was the most important factor" (Järnström, 2019: 113). Although two separate studies cannot as such be reliably compared to one another, nor can their results be generalized to apply to the entire population (even though the Finnish school system is relatively homogenous), it is still an interesting difference to note that the majority of students in one study considered intelligibility as the most important pronunciation goal, whereas the teachers' opinions on the topic were more divided in another study.

However, there may still be a value in comparing certain aspects or features of oral skills between L1 and L2 speakers of a language, as sometimes there are differences that may affect the effectiveness of communication. For instance, pausing is a naturally occurring phenomenon in any speech, but Skehan (2009) highlights the fact that non-native speakers pause mid-clause more frequently, resulting in less fluent speech, whereas native speakers tend to pause in between clauses, which is perceived to be a more natural place for a pause to occur, thus making the speech more fluent and effective from a communicative point of view. While these types of comparative conclusions about L1 and L2 speakers' differences may prove useful for certain tasks

in a formal classroom setting, it is not necessary to explicitly use the L1 speaker as the model for acquisition.

On a similar note, Lintunen & Dufva (2017) suggest that it is beneficial for the L2 learner to have some kind of model to reflect their own language development against. It would be useful for learners to be acquainted with the wide variety of Englishes spoken across the globe, and to introduce a lingua franca approach in the classroom as it encourages the use of English for international communication purposes (Lintunen & Dufva, 2017). This would enforce the notion of being understood as a central goal in L2 speaking, as well as stress the relevance of acquiring a level of proficiency that allows the learner to communicate with as many people as possible in the target language. The lingua franca model also encourages the learner to reflect on themselves more actively as an international user of the language (Lintunen & Dufva, 2017), consequently directing them toward a more individualistic language identity that does not set unrealistic expectations on them to attain some pre-defined model of what English is or should sound like.

3.3.4. Development of Speaking Skills

Spoken interaction in the classroom has been valued in language teaching for quite a while, with increasing focus on limiting teacher talking time in order to optimize the development of student engagement and output of spoken production (Hughes, 2010). Previously, L2 oral skills were taught with primary focus on grammatical accuracy and acquisition of correct pronunciation, whereas more recently the focus of L2 teaching has shifted toward intelligible and contextually appropriate communication (Goh & Burns, 2012). In other words, language teaching has generally evolved from form-focused instruction to meaning-focused communication, based on "the assumption that learners do not need to be taught grammar before they can communicate but will acquire it naturally as part of the process of learning to communicate" (Ellis, 1997: 79).

Even though the meaning-focused approach promotes opportunities for student talk and encourages meaningful communication and interaction in the classroom, it does not necessarily focus on speaking as a skill to be developed and evaluated as such (Hughes, 2010). Backing this up, Tergujeff & Kautonen (2017) similarly state that speaking skills have often been considered to be the by-product of other language

learning in the classroom, especially in Finland where English is prominently present in the students' everyday lives. The assumption is then that speaking develops naturally via classroom interaction and extracurricular activity. That is not to say that general speaking activities in class do not benefit the development of speaking skills and the automatization of producing speech in the L2 (Tergujeff, Heinonen, Ilola, Salo & Kara, 2017). However, while general speaking activities are common in most EFL classrooms, the kind of development they promote cannot necessarily be equated to "the effective teaching of speaking as a holistic skill" (Hughes, 2010: 7). This is often partly due to the fact that teachers lack the experience of having been taught speaking as a skill during their own school years, not to mention during their teacher education (Tergujeff & Kautonen, 2017). Speaking in the L2 classroom has therefore traditionally been considered more as a medium for acquisition rather than a separate language skill worth developing or assessing on its own.

Questions of whether or not speaking skills should be taught and developed as a skill in its own right have also been raised. For instance, Lowie et al. (2018) tentatively suggests that explicit instruction on the whole does not provide the same benefits for developing speaking in a second language as meaningful communicative interaction and immersion in the language does, echoing the concept of using spoken language as a tool for communication in the classroom rather than spoken language as a skill to acquire:

> The emergent and self-organizing nature of second language speech development implies that language cannot be taught, but can only be acquired. This requires a type of language coaching that optimizes the learner's opportunities to learn. Explicit instruction is simply less likely to lead to successful perturbations of the language system than meaningful communicative interaction. The relative success of immersion settings and language learning situations in which the target language is also the main language of communication confirms this observation for the development of speaking.

> (Lowie et al., 2018: 120)

Nevertheless, while it is important to note that the current emphasis on meaningful authentic communication as a means for language acquisition and developing proficiency in an L2 is useful, it is also worthwhile to consider language from a more holistic point of view and incorporate the wide array of skills and dimensions related to language proficiency into teaching. These latter areas do tend to benefit from more

explicit teaching and development. For instance, two different case studies in oral fluency development have found that the experimental groups that were instructed explicitly on features of oral fluency and guided speaking activities aided by these features generally scored better in oral fluency tests than the control groups, in which the same speech activities were not guided by any pedagogic intervention regarding oral fluency development (Tavakoli, Campbell & McCormack, 2016; Galante & Thomson, 2017). These studies attest to the fact that explicit teaching of a specific skill set commonly yield positive results in the learners' performance of that skill set.

Regardless, teaching is often influenced by the values of the teacher and the kinds of skills that are in focus can vary greatly depending on what that teacher values as an essential skill to be developed in the target language. Quite often speaking skills are easier to approach from a less systematic perspective and, as previously discussed, many use it primarily as a tool for communication in the classroom through encouraging general speaking in the target language. However, especially more advanced learners may want to expand their knowledge beyond the ability to communicate in the language which is why a more holistic perspective on the skill of speaking is needed in the classroom.

Considering the discussion above, there are certain pedagogical implications concerning the systematic development of speaking skills that need to be highlighted here. Firstly, as the spoken medium is by nature dynamic and transitory, different methods of iteration of speech can be used to facilitate the handling of the process as a whole (Bygate, 2018). Additionally, since speaking is context-bound and entails wide sets of areas of competence, the pedagogic environment also needs to set up effective conditions and limited spaces in the classroom for the students to be able to process and develop the given task (Bygate, 2018). It is also essential to acknowledge that the acquisition and development of speaking skills is both dynamic and individual, which requires the pedagogic environment to place focus on the *process of*, rather than the *product of*, speaking (Lowie et al., 2018).

The implications of these conclusions are manifold and developing speaking as a skill in its own right in the classroom context may be a demanding task, but not impossible. It should be noted also that these conclusions indicate that speaking cannot be effectively developed and evaluated statically at one single point in time (e.g., with one course or test such as the elective ENA8 course in the Finnish curriculum), since

that method does not account for the high variability and progressive nature of speaking, nor does it take into account the vast variety of different areas and dimensions involved in the skill of speaking as a whole. Having briefly discussed the nature of spoken production and established some implications for the development of speaking skills, the next section will examine some theories and methods of assessing this skill.

3.4. Assessing Speaking Skills

This section discusses the evaluation and assessment of speaking skills, including some practical models for assessment as well as methods of actualizing the assessment in a formal classroom setting. As previously discussed, the new national curriculum states that oral skills in foreign languages should be taught and assessed during the compulsory and optional courses in upper secondary school (Utbildningsstyrelsen, 2019), but generally the assessment lacks a clear systematic application, at least in regard to the compulsory courses. Ahola (2017) also points out that since oral proficiency is often evaluated in the form of class activity during courses in foreign languages, oral proficiency is given less weight over other language skills (in that spoken proficiency and spoken activity are not synonymous), while also only rewarding the more extraverted students. Therefore, it is essential to consider more valid methods of assessing oral skills, through using models that provide realistic and reliable criteria for assessment. Giving speaking skills and their assessment a more explicit place in the classroom also promotes the notion of speaking as a fundamental language skill, since it is arguably as important as the remaining skills of listening, reading and writing.

The general lack of assessment of speaking skills is partly due to the fact that evaluating speaking skills can be quite time consuming, considering the high variability and dynamic nature of speech, and also from a more historical viewpoint evaluation has been difficult to execute due to lack of adequate technology and recording devices (Tergujeff & Kautonen, 2017). As a consequence, the written form has been at the forefront of institutional assessment of productive language skills, since models and methods of development and assessment of written skills are more readily available to educators and learners alike. Written production is also a more cemented

and permanent form of language compared to spoken production, which greatly facilitates the development and assessment of writing as it can be more easily dissected and evaluated in its existing form.

It is important to consider the variable nature of speech and the fact that speaking also encompasses different areas that can be developed and assessed. Therefore, assessment of oral skills cannot be based on oral activity in class as it does not assess the skill itself, nor is it a consistent method of assessing specific features of speaking since the opportunity to demonstrate one's skills will not be equally distributed in a group of students. Organizing one single exam can also be problematic as it does not account for the variability of speech or the development over time. Thus, the skill of speaking also needs clear models for assessment in order to provide the base for equal and reliable evaluation, as well as different methods of assessment in order to account for the multi-faceted nature of speaking.

3.4.1. Models for Assessment

Well-developed models for assessment provide the corner stones for any evaluator in the sense that they help define the area(s) of speaking that are being assessed, as well as outlining what the goals of the assessment are. However, it is not always easy to define concrete goals for the vast array of skills involved in speaking, and oftentimes the general goal for many L2 learners concerning speaking skills is to develop good communication skills in the language (Hammerly, 1991), which of course is a worthwhile goal, but not particularly useful in the context of developing or assessing more specific aspects of speaking.

As previously discussed, using the native speaker model has been proven to be an irrelevant target. Rather, the goals of any given task or test should be related to the course objectives and concretely describe what the learner is expected to be able to do with the target language in that specific context. Therefore, it is important to set these goals before moving on to the assessment so that both the teacher and the student will be prepared and know what to expect. For instance, The Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) (Council of Europe, 2001) and its Companion Volume with New Descriptors (Council of Europe, 2018) provide a wide variety of scales that can be adopted into different teaching contexts across all four language skills. In relation to spoken production and interaction the CEFR provides separate

scales and descriptors for different speaking contexts, such as monologues, interviews, formal and informal discussions, spoken fluency, and many more (Council of Europe, 2018). The aim is to provide models for educators and learners to evaluate their proficiency within a given area of language skills and serve as a tool to develop more concrete and consistent criteria for different types of contexts.

The CEFR scales are made to serve as general descriptors since they are used as a common reference point between many countries that all have different educational systems and language curricula, and therefore they cannot be used as the sole model for assessment either. Luoma (2004) points out that while adopting existing scales, especially ones developed by recognized institutions, might seem effective and reliable it is equally important to ensure that the scales are related to the context of the assessment itself and must therefore be adapted to fit the goals and expectations of the test. This is also echoed by Fulcher (2003) who states that common reference levels may serve as a general indication of the learner's position within the given scale, using comparable and consistent descriptors. Using scales, such as the ones in CEFR, can thus provide a backbone for evaluation and assessment in the sense that they help the assessor to remain consistent in the process of evaluation, as well as giving the learner an opportunity to understand their own progress within a given area of language skills, assuming that the scales and descriptors are made explicit to the learner as well.

The core curricula for upper secondary schools in Finland use adapted scales from the CEFR to describe the proficiency levels ranging from A1-C1 users of a language across the general language skills of communication and ability to interpret and produce texts, both spoken and written (Utbildningsstyrelsen, 2015; Utbildningsstyrelsen, 2019). These scales, however, may be too general to use in an activity or test as the sole method of assessment as they are quite general descriptions of different levels of proficiency. Nevertheless, the curricula do specify that one goal for students in the advanced syllabus in English is to be able to equate their skills to the proficiency level B2.1 (Utbildningsstyrelsen, 2015; Utbildningsstyrelsen, 2019), which the CEFR defines as a vantage independent user (Council of Europe, 2001).

These scales and frameworks can be highly useful in approaching the assessment of speaking skills, as long as they are adapted to fit the specific context of assessment, since they are concrete and structured in a way that facilitates the communication between instructor and learner concerning the level of proficiency within a given

context. However, as such they do not account for the complexity of assessing speaking and from a more practical point of view, they may not always provide suitable criteria for the context in question, meaning that the CEFR or curriculum descriptors may not always match the goals or the focus of the activity, which is why teachers cannot solely rely on these types of scales but also need to reflect on and devise appropriate methods of assessment.

3.4.2. Methods of Assessment

There are many different ways in which one can go about assessing and evaluating skills, but the task of doing so effectively and in a way that is productive for the development of the learner is not always simple. Nation & Newton (2009) point out that a well-developed test or assessment method should take the following three factors into account: validity, reliability, and practicality. Firstly, it is important that the assessment is based on the actual thing being measured (e.g., with the help of clear criteria) which improves the validity of the test. Secondly, assessment should not be based on one single test or activity as this reduces the reliability of the result. Thirdly, the result of the assessment should also be applicable in various contexts and thus reflect the actual level of knowledge in the measured skill, rendering the assessment practical (Nation & Newton, 2009).

Similarly, Luoma (2004) emphasizes the role of validity in any assessment as the aim is of course to assess the correct thing. In terms of speaking assessment, Luoma (2004) goes on to address the central fact that developers of the assessment need to understand what the skill of speaking entails and then begin to define what areas of speaking will be assessed, as well as developing realistic criteria that test that specific area of speaking. Additionally, learners should be informed on what they are being tested on and the assessor also needs to ensure that the testing process delivers according to plan (Luoma, 2004). This may be easier said than done, as Fulcher (2003) also notes that a central challenge in assessing oral skills is in fact "designing tasks that elicit spoken language of the type and quantity that will allow meaningful inferences to be drawn from scores to the learner's ability on the construct the test is designed to measure" (Fulcher, 2003: 47). These observations assert that the assessment of L2 oral skills is complex, yet manageable and beneficial for development, as long as speaking skills is not considered something subsidiary to other

language skills in the classroom and therefore assessed in a haphazard and arbitrary manner, such as using oral class activity as grounds for assessment.

These general characteristics of a quality test are of course not always easily achieved and require structured planning by the teacher. In a teaching context it is often preferable to include various methods of assessment, rather than solely relying on teacher based assessment at the end of a course, including diagnostic assessment at the beginning of a course through self-evaluation forms, formative assessment during the course through teacher and/or peer feedback, as well as summative assessment at the end of a course that provides the learner with insights on where they stand currently in the language and what aspects may still be developed in the future (Ahola, 2017). Offering a variety of different methods for evaluation and assessment may become increasingly important when it comes to oral skills in a language since "the observed variability in speech production is not a sign of the learner's limitation but is a positive sign of an actively developing system" (Lowie et al., 2018: 120), which requires assessment that takes these features of speech production and development into account. Lowie et al. (2018) go on to assert that assessing oral skills at one point in time is therefore undesirable and suggest that the assessment of speaking skills should aim toward continuous assessment, preferably over the entire formal L2 learning process.

Additionally, Ahola (2017) points out that since teachers in Finland enjoy quite a lot of autonomy in the way they set up their classes and their content, they can also choose quite freely what the assessment will look like and if speaking skills is one part of it, then the teachers also need to have sufficient knowledge of what speaking entails and set clear goals for what is expected of students within the given context. Concerning different ways of providing students with feedback and evaluation in oral skills, Ahola (2017) suggests that verbal assessment and descriptive criteria are usually more effective than using a numerical scale, since the latter (used in isolation of other assessment) does not indicate much about the students' current strengths and weaknesses, and therefore it does not promote the development of speaking skills. The role of assessment in the form of feedback is essential to developing speaking skills as it raises the learners' awareness on features of speaking that they already grasp well, as well as giving them an opportunity to focus on areas that can be developed (Tergujeff et al., 2017). The feedback should always be given in a sensitive (e.g.,

privately) and encouraging (e.g., start feedback with can-do's) manner, so as to not disengage or demotivate the student from similar tasks in the future (Tergujeff et al., 2017), as speaking is inherently a more personal manifestation of language skills than, for instance, taking a traditional written test in the language.

It is also essential to consider the effect of task types and the conditions of evaluation and how they can affect the students' performance. As previously mentioned, including a variety of assessment methods over a longer period of time diminishes the bias of one test result as indication of a skill, especially one as complex as speaking. Ahola (2017) suggests a few practical ways a teacher could approach assessment of speaking skills in class, for example collecting recordings of spoken production, which can alleviate some students' language anxiety or nervousness to speak in class, if they are allowed to prepare and execute the speaking task at home. However, using only recordings in the assessment of speaking does not account for the interactive element and communicative purpose of language, which is why it is important to also incorporate real-time evaluation in one way or another (Ahola, 2017). Different tasks render themselves more useful for the assessment of one area of speaking skills than others, which is why it is also essential to define what the focus of the assessment is and then develop tasks that best help capture that feature of speech. Setting up brief and clear criteria for assessment are also necessary in order to ensure consistency and diminish the subjectivity of evaluation, especially if there is only one person responsible for the assessment.

4. MATERIALS AND METHODS

This chapter details the materials and methods used for the design, collection and analysis of this research. Firstly, the materials for data collection will be described and discussed. The method of analysis will also be presented and central limitations with the material designs will be addressed. Secondly, the classroom intervention will be discussed as its contents are central to the comparison of the collected data via one pre-intervention survey and a post-intervention survey.

4.1. Materials

This section will describe the materials used to collect the data in this case study. As mentioned above, two surveys were distributed with some distinct items (general attitudes and experiences) and some identical sections (in order to compare results before and after the intervention). The research questions that this thesis will answer via the collected material and analysis are the following:

1. What are the students' attitudes toward teaching and assessment of speaking skills?

2. In what ways do students' perspectives on speaking skills and assessment compare before and after pedagogical intervention?

3. How successful was the pedagogic intervention in making speaking skills an explicit part of lessons and assessment?

The following sections will discuss survey design in general, as well as describe the content and distribution of the surveys.

4.1.1. Designing the Surveys

Using surveys to collect information about a group of people has its strengths and weaknesses. The strength of using questionnaires lies in their versatility and relatively fast and straightforward data processing, assuming it has been constructed thoroughly (Dörnyei, 2010). Clearly there are also quite a few weaknesses with questionnaires, such as the simplicity or superficiality of responses, as well as different respondent biases, literacy issues, and unreliable or unmotivated respondents (Dörnyei, 2010),

which all affect the degree of reliability of the responses and the conclusions that the researcher can draw based on the received responses. Moreover, Wood (2003) points out that simply asking people about something might give them ideas and alter what they initially think about the topic, causing the results not to be as straightforward as one might assume, although surveys often serve as a tool for awareness-raising.

Therefore, the researcher must always keep in mind that when working with data based on people's experiences, opinions or attitudes, the questionnaire and its separate items will naturally be approached from a unique perspective in that no human being will interpret something exactly the same way as another. This results in a collection of data that can surely be insightful and beneficial for the research or study at hand, but no absolute truths can be stated based on social questionnaires as if they were exact science. Rather, the responses in any survey could be better approached as a collection of the respondents' insights at the time of completion.

However, the more carefully designed the questionnaire is, the more reliable the responses, although careful design cannot completely eliminate all disadvantages (Dörnyei, 2010). Some of these disadvantages may be reduced by pilot testing, which was also conducted with the present survey(s) in their preliminary form during the thesis seminars in the English department at Åbo Akademi University. The comments and suggestions that were received helped with eliminating typographical errors, rephrasing sentence structures and clarifying item wording to be as exact as possible. Suggestions to clarify the benefits of taking the survey were also made, although the research design and the survey were modified slightly after the pilot testing session.

Another important thing to take into account when working with data based on real human beings and their attitudes and opinions is research ethics and ensuring the anonymity of the respondents. That is, we need to make sure to not only report all the data that has been collected and not exclude any information even though it might be counterproductive to our hypothesis. We also need to make sure that we use those responses in an ethical manner and part of it is ensuring that the respondents' identities will remain anonymous. This study is in a sense quasi-anonymous in that this was a case study and therefore the identities of these students are familiar to me as I taught them myself, which contributes to the awareness that each response received can only belong to one of the students in that class. However, all responses were anonymously collected, meaning that they cannot be traced back to any individual student. The

students were also explicitly told during class time and in the survey descriptions that this intervention and the surveys would comprise the data of my research, and the students were asked for their responses to be used for the stated purposes. Only the responses in the surveys that were given consent by the students (all except one) will be addressed in this analysis.

The methodological design derives from the commonly used pretest-posttest design in which "the researcher gives a pretest […] to a group of students, provides some sort of treatment to the group […] then gives them a posttest. The pretest and posttest means are then compared to determine whether learning took place" (Brown, 1988: 154). However, in this present study this design is adapted to suit the circumstances, which adds quite a few limitations as well. Centrally, there were no separate experimental or control groups, mostly due to the practical concerns considering the brief sequence of lessons with an allocated class during the teaching practice within which this case study was conducted. Rather, all students in the class received the same 'treatment' and were asked to complete the same pre- and postsurvey.

Moreover, the novel situation of distance teaching caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and the challenge of adapting teaching methods to fit the situation set some limits on how much work could be expected of students at this time. Since the surveys were distributed to the same group of students over a short period of time in-between, the results might not be as reliable in their description of the actual effects of the intervention. The intervention itself was also extremely brief, incorporated into five lessons that took place over the course of three weeks, in which the content was composed in its entirety by me as a teacher trainee. Generally, this means that the students' responses in the postsurvey could be approached as a sort of evaluation of the impressions that this specific group of students received from the specific set of activities and assessment methods used during the intervention.

4.1.2. Presurvey

The presurvey (see Appendix A) was distributed to the students at the end of the first lesson of the sequence. It was administered on the online ÅAU survey platform and the students were given a brief introduction to its content before being asked to complete the survey. The students were also instructed not to spend excessive time on

completing the survey, since it should take no longer than 10-15 minutes to complete as confirmed by the pilot testing. The presurvey yielded 15 responses out of the 26 students that were given an exam grade at the end of the sequence. One reason for the low response rate may have been that participation in class was not consistent (often fewer than 20 students) which might have affected the absentees' motivation to complete work outside of class. Distance teaching due to the COVID-19 pandemic might also have had an effect on motivation levels and the completion of assignments and homework in general.

The presurvey was divided into five parts. The first part asked the students about their general experiences of speaking English, including questions about frequently occurring and preferred varieties of English. The second part consisted of the presurvey Likert-scale items, commonly used to indicate the degree to which one agrees or disagrees with a statement (Dörnyei, 2010). On a range of 1-5 (Completely disagree, Disagree, Unsure, Agree, Completely Agree) the students were asked about their general opinions and attitudes concerning speaking English in class, pronunciation, fluency and the assessment of speaking skills. This part of the survey was identical in the postsurvey as well, which allows for a comparison of responses pre- and post-intervention, while keeping in mind the responses in the postsurvey may be affected not only by the intervention itself but also the fact that the students have recently answered the same questions in the presurvey.

The third part in the presurvey asked the students to place themselves on the same Likert-scale in terms of their own communicative language skills (part 3.1) and qualitative aspects of spoken language (part 3.2). These statements were adapted from the outlined levels of competence the students in question are expected to reach during their upper secondary school years. Part 3.1. was adapted from the curriculum's scale for level B2.1. communicative skills (Utbildningsstyrelsen, 2015: 253), whereas Part 3.2 was adapted from CEFR's scale for level B2 range, accuracy, fluency, interaction and coherence of spoken language (Council of Europe, 2001: 28). The purpose of this was to get an overview of how the students would juxtapose themselves with the outlined goals of the curriculum, concerning communication and speaking skills in English. The fourth part of the survey then asked the students to indicate what kinds of speaking activities are most commonly used during classes as well as what activities the students would consider to be most useful. This was asked in order to get insight

into what activities the students are most familiar with and to reflect on their possible reaction to the activities used during this sequence. Lastly, this survey also asked the students for some additional information (gender, year of study and L1) although it was later decided not to use this information for the analysis and is therefore omitted from the postsurvey as well.

4.1.3. Postsurvey

The postsurvey (see Appendix B) was distributed during the last feedback session of the sequence and the students were given the required time to fill in the survey during class time, yielding 17 responses out of the 26 that participated in the final exam of the sequence. Considering the previously mentioned low attendance rate in classes, the estimate of active students in this course was somewhere closer to 20. Moreover, most of the students who did not participate in the surveys did not participate in the classes either, meaning that they could not have taken the survey anyway (or perhaps worse, would have filled it in randomly). It is also important to keep in mind that the few students who did participate in the lessons but did not respond to the surveys cannot be presumed to have given similar responses to the other students in the sample, as Wood also points out:

> The sample may, despite your best efforts, end up biased in the direction of people who are available and willing to answer your questions […] The question is then whether you can assume that those who don't respond are similar to those who do. The honest answer to this is often 'no', but this is often barely mentioned in many research reports

(Wood, 2003: 173)

Therefore, we need to approach the results of this exploratory case study with tentative measures, especially since the sample is small and the duration of the intervention was quite brief as well. Nevertheless, what a case study of this scale can provide are many interesting insights into the students' attitudes and opinions on speaking skills before and after an intervention, and give indications to what approaches could be used in future studies and teaching of speaking skills.

The structure of the postsurvey was somewhat different from the presurvey, having excluded the more general background items on speaking skills and only asking

the students for responses to the identical Likert-scale items on speaking English during lessons, pronunciation, fluency and the assessment of speaking skills. Open-ended questions were also included in this postsurvey in order to give the students the opportunity to freely express their opinions on the intervention and how they experienced it. This part provides qualitative data to support the quantitative data provided by the closed items, although the analysis of the quantitative results will also to an extent rely on a more qualitative perspective due to the methodological limitations. The open-ended items can also provide illustrative quotes and even highlight some possibly unanticipated issues (Dörnyei, 2010). Although the students had been assured of the anonymity of their responses in both surveys and the fact that their responses would be used for this thesis, the students were also asked to indicate their consent by ticking the box (yes or no) on the question whether or not their responses in both surveys could be used for these research purposes.

4.1.4. Analysis of the Material

The material collected via these surveys will make use of both quantitative and qualitative analysis methods. The closed questions will be analyzed with basic descriptive statistics, simply by presenting the responses using numbers or percentages, which are likely to yield more insightful data for a small sample size than calculating statistical tendencies and dispersions that are better suited for larger samples. These quantitative results will therefore be analyzed somewhat qualitatively, in that the spread of responses will be interpreted and conclusions will be drawn based on that analysis.

The open-ended questions will be analyzed with the help of a content analysis in order to facilitate the grouping of responses and the finding of central themes and ideas for each item among the individual responses. Evidently, this "[…] categorization process involves more potentially subjective elements on the part of the coder" (Dörnyei, 2010: 99), as opposed to more clearly defined numerical scales. Dörnyei thus suggests a two-step content analysis through which each response is analyzed and checked individually for "distinct content elements, substantive statements, or key points" followed by "forming broader categories to describe the content of the response in a way that allows for comparisons with other responses" (Dörnyei, 2010: 99). These suggestions were followed in my analysis of the open-ended questions,

although the subjective element cannot be completely removed from any kind of study: "All we can do is make a judgement about the extent to which patterns found in the sample can be extrapolated to a wider context" (Wood, 2003: 30). This applies to the interpretation of the closed questions as well in that even though the responses might be more consistently and systematically structured, the interpretations and the conclusions are still drawn by the researcher and in that sense, they are always subjective to an extent.

4.2. Methods

This section will describe the method of action research used in the present study, which guided the intervention design, as well as discussing the motivation for its content of pronunciation and fluency. The sequence of lessons will also be described in detail, in order to provide a contextual point of reference in relation to the results obtained from the materials, especially the postsurvey.

4.2.1. Action Research as Method

Action research is a method of investigation that is carried out in a social context where the teacher is both an active participant in and a researcher of a certain phenomenon. In short, it means that action and research are combined in a practical situation, with the aim of forming a mutually influential cycle that optimally results in further development of teaching methods in a specific area of interest (Burns & Kurtoglu-Hooton, 2016). One advantage of action research is that it enables this specific focus on one area of teaching and can thus offer concrete and non-generalizing results and conclusions about the phenomenon in focus (Barbre & Buckner, 2013), providing teachers with the opportunity to reflect on the success of their action and what aspects of the pedagogic intervention might need further development and research. Central steps for conducting an action research are planning, carrying out the action, observation and documentation, as well as reflection on the results, leading to new points of view and elaborated research opportunities (Burns & Kurtoglu-Hooton, 2016). In terms of the present study, it should be noted that the action was planned and carried out in a sequence of five lessons, forming part of my teaching practice period

during which some general observations on the results were made. However, the main analysis and discussion of results will be conducted and presented in this thesis.

In planning the action then, a focus area needed to be defined, and the development and assessment of speaking skills in the classroom was chosen as the topic for intervention. The justification and interest in L2 speaking skills stemmed from the already mentioned general lack of systematic application of its development and assessment in Finnish upper secondary schools. As already noted, speaking skills is a vast area of competence and for the scope of the research and the limited number of lessons, the action needed to be trimmed down into including only certain areas of development. Therefore, pronunciation and oral fluency were chosen as the central focus of the action, although the general importance of speaking skills were also highlighted throughout the sequence of lessons.

4.2.2. Motivation for Pronunciation and Spoken Fluency

Pronunciation was chosen as one area of development in the action partly due to its relevance for intelligibility when speaking in the L2, especially concerning its prosodic features such as placement of stress and intonation, and partly due to pronunciation being a fairly simple and straightforward feature of spoken language to develop and assess (Tergujeff et al. 2017). Pronunciation teaching, although more often form-focused and thus occasionally neglected in the prevailing meaning-focused language teaching approach, certainly supports the development of communicative skills in the sense that the differing use of suprasegmental pronunciation features (such as stress, emphasis and intonation) highly affect the communicative situation and the way in which listeners and speakers interact and engage in conversation.

In fact, one method of approaching pronunciation from a more meaning-focused perspective would be to use a broad approach, by focusing first on the suprasegmental features and then moving on to the incorporation of individual items affecting those features (Tergujeff, 2013), thus raising the more itemized language awareness *after* the emphasis on meaning. Clearly, these approaches need to be adapted accordingly to match the level of students, as beginners may certainly have greater need of a form-focused approach at first, whereas advanced level students (such as the group in this study) may not find form-focused approaches to be as useful or beneficial for their

development considering that especially their segmental pronunciation of certain sounds may have become automatized to some extent.

Similarly, Nation's (2007) framework of the Four Strands outlines that a language course should incorporate methods of meaning-focused input, meaning-focused output, language-focused learning, and fluency development to an equal degree, so that optimally the approaches can offer a more holistic basis for development of a skill. Pronunciation would perhaps fall most clearly into the category of language-focused learning, if approached from the previously discussed form-focused point of view. However, pronunciation teaching may also lend itself to more meaning-focused approaches and output, through emphasis on more suprasegmental features and their impact on effective communication.

A central goal for many, if not most, L2 learners is learning how to communicate well orally in the target language (Hammerly, 1991), often striving for fluent speech. Although fluency is a complex term, in the context of L2 research, oral fluency is often referred to as the "automaticity" of speech, which is "manifested in flow, continuity, and smoothness of speech" (Tavakoli et al., 2016: 447). In other words, oral fluency is displayed through the speaker's capacity to convey meaning as effortlessly as possible, with minimal disruptions and a natural flow of speech. The speaker is also actively making use of previously acquired L2 knowledge and is capable of efficiently placing that knowledge in the context of speech. As such, fluency relies much less on form-focused aspects than pronunciation and in general fluency might be more readily accepted as a worthwhile goal for advanced students.

As previously mentioned, research has shown that explicit teaching and practicing of oral fluency has positive effects on the development in the skill itself (Tavakoli et al., 2016; Galante & Thomson, 2017). Assuming that the explicitness of instruction and increasing student engagement with the skill can have the same benefits with other features of spoken language (e.g., pronunciation), we can draw the conclusion that there is value to be found in the systematic teaching of different features of speaking. Hence the purpose of this interventive action research was to get an insight into how beneficial the students consider the explicit teaching and assessment of pronunciation and oral fluency to be, based on their experiences and opinions formed during the sequence of lessons, which will be described in more detail in the section below.

4.2.3. Description of Lessons, Activities and Assessment Design

The lessons and sequence of activities were planned as part of the English course ENA6 in a Finland-Swedish upper secondary school. The number of students enrolled in the class remained unclear throughout the sequence, since many students were often absent, and assignments were not always handed in. However, 26 students participated in the final exam of the sequence. It is also important to repeat here that this sequence of lessons was not delivered in a traditional classroom setting, as the COVID-19 pandemic obliged all schools to undertake distance teaching. This of course set some limitations on the intervention concerning speaking skills and the kinds of activities that could be used. However, the video call software program Zoom was used during lessons and the interactive element of speaking could be recreated to a certain extent via different types of activities with the whole group, as well as through dividing students into smaller groups in breakout rooms on the program, so as to increase the students' possible speaking time.

One central weakness with teaching through a computer screen is the fact that it becomes much harder to notice the students' engagement, and attempt to direct and motivate them accordingly, especially students that are only visible to you as a muted black screen during the entire lesson. However, there may also have been certain benefits to the present study concerning speaking skills, as the distancing element may have decreased the anxiety some students feel in connection to speaking in class, not to mention the relative ease with which recorded material could be collected through the learning platform used by the school.

Lesson 1

During the first lesson of the sequence the general introductions were made, and an overview of the lessons and their content were given. As this sequence formed part of a longer course, there were naturally other activities and focus areas included in each lesson as well alongside the activities and interventions related to the present study. However, only the relevant sections to this case study will be presented here. The students were also given a brief introduction to why speaking skills will be focused on during the upcoming lessons and an attempt at raising motivation levels and positive attitudes toward the skill of speaking was made through highlighting benefits for

communication and development of language skills in general, as well as mentioning the students' own desires of developing speaking skills that has been expressed previously in a pre-course evaluation. At the end of this lesson the students were also asked to fill in the presurvey (Appendix A) as part of their homework. The postsurvey (Appendix B) would be completed after the sequence of lessons presented here.

Lesson 2

The second lesson placed more focus on explicit instruction of different features of pronunciation and their impact on speaking and communication skills in English. The explicitness of instruction and awareness-raising is of key importance when it comes to developing specific pronunciation features (Tergujeff et al., 2017), which is why time was devoted to highlight some central features of pronunciation (sounds, word stress, sentence stress) and intonation during this lesson. This material also served as a guide to help the students prepare for the recording task that was described at the end of the lesson. Although this instruction was explicit, and therefore more deductive in its approach, the students were also assumed to be quite familiar with the themes and rules of pronunciation that were highlighted during this lesson. Student engagement and inductive thinking were also encouraged during this somewhat more theoretical teacher-talk based segment, via questions and prompts to reflect on different features of pronunciation throughout the session.

The students were then given a recording task at the end of the lesson, which was chosen partly due to its straightforward design as well as based on the assumption that the task is of familiar nature to the students and simple to complete. The students were asked to read a segment of the text we had worked on in class, with consideration of the features of pronunciation discussed during the lesson. Reading a segment of text out loud is often used in language teaching and the familiarity with this type of exercise may decrease the anxiety some students might feel when practicing speaking skills, not to mention being assessed on them. Additionally, in these types of reading exercises, the students do not need to put their own personae in the spotlight in the same way as they do in more free activities of spoken production (Tergujeff et al., 2017), possibly allowing for a more sensitive approach to feedback and assessment. Students were also encouraged to highlight different parts of their chosen text in order

to support their task of reading and to help visualize certain features of pronunciation that they may or may not struggle with.

Lesson 3

The third lesson of the sequence focused less on explicit instruction and allotted some time for general discussion in smaller groups to promote more student talking time. As distance teaching was in its early stages, supervisors encouraged Zoom (class) time to be shortened due to many students finding schoolwork extremely stressful and long days in front of the computer screen were not optimal. Therefore, formal lesson time was cut a bit shorter and the students were encouraged to use the remaining time to complete and submit their recording which was due the following day. The students were also assigned a written task, that would serve as their topic for discussion for the fluency activity in an upcoming lesson.

Feedback on recording

In between lessons 3 and 4 the students received individual written formal feedback on the different features of pronunciation that were emphasized in the slides during the second lesson.

> Speaking scores are usually reported as overall grades in terms of numbers or letters. […] In learning-oriented settings, the overall grade serves as an introduction to more detailed feedback. This may be given in terms of separate ratings on analytic features such as intelligibility, rhythm and intonation, grammatical accuracy, lexical range, and appropriateness of language use, for example.
>
> (Luoma, 2004: 173)

Although no 'scores' were reported in the feedback, the general comments were given in order to highlight the students' strengths and to give suggestions on what aspects of the recording could be revised for the final version, which would be assessed with a grade that constituted a small part (20%) of the final exam of the sequence. The comments and suggestions given on this first recording mainly focused on features in the students' pronunciation that caused issues for intelligibility (mispronunciation resulting in incomprehensible speech for the listener) or affected the communicative context in general (such as unusual or deviating stress and intonation). For students

who struggled less with the aforementioned features, the comments focused more on segmental features of pronunciation, such as individual sounds, and how they may affect the message, as well as on features that also increase fluency, such as linking certain words and phrases together in order to produce more naturally flowing speech, or reconsidering the pace and placement of pauses in the recording.

Lesson 4

This lesson focused on both implicit and explicit instruction of fluency. During the fourth lesson the students were given a task of peer evaluation on their classmates' written assignments, asking them to comment on one interesting thing they wrote about as well as providing them with one example or viewpoint that could be added to expand on the topic. The purpose of this was that the students would then optimally have even more points to discuss on their topic during the upcoming fluency activity in the fifth lesson. After this the students were given a fluency task (not made explicit) in breakout rooms as a warm-up exercise to fluency instruction. This exercise was an adaptation of the 4/3/2 technique "where the same talk is repeated to different listeners in a decreasing time frame (four minutes, then three minutes then two)" that has been proven to increase fluency during the task (Nation, 2007: 8). The students were asked to time themselves discussing the topic of their choice for two minutes and then again for one minute.

Although this exercise was interactive and, in that sense, not a straightforward fluency activity in that one speaker presumably did not speak for the entire minute(s), the aim was to raise awareness on how a decreasing time limit, repetition, and a set topic for discussion might ease the flow of spoken production. After this activity, students were asked what they think fluency entails, before moving on to describe some central features of oral fluency in the lesson slide. During this lesson the students were also given a brief on the fluency activity that would be completed in the next lesson, also based on the 4/3/2 technique although a bit more systematic and accurate in that the students would be speaking on their topic from the written task for 2 minutes, then 1 minute, and finally 30 seconds.

There are some central features of task design that optimize the development of fluency, which will be briefly commented upon here. One feature is the quantity of language output, which can be produced by setting an objective of time during the

activity, resulting in the speaker filling that time with large amounts of language output (Nation, 1991). Setting limited demands is also an important feature to recreate in the sense that when practicing fluency, the learner should not be confronted with new language items or vocabulary but rather be given the opportunity to use the language skills already acquired without the need to grasp new topics or use unfamiliar language items (Nation, 1991). These features were met in the task design through setting the time limit and making explicit the kind of language output that was expected from the students. Using the topic of their own written assignment for the fluency task should have eliminated any concerns with unfamiliar language items and as the students were instructed to choose a topic they were most interested in, or familiar with, the expectation was also that the students would be able to speak about the topic for a full 2 minutes, with additional help provided by the peer feedback.

Other central features of fluency activities are the repetition, preparation, planning and the seeking of feedback (Nation, 1991) which were recreated in this design by letting the students know in advance what the activity will look like next lesson, and giving them the opportunity to prepare as they wish. Additionally, the students would be completing a self-assessment grid on spoken fluency (Council of Europe, 2018), with the aim of raising awareness on where they would place themselves on the scale, and perhaps noticing some difference in fluency when comparing their performance during the first 2 minutes of speech to that of their last 30 seconds of speech in the activity. This information was also given during this preparatory lesson in order to facilitate time management and completion of the activity in the upcoming lesson.

At the end of this lesson the students were also given instructions on their final recording, which would constitute one part of their exam grade. Students were prompted to read the feedback comments given, while listening to their first recording, in order to better understand what features were being commented upon. The students were then to re-record the same snippet of text and submit it whenever they were happy with the final version. The developed assessment criteria (see Appendix C) were also posted on the learning platform so that the students could better understand the grading criteria and relate their own performance grade to the given descriptors. Moreover, Tergujeff et al. (2017) highlight the importance of communicating the assessment criteria to students by making them explicit, so as to diminish any presumptions of

arbitrary assessment. The descriptors in the assessment were partly adapted from the column "Phonology" in the CEFR scale *Qualitative features of spoken language* (Council of Europe, 2018: 171-172), but mostly created based on the features of pronunciation that were discussed during Lesson 2 of the sequence: sound articulation, word and sentence stress, as well as intonation patterns.

Lesson 5

During this fifth lesson the fluency activity described above was completed in groups of 3-4 students. The activity was then followed up by individual self-assessment grids, based on the CEFR scale for spoken fluency, on the learning platform used by the school. The students were to consider their own speech during the first and final speaking turn and try to place their performances on one of the descriptive levels. This self-assessment did not work as planned, due to technical difficulties on the platform function, as the students were able to choose several of the descriptors. However, it can be presumed that the self-assessment did raise the students' awareness of what aspects oral fluency entails and that they were still able to match their own language use to these general descriptors.

Exam and Feedback Session

As previously stated, the final recording formed part of the students' exam grade (20%). The remaining 80% of the exam grade consisted of assessing other skills not specifically related to this case study (vocabulary, reading, listening and writing). The assessment criteria for the recording (Appendix C) served as the basis for evaluation and the recordings were given separate grades for sound articulation, word stress, and sentence stress and intonation. The average of these three features accounted for the 20% of the exam grade. After the exam there was also a feedback session with the group that wrapped up the sequence, during which the exam was reviewed, and the students were also allotted the time to fill in the postsurvey (Appendix B).

5. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results and discussion of the collected data will be divided into seven sections, with the first section presenting the results of the general items in the survey which will serve as the background insight into the students' general experiences of and attitudes toward speaking English. The second section will detail the results on the students' self-assessment of a variety of level B2.1. speaking skills as detailed in the curricular goals.

Sections 5.3-5.6. contain the presentation, comparison and analysis of the results from the pre- and the postsurvey. It is important to keep in mind that there are two more respondents in the postsurvey (17) than in the presurvey (15), which may to an extent limit the conclusions that can be drawn, since it is impossible to say whether the smaller differences between the presurvey and the postsurvey are due to some change caused by the intervention or due to a new respondent's views being added. While these smaller changes may be commented upon and tentatively analyzed, the general tendency of the distribution of responses will be more central to the answering of my research questions.

These presurvey-postsurvey comparison sections will be followed by a content analysis in section 5.7. of the open-ended questions in the postsurvey, which will provide a more detailed insight into the individual students' attitudes toward and experiences of the intervention, and will thus help illuminate the results presented in the previous sections.

5.1. Students' Experiences of and Attitudes toward Speaking English

This section outlines the results from the students' responses in the presurvey to the questions asking about their general experiences and habits of speaking English, different varieties of English as well as what kinds of speaking exercises are commonly used during lessons and which exercises the students consider to be the most useful.

The students were asked to indicate the frequency with which they speak the language both inside and outside of the classroom, in order to gain some insight into how disposed the students are in general toward speaking English in the formal classroom setting as well as to get an overview of their interaction with the language

outside of the classroom. Figure 1 below details the distribution of responses to the question of how often the students speak English during English lessons.

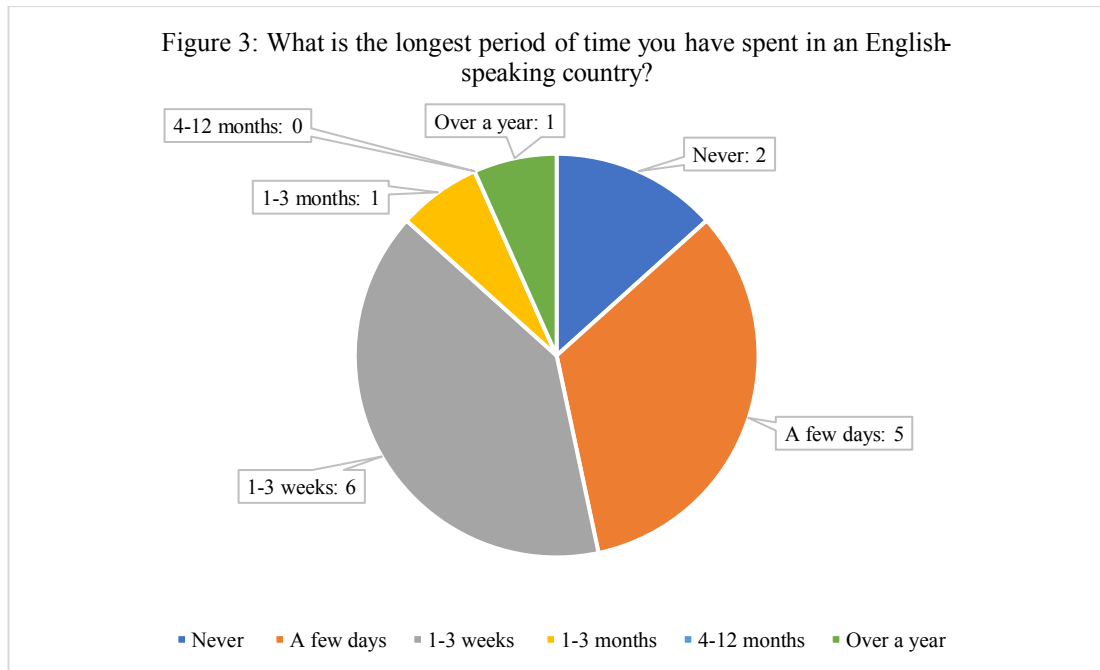Figure 1: How often do you speak English during English lessons?
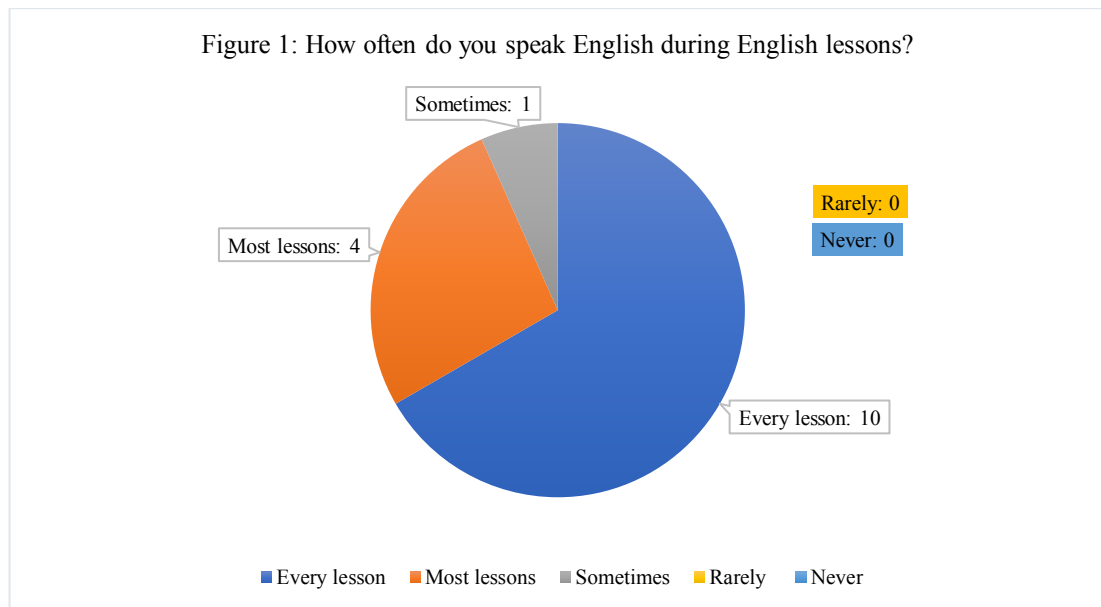
The results indicate that all students speak English during lessons, most of them every lesson (10/15) and some of them most lessons (4/15). Only one student indicated that they only speak sometimes, and none of the students chose the options rarely or never. These results show that the students in this particular class are quite disposed toward speaking the language in the classroom, which was a positive outcome considering the content of the intervention in this study.

When asked about how often the students have a conversation in English the responses were a bit more widely distributed among the given options, as shown in Figure 2 below:

Figure 2: How often do you have a conversation in English during your free time?
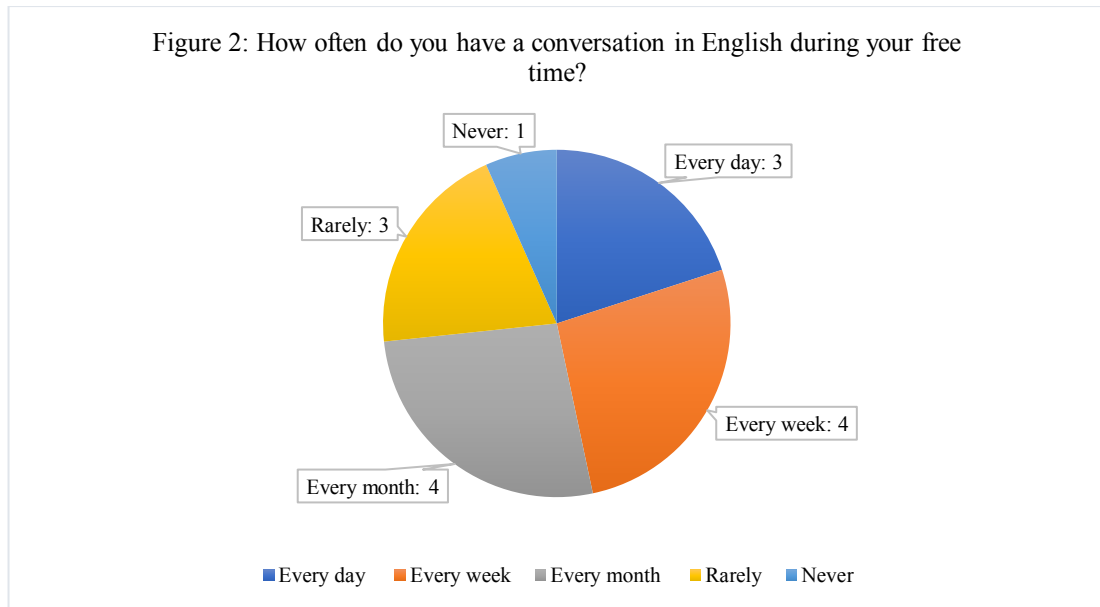
These results show that while many of the students also use spoken English outside of the formal classroom setting quite frequently, there are also some who speak English rarely (3/15) or never (1/15) outside of English lessons at school. The difference in distribution between Figures 1 and 2 might partly be due to the difference in opportunity: it is safe to assume that the formal classroom setting provides all students with an opportunity to speak the language that may not otherwise present itself during their free time. Alternatively, the students may have the opportunity to speak English during their free time but choose not to, and only speak during lessons due to formal expectations.

In order to gain more insight into the students' interaction with the language, the students were also asked about the longest period of time spent in an English-speaking country. The distribution of responses are detailed in Figure 3 below.

Figure 3: What is the longest period of time you have spent in an English-speaking country?

4-12 months: 0
Over a year: 1
Never: 2
1-3 months: 1
A few days: 5
1-3 weeks: 6

■ Never ■ A few days ■ 1-3 weeks ■ 1-3 months ■ 4-12 months ■ Over a year

The figure indicates that most of the students have at least spent some time in an English-speaking country, albeit to a varying degree. Most commonly, the students have spent something between 1-3 weeks (6/15) or a few days (5/15) in an English-speaking country, with two students choosing the option never, as well as two others who have spent a longer period of time in an English-speaking country (one 1-3 months, another over a year). Generally, the tendencies in Figures 1-3 indicate that the majority of students in this group do interact quite frequently in and with spoken English, although there also seems to be a few students who are not as immersed, disposed or have had the opportunity to interact with the language to the same degree as the majority.

This background information was important to collect since often these facts affect the ways in which speaking in a second language is approached in the classroom. It could be suggested that a student who has spent over a year in an English-speaking country and has had many opportunities to speak in the language may react somewhat differently to development and assessment of speaking skills than a student with limited opportunities to engage in the language, as previous familiarity, interest in, and success with the target language or culture tends to increase positive attitudes and motivation toward it in general (Ellis, 1997).

The varying results in the figures above also reflect the likelihood that a group, even one as relatively homogenous as a classroom in Finland, will be composed of

individuals with very different backgrounds concerning any specific skill, interest, or experience. These results also indicate toward the status of English in Finland as more of a second language, or lingua franca, rather than a 'traditional' foreign language, as the majority in this group do seem to converse in English outside of the classroom as well. Presumably, the students come into contact with English more frequently through other media and forms of interaction, as reading and writing in the language may not be as limited by opportunity as speaking.

The presurvey also asked the students to indicate what types of speaking activities are most frequently used in the classroom, as well as to choose which activities they consider to be most useful. A list of activities were provided, and the students were to choose the three most frequently occurring and the three most useful activities as perceived by themselves. The results from both questions are detailed in Figure 4 below.
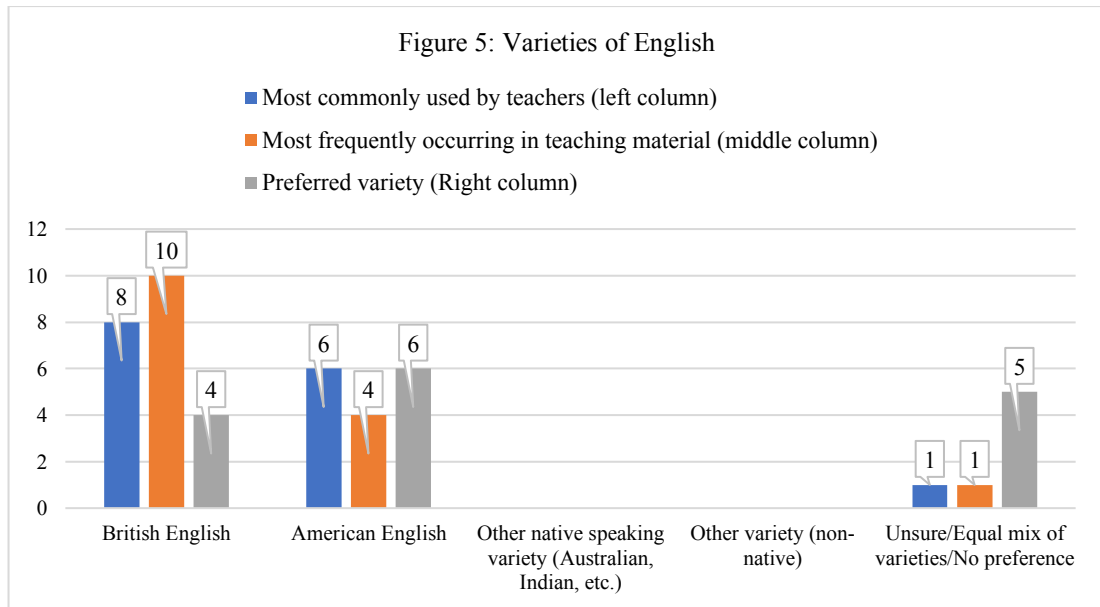

Figure 4: Speaking Exercises
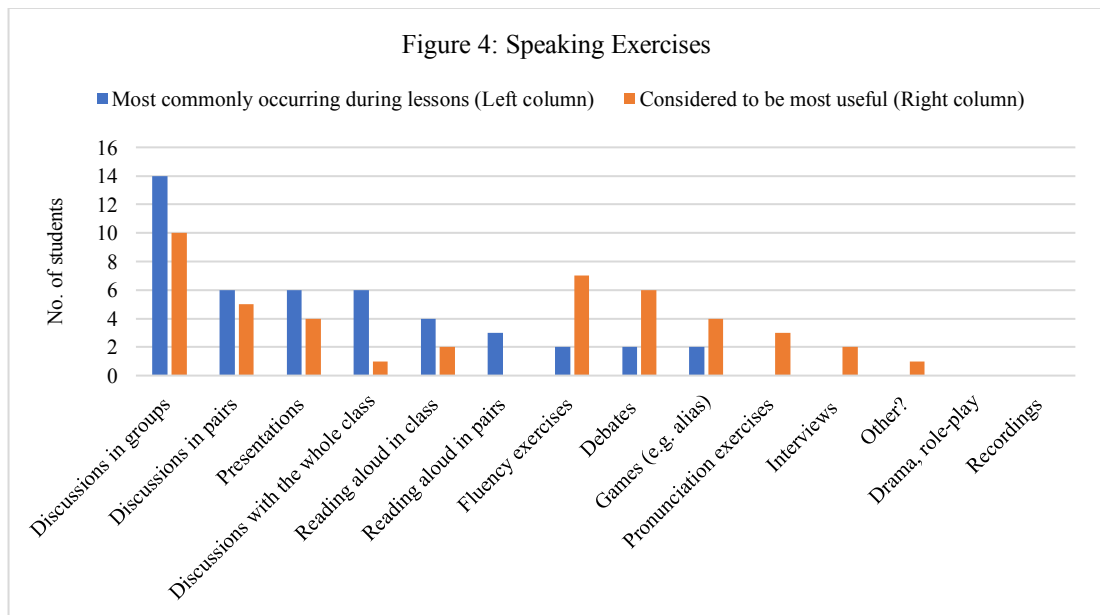
The results show that the most frequently occurring activity is group discussions, as almost all students (14/15) chose this as one of their options. Other frequently occurring activities include discussions in pairs (6/15), discussions with the whole class (6/15) and presentations (6/15). Other activities that were indicated by the students to occur most frequently were fluency exercises (2/15), debates (2/15), reading aloud in class (4/15), reading aloud in pairs (3/15) and games (1/15).

The distribution of responses concerning which activities the students perceive as most useful was a bit more diverse. Group discussions still received the most votes (10/15) indicating a positive relation between frequency and usefulness of the speaking activity. Almost half of the students indicated that fluency exercises would be useful (7/15), which is not reflected in the numbers of frequently occurring activities. Other notable results that I want to address are that pronunciation exercises were indicated by 3 students to be useful, while it does not seem that this is a very frequent activity during lessons. Additionally, the option of using recordings as a speaking exercise did not receive any votes for frequent occurrence or for usefulness. This might be an interesting observation to keep in mind in the ensuing discussion of the results of the students' attitudes after the intervention.

From the trends described in the two paragraphs above we might be able to draw the conclusion that they correlate with the previously discussed notion that speaking has traditionally been emphasized as the tool for communication and that more systematic teaching of it as a language skill in itself tends to be neglected (Bygate, 2018). This is suggested in Figure 4 in that different forms of discussions and presentations seem to be the most popular speaking activities, whereas the options that comprise more specific aspects of speaking skills (pronunciation and fluency exercises) seem to be less frequently used, if at all. It is also worth noting that some of the more structured activities, such as fluency exercises and debates, are considered to be useful by many students but they seem to occur less frequently. This suggests that, at this point during the intervention, many of the students in this group are positively disposed toward more systematic speaking activities.

The presurvey also asked the students about their experiences of and attitudes toward different varieties of English, including the most frequently used by teachers and the teaching material, as well as asking the students about their own preference. The results of these three items are collectively presented in Figure 5 below:

Figure 5: Varieties of English

- Most commonly used by teachers (left column)
- Most frequently occurring in teaching material (middle column)
- Preferred variety (Right column)

	British English	American English	Other native speaking variety (Australian, Indian, etc.)	Other variety (non-native)	Unsure/Equal mix of varieties/No preference
Most commonly used by teachers	8	6			1
Most frequently occurring in teaching material	10	4			1
Preferred variety	4	6			5

As for the most commonly used variety by teachers, the responses were quite evenly distributed between British English (8 students, 53%) and American English (6 students, 40%), with one (7%) student choosing the option unsure/equal mix of varieties. However, the teaching material seems to lean more toward British English (as indicated by 10 students, 67%), whereas American English is indicated to occur less frequently (4 students, 27%), albeit still more often than other native or non-native varieties. One student also indicated uncertainty or that an equal mix of varieties occurs in the teaching material. The students were then also asked to indicate their preferred variety, if any. These responses were distributed more evenly with six students opting for American English (40%), five students indicating no preference (33%) and four students preferring British English (27%).

Tentatively, we could conclude that these results seem to correlate with some previously discussed studies (Björklund, 2008; Forsman, 2004), which found that many Finland-Swedish students tend to associate British English with the formal classroom setting, whereas American English seems to be the more prevalent variety in extracurricular contexts. This might correlate with the results of American English being slightly more favored by the students, although the difference in distribution was quite minimal, hence no ultimate conclusions can be drawn based on this sample. However, two of the students also chose to provide further comments on the question concerning their preferred varieties, one of whom commented as follows:

> *"American English is the variety that occurs the most on social media and thats [sic] why I prefer it"*

This comment supports the conclusion that some students may be inclined to prefer the variety they are most familiar with, for instance via social media, where American English has a more dominating presence. Another comment specified that their preferred variety was somewhat influenced by formal requirements:

> *"I myself speak Australian English, but I've understood that I will have to stick with one type on [sic] English in the matriculation exam and therefore I'm trying to use strictly British English words and spelling (instead of American) becasue [sic] it is pretty close to Australian."*

Although the student seems to in fact prefer the use of Australian English, they indicated that in the educational context British English is their preferred variety due to perceived consistency requirements in the matriculation exam. However, the assessment criteria for the matriculation exam do not specify that any inconsistencies in the students' use of different written varieties will result in the deduction of marks in the written task. Rather, the assessment criteria and scoring of the written production are based mainly on the communication skills of the student. Secondary scoring categories are the content and structure of the text, and the linguistic range and accuracy; with no mention of consistent use of a variety in the latter category (Ylioppilastutkintolautakunta, 2020: 16).

5.2. Students' Self-Assessment of Level B2.1. Speaking Skills

The presurvey also asked the students to indicate, on a 1-5 Likert-scale, their level of agreement with different statements concerning their communicative skills (as outlined by the goals of the curriculum) and some qualitative aspects of spoken language (as outlined in the CEFR). The purpose of this was to get an overview of where the students place themselves currently and whether there are any differences between specific aspects of speaking that might indicate the students struggle more with one aspect than another.

Since the curriculum also uses the CEFR level B2 as a reference goal for the students at this stage of their studies, the descriptors detailing the qualitative aspects of spoken language use (Council of Europe, 2001: 28) were also included in the

presurvey. These aspects include range, accuracy, fluency, interaction and coherence. Table 1 below outlines the distribution of responses:

Table 1: CEFR Classifications	Self-assessment Items	Agree	Disagree	Uncertain
Coherence	I can use some cohesive devices to link my utterances into clear, coherent speech	12	3	0
Interaction	I can use different communicative strategies to support interaction	11	3	1
Fluency	I can speak during a longer period of time with a fairly even tempo and few noticeably long pauses	14	1	0
Accuracy	I can speak without making errors which cause misunderstanding, and can correct most of my mistakes	11	2	2
Range	I can give clear descriptions and express viewpoints on most general topics, without searching for words too much	13	1	1

The majority of the students indicate agreement with the statements from the CEFR but there are also a few students opting for disagree/uncertain in each descriptor. The survey provided the students with examples and definitions of some of the technical terms in the descriptors, such as cohesive devices and communicative strategies in order to facilitate the understanding of them (see Appendix A). Interestingly, the statement encompassing fluency received most agreement from the students (14), with only one (1) indicating disagreement, followed by range (13). Overall, most students also agreed with the descriptors for coherence, interaction, and accuracy as well.

Table 2 below presents the results from the statements connected to the curricular goals of communicative skills for level B2.1. students (Utbildningsstyrelsen, 2015: 253), enrolled in the advanced English course at an upper secondary school in Finland:

Table 2: Comparison to CEFR classifications	Self-assessmnet Items	Agree	Disagree	Uncertain
Interaction	I can use different communicative strategiers while speaking	10	3	2
Interaction	I can vary my language use to fit different communicative situations	12	1	2
Accuracy	I can correct myself while speaking if needed	12	2	1
Accuracy	I can discuss the meaning of complex words and expressions	11	2	2
Range	I can communicate without hesitation in new situations that also contain more advanced language	11	2	2

As shown in the table above, the majority of the students agree with the statements, which is a positive indication of most of the students having achieved, at least in their own opinion, the curricular goals concerning communicative skills. However, there

are also a few students who indicate disagreement (or uncertainty) in each statement. From looking at each submitted response individually, it is clear that only one student disagreed with all of the statements in both tables, whereas seven students agreed with all of the statements. The remaining seven provided different responses for different descriptors (ranging from 2-5 on the Likert-scale), although the majority of the responses still leaned toward agreement, as can be seen in the Tables above.

This suggests is that there is in fact only one student in this group who does not consider their current language skills comparable to level B2.1. as described by the CEFR scale and the curriculum goals on the specified aspects of spoken language above. According to these self-assessment style survey items, it is also safe to conclude that most of the students would equate their speaking skills to the level that they are expected to reach at this stage of their studies. Nonetheless, it is still important not to set unrealistic expectations on the class as whole based on the assumption that the majority of the class are relatively proficient.

This section of the presurvey also served as a self-assessment, concerning different aspects of speaking skills according to the level the students are expected to achieve during their upper secondary school years. Implicitly, this part of the survey may have raised awareness on features and skills that are involved in speaking and communication, as well as encouraging the students to reflect on their own use of spoken language in connection to the curricular goals.

5.3. Speaking English During Lessons

This section presents the results from both the presurvey and the postsurvey, concerning the students' attitudes and experiences of speaking English during lessons. As shown in Figure 6 below, the majority of the students indicate, in both surveys, that it feels natural to speak English during lessons.


Figure 6: It feels natural to speak English during lessons
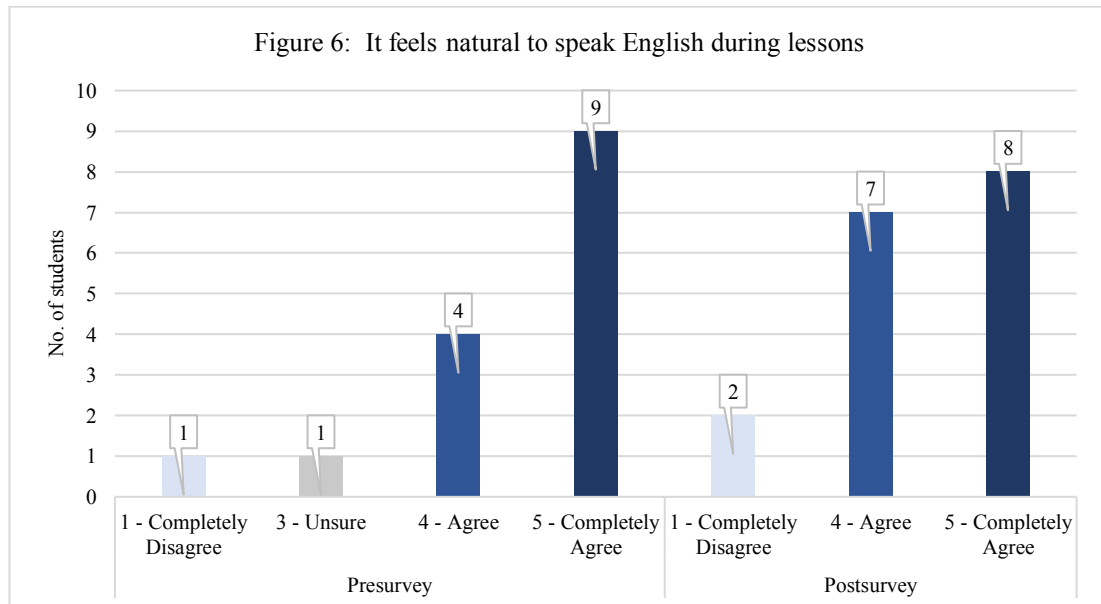
Only one student indicated complete disagreement with the statement in the presurvey, while two students chose this option in the postsurvey. One student also indicated uncertainty in the presurvey. Interestingly, the distribution of responses was a bit more varied for the statement "I feel nervous about speaking English during lessons", as shown in Figure 7 below:

Figure 7: I feel nervous about speaking English during lessons
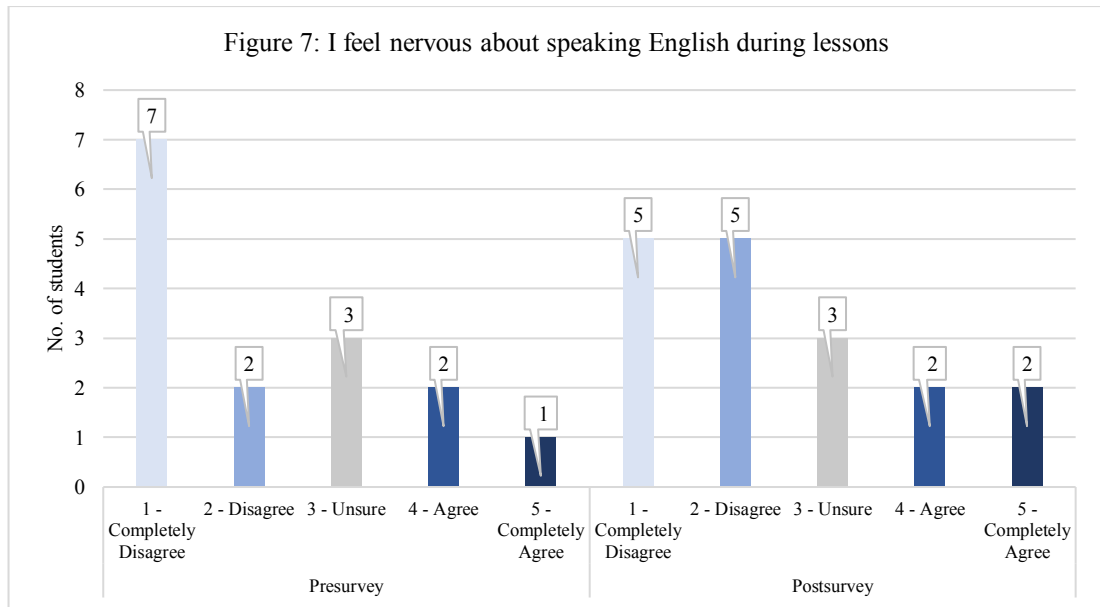
In comparison to Figure 6, slightly more students placed themselves on the unsure-agree-completely agree end of the statement. Moreover, fewer students chose the option on the extreme end (Completely disagree) than in the previous statement, indicating that there may be some nervousness attached to speaking, even though it feels natural to do so for most of the students.
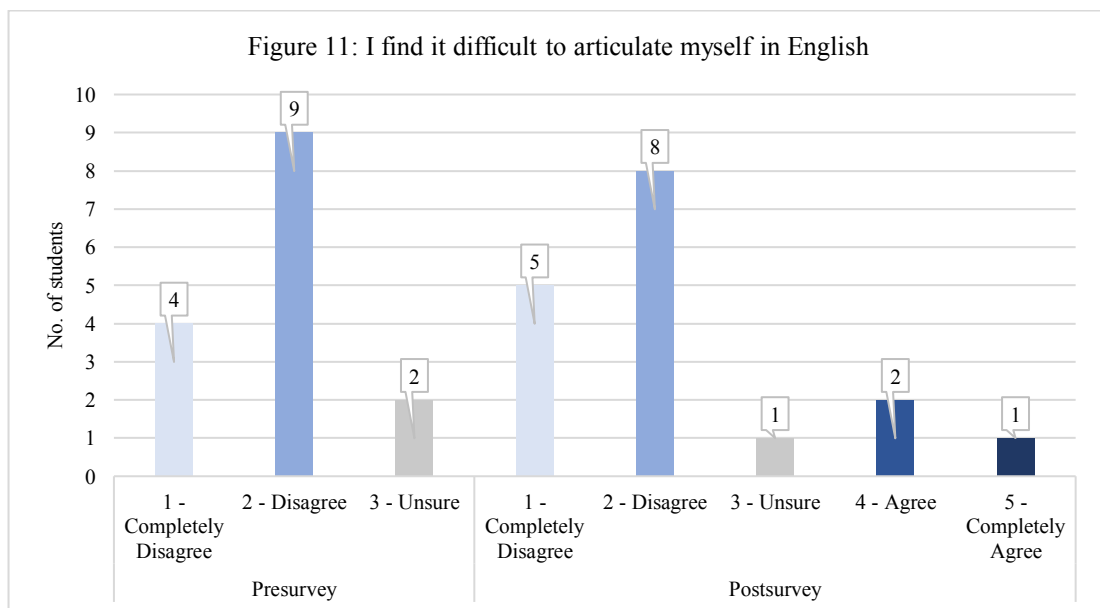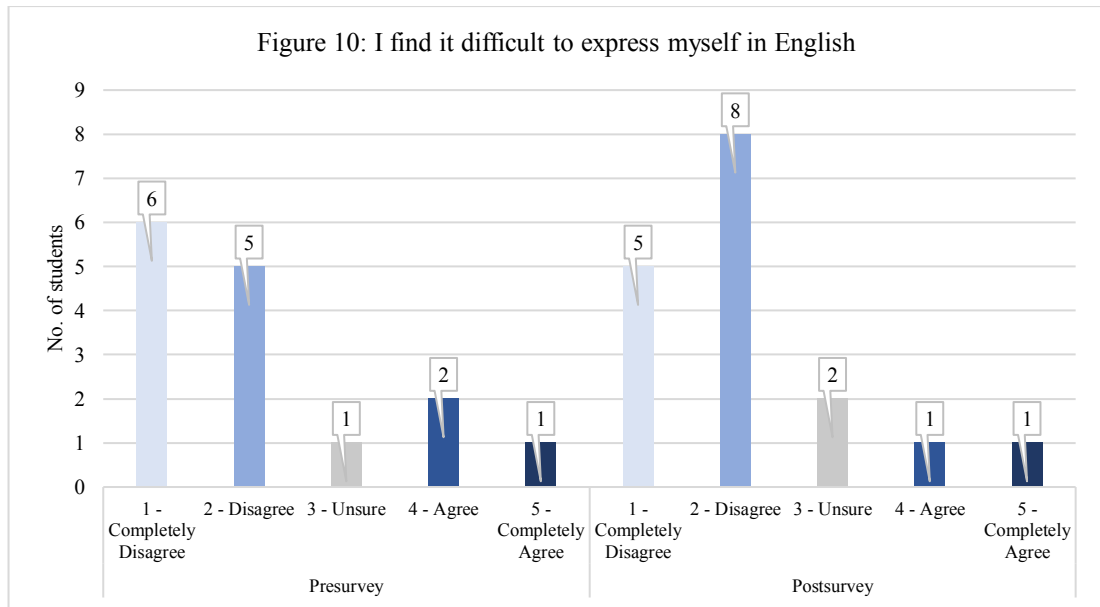
More students also speak English more often than Swedish during lessons, as shown in Figure 8 below:

Figure 8: I speak English more often than Swedish during lessons
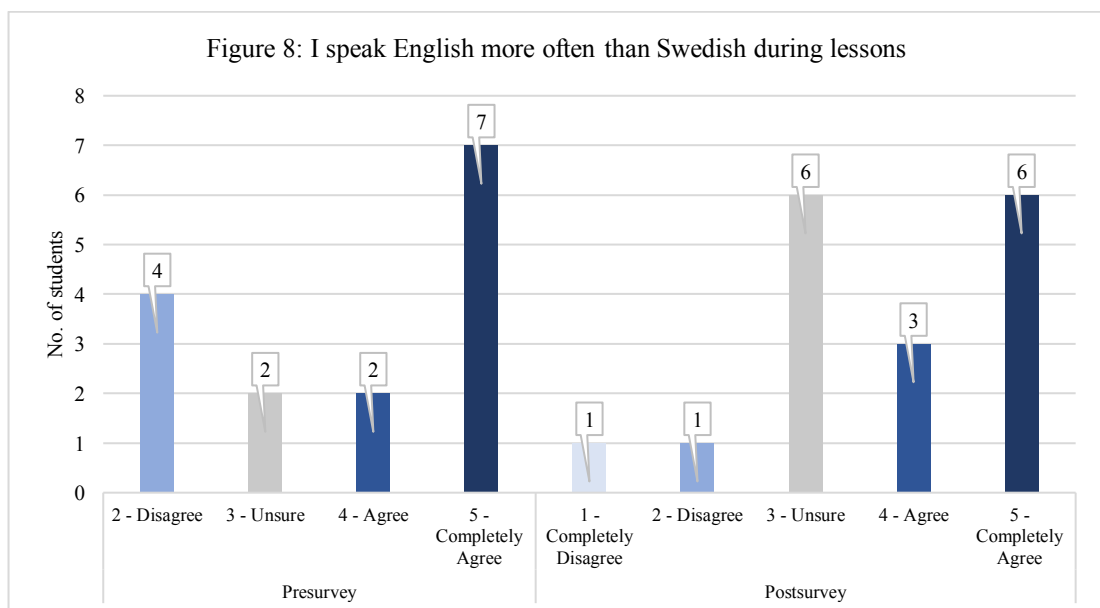
However, quite a lot of the students chose the option "unsure", especially in the postsurvey (6), which makes it difficult to analyze what the students mean. One possibility is that they speak a roughly equal amount of both, another is that they did not understand what was meant by the question, and yet another could be that they chose the neutral option if neither agree nor disagree felt intuitively like the right choice. There are of course several other possibilities, and this goes for all the Likert-scale survey items since "unsure" is an option in all of them. Nevertheless, the majority of students (9 in both surveys) indicated that they do speak English more often than Swedish during lessons. The number of students who disagreed decreased a little (pre:4 vs post: 2, one of whom completely disagreed), while more students opted for unsure in the postsurvey.

The final three statements in this section aimed at identifying whether there were any specific aspects of speaking that the students identify as more difficult than others. The students were asked how difficult they find it to convey themselves (e.g., choosing the content of their speech), to express themselves (e.g., choosing appropriate words and expressions), and to articulate (e.g., pronouncing words and sentences). Generally, the majority of the students indicated disagreement with the statements in both the presurvey and postsurvey, as detailed in Figures 9-11 below.

Figure 9: I find it difficult to convey what I want to say in English

Figure 10: I find it difficult to express myself in English

Figure 11: I find it difficult to articulate myself in English
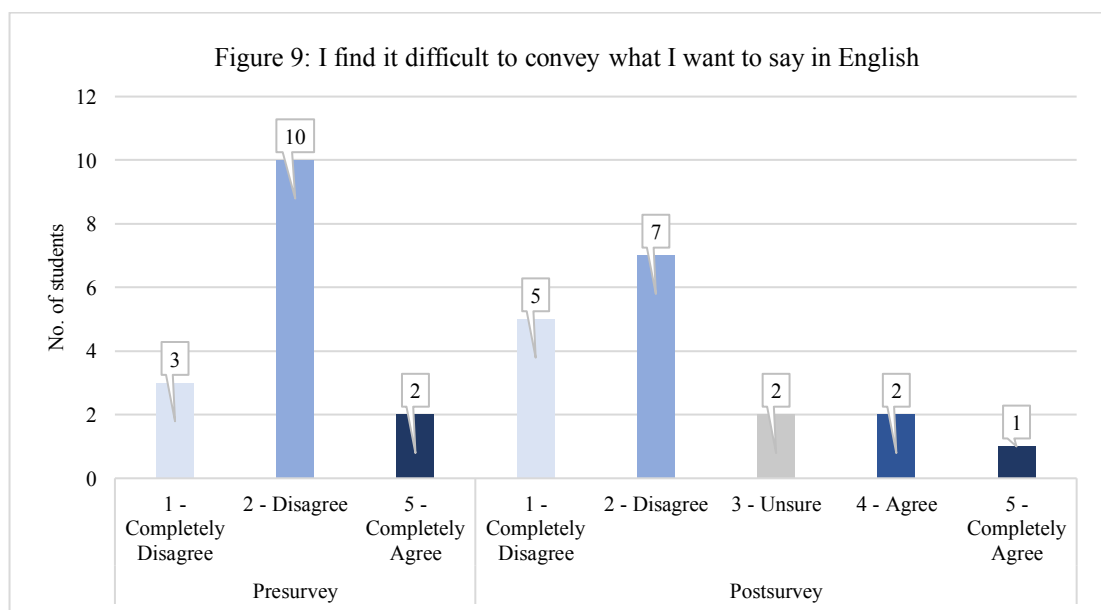
Generally, no major changes between the presurvey and postsurvey responses were observed in the results of this section, other than the fact that one student in the postsurvey expressed difficulty with all three statements. It could be possible that this student was a new respondent (i.e., did not fill in the presurvey), in which case their response does not compare with a previous one from the presurvey. Moreover, the lack of any major pre-post changes could be due to the fact that these items did ask the students about more cemented habits or general speaking skills that are perhaps less likely to be altered over a very short period of time, such as the ability to express oneself or how natural speaking in a language is perceived.

Although most students do not find articulating, expressing, or conveying themselves as particularly difficult, there are still a few cases in both the presurvey and postsurvey results that do agree with the given statements. A look at the individual responses in the presurvey shows that there were two students in this group that indicated that it is difficult to convey and to express themselves. These same students were also the ones who chose the option unsure when asked about articulation. One other student in the presurvey indicated that it is difficult to express themselves, but not to articulate or convey themselves.

In comparison, one student indicated in the postsurvey complete agreement with all three statements, meaning that they find all of the described abilities as difficult. This same student indicated previously complete disagreement with the statement "It feels natural to speak English during lessons" (see Figure 6) as well as indicating complete agreement with the statement "I feel nervous about speaking English during lessons" (see Figure 7), which implies a correlation between the student's perception of their ability of articulating, conveying, and expressing themselves with their level of comfort when it comes to speaking English during lessons. Interestingly, this same individual indicated complete agreement with all statements concerning the importance of assessment (see section 5.6), which indicates that this student may acknowledge deficiency in some aspects of their speaking skills but does not see that as an obstacle for the importance of assessment. The same student also expressed much agreement in the sections concerning the importance and efficacy of pronunciation and fluency development (see sections 5.4-5.5), as well as offering positive comments in regard to the intervention and the tasks. What this isolated response suggests, is that a perceived weakness in any language skill does not necessarily entail aversion toward the development or the assessment of it. In fact, it might even be more appreciated by this particular student because they realize that there may be something to gain from spending time on developing speaking skills.

5.4. Students' Attitudes toward Pronunciation

The second part of the pre-post comparison comprised items asking the students about their experiences of and attitudes toward pronunciation teaching, as well as their preferences and opinions on their own pronunciation. Firstly, the students were asked to take a stance on the importance of teaching pronunciation during English lessons. As can be seen in Figure 12 below, there are no extreme differences between the presurvey and the postsurvey results: very few indicate disagreement (pre: 1, post: 2) or uncertainty (pre: 2, post: 1), while the majority indicate agreement:

Figure 12: I think it is important to practice pronunciation during lessons
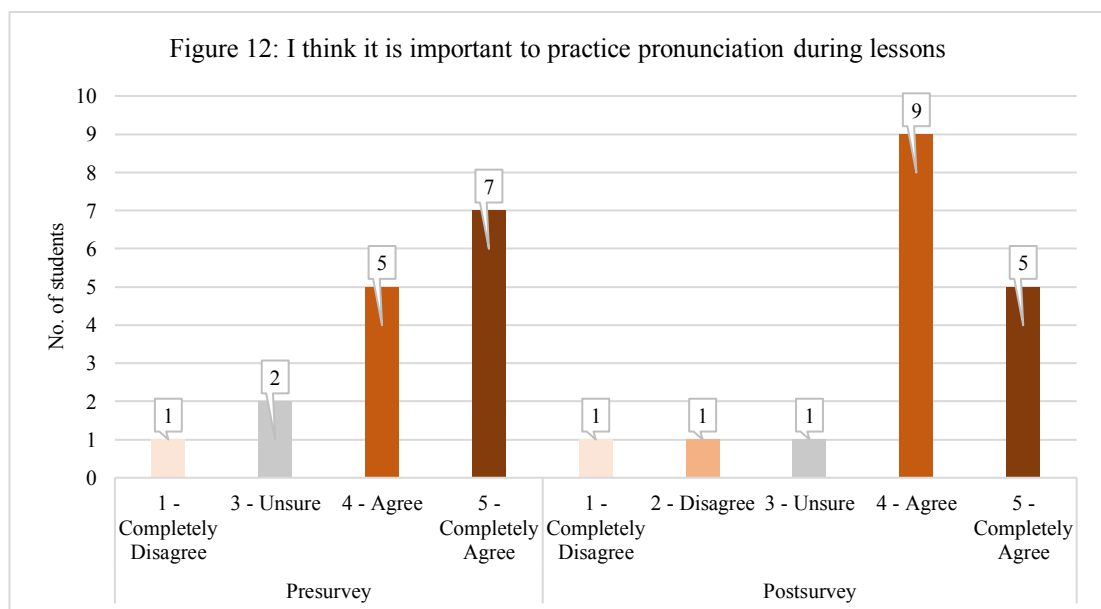
Slightly fewer students opted for completely agree in the postsurvey (5, compared to 7 in the presurvey), whereas more students chose the option agree in the postsurvey (9, compared to 5 in the presurvey). Since pronunciation was one of the central focal points during the intervention, many students' attitudes toward its importance as a skill of speaking may have been consolidated as a result, while the degree of agreement may also have diminished due to the increased exposure to the skill during the sequence.

The following items "I think we practice the pronunciation of individual sounds and words enough" and "I think we practice more general pronunciation patterns enough" received slightly varied results, as indicated by Figures 13 and 14 below:

Figure 13: I think we practice the pronunciation of individual sounds and words enough during our lessons

Figure 14: I think we practice more general pronunciation patterns enough during our lessons (e.g. intonation and stress)
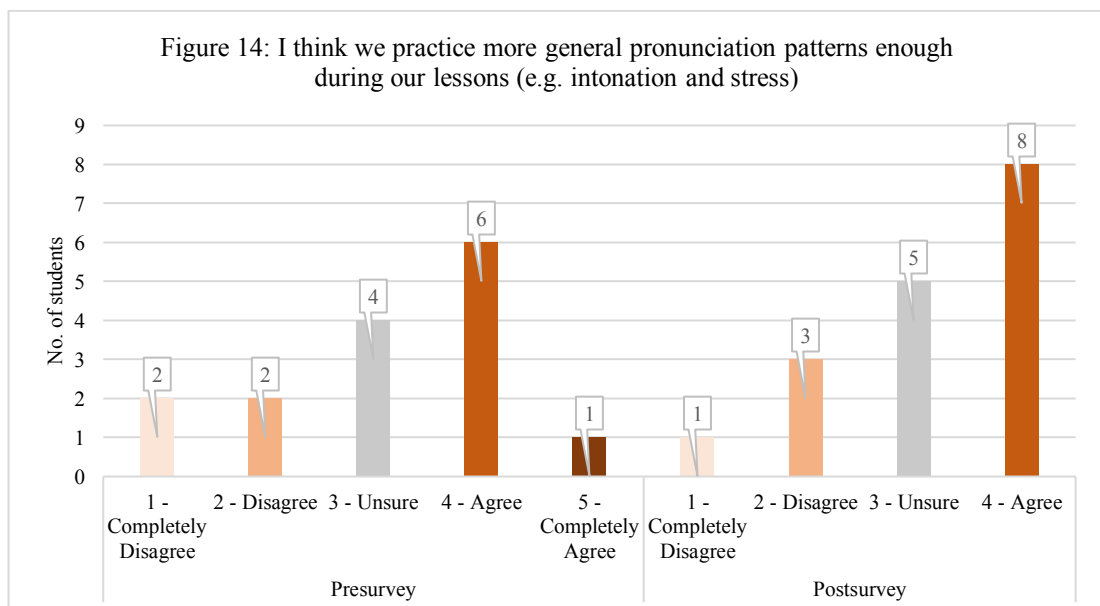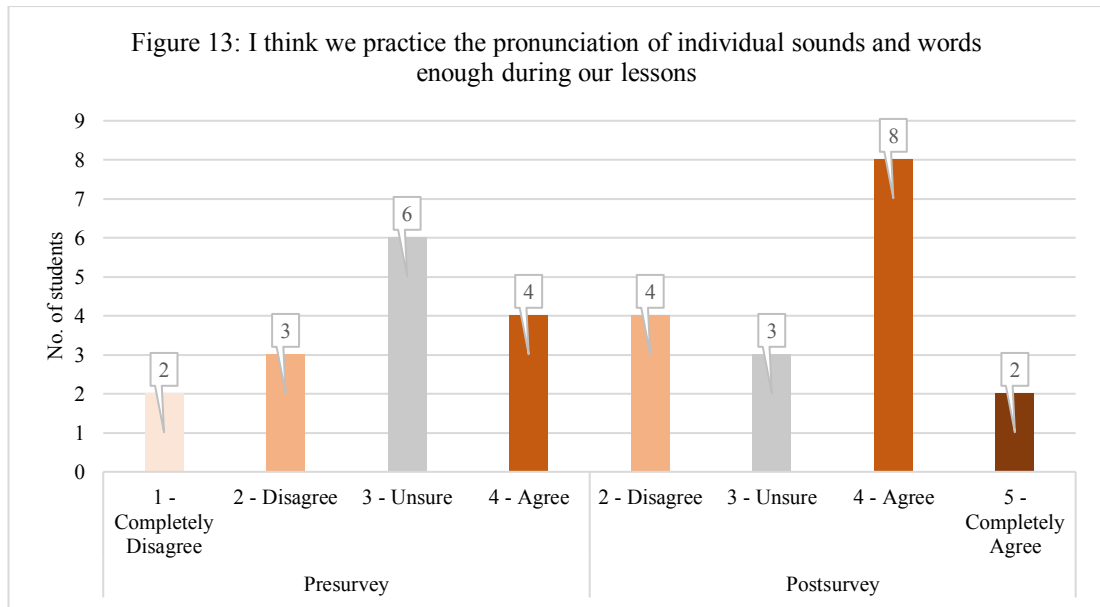
It seems as if in the postsurvey, more students feel like the pronunciation of individual sounds is practiced enough (10) in comparison to the presurvey (4). It might safely be assumed that since the intervention included instruction on sounds and words, the increased amount of agreeing students in the postsurvey may be due to a general experience of having practiced it enough, especially since the postsurvey was taken directly after the intervention. Interestingly, Figure 14 shows quite similar results both presurvey and postsurvey. In agreeing, the students might be indicating that there is enough practice of these features of pronunciation and that they do not need/want any more of them, *or* that there is enough practice of these features and that this is a positive

thing for them. Quite a few students also indicated uncertainty in both of the items, presurvey and postsurvey, which makes it difficult to make inferences about their responses.

This section also asked the students about the importance to them of achieving native-like pronunciation. Interestingly, as shown in Figure 15 below, the number of students indicating agreement increased by quite few in the postsurvey (10 compared to 6 in the presurvey).

Figure 15: It is important for me to achieve native-like pronunciation
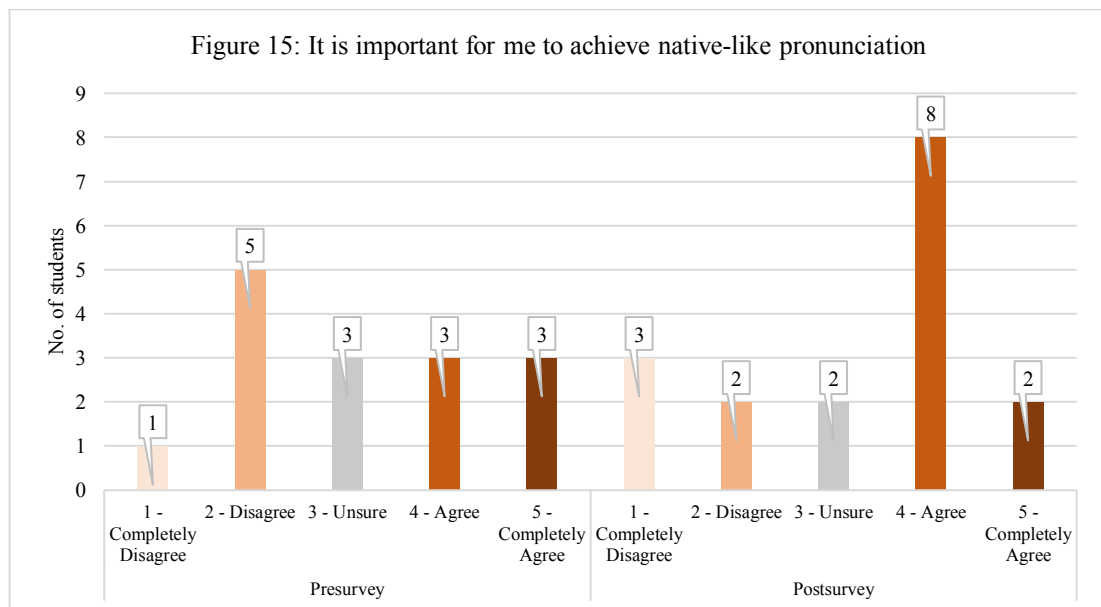
These alterations in the general tendency of the results might indicate that a change in attitudes took place concerning their goals in pronunciation, i.e. that native-like pronunciation became a more important goal after the intervention. However, this might also not be the case as the results for the next item "Having an accent when I speak English does not bother me" received increased agreement in the postsurvey, as indicated by Figure 16 below:

Figure 16: Having an accent when I speak English does not bother me
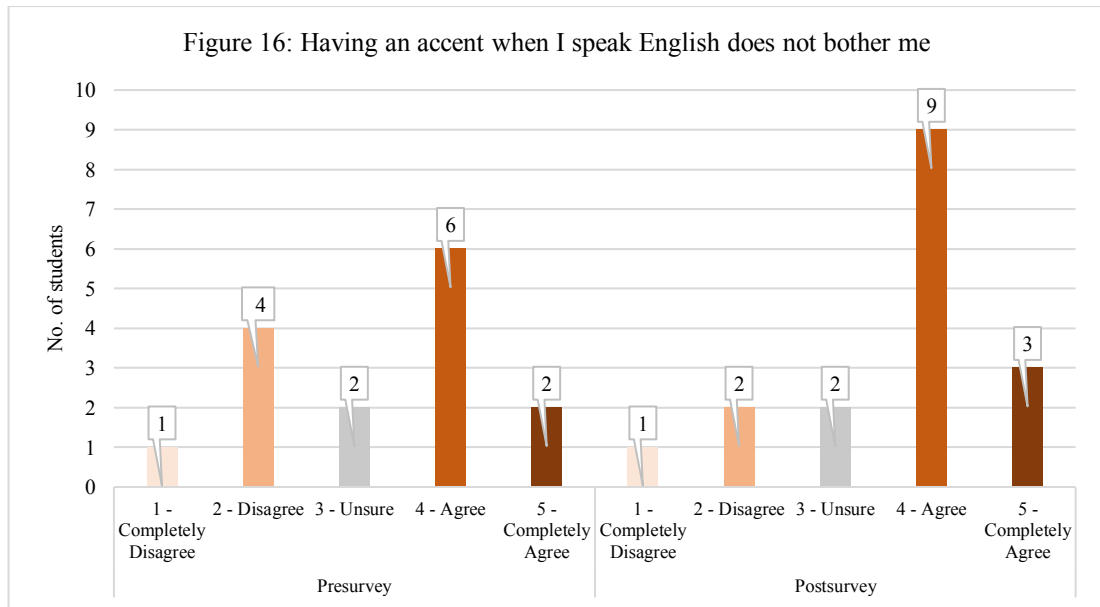
In comparing the results in the two Figures above, at first sight there might be some contradiction in the postsurvey results, as the majority indicate that it is important for them to achieve native-like pronunciation (10) and that having an accent when speaking does not bother them (12). These results show that while students might want to achieve native-like pronunciation they nevertheless do not find accented speech an issue in general, which to me implies that what the students actually might strive toward is clear, intelligible pronunciation (which native-like speech oftentimes is), rather than achieving the pronunciation pattern of any specific variety of English. As previously discussed, in section 3.3.3. of this thesis, L2 students can often assume that native-like pronunciation equals the same features as intelligible pronunciation (Levis, 2018). What could be important in the future is to convey the difference between the two to the students, and emphasize that although native-like speech and intelligible speech may in some contexts be connected, they are not synonymous concepts. Throughout this present intervention, focus was placed on intelligibility, and native-like pronunciation was neither mentioned nor used as a model for assessment. However, it could be a good idea in future contexts to bring up these issues with the class in order to broaden the students' perspective on the topic.

5.5. Students' Attitudes toward Fluency

The third part of the pre-post comparison comprised of items asking the students about their experiences of and attitudes toward fluency teaching. As can be seen in Figure 17 below, almost every single student indicates agreement concerning the importance of practicing fluency during lessons, in both the presurvey and the postsurvey (only 1 unsure in the presurvey).
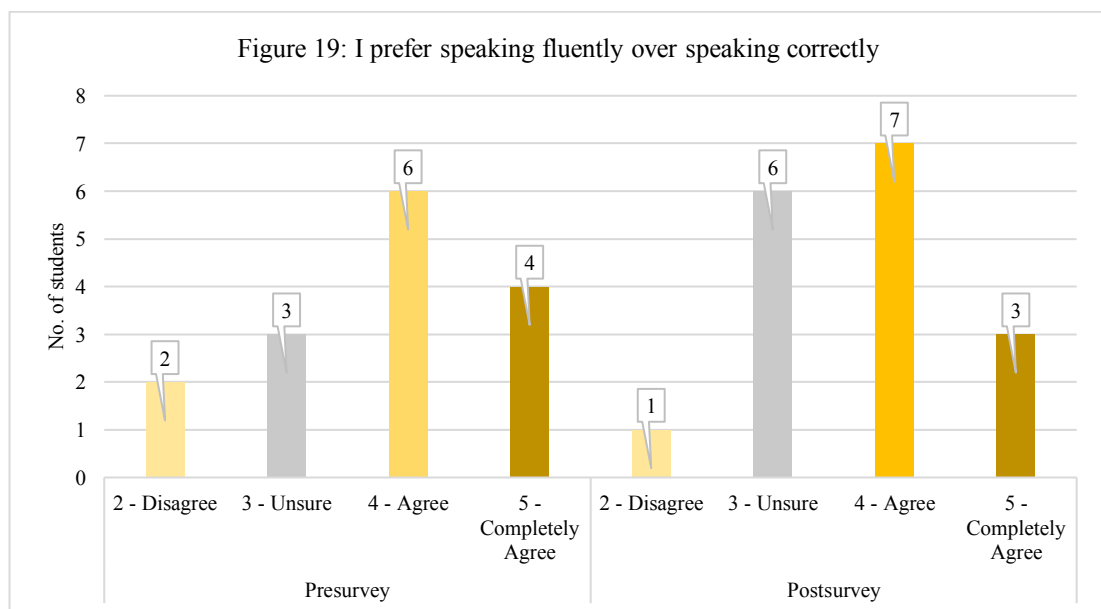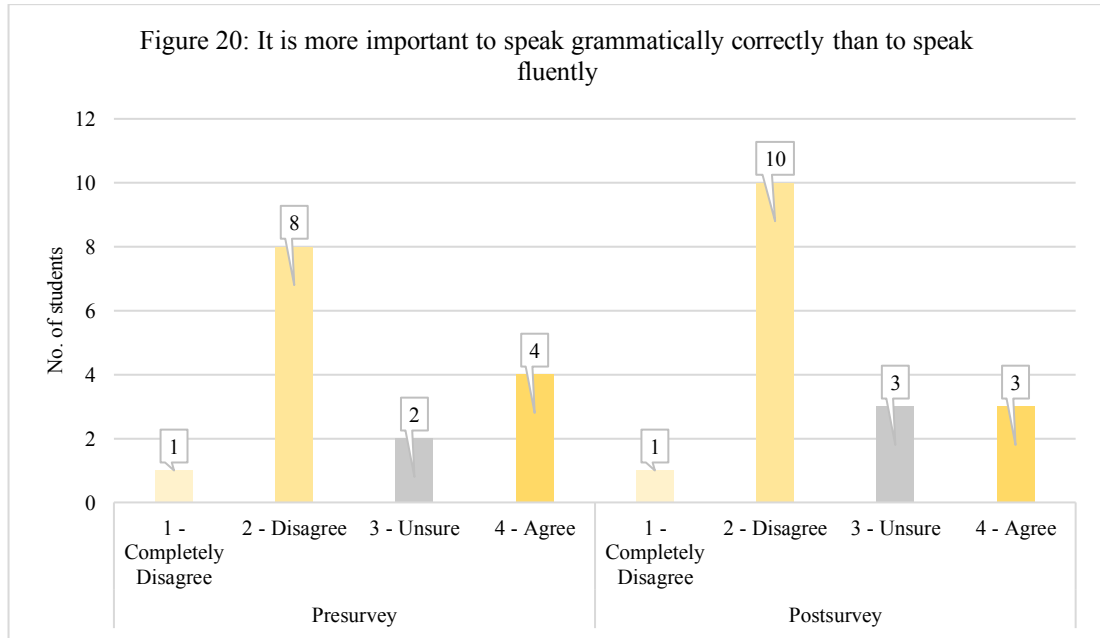

Figure 17: It is important to practice fluency during lessons
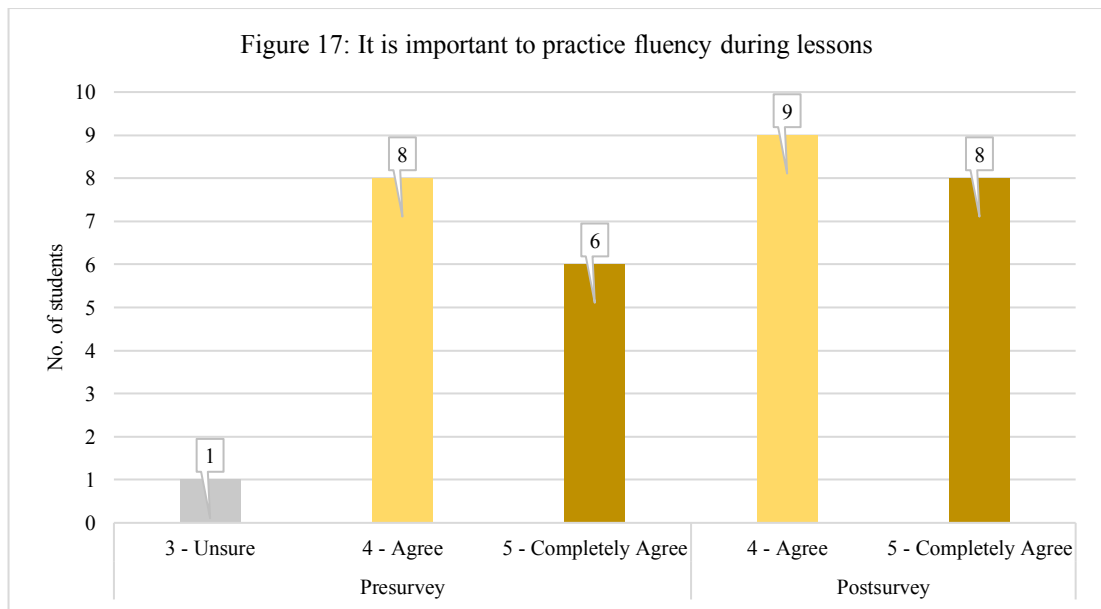
In contrast, not all students perceive that fluency is practiced enough, as can be seen in Figure 18 below:

Figure 18: We get enough instruction on fluency during our lessons
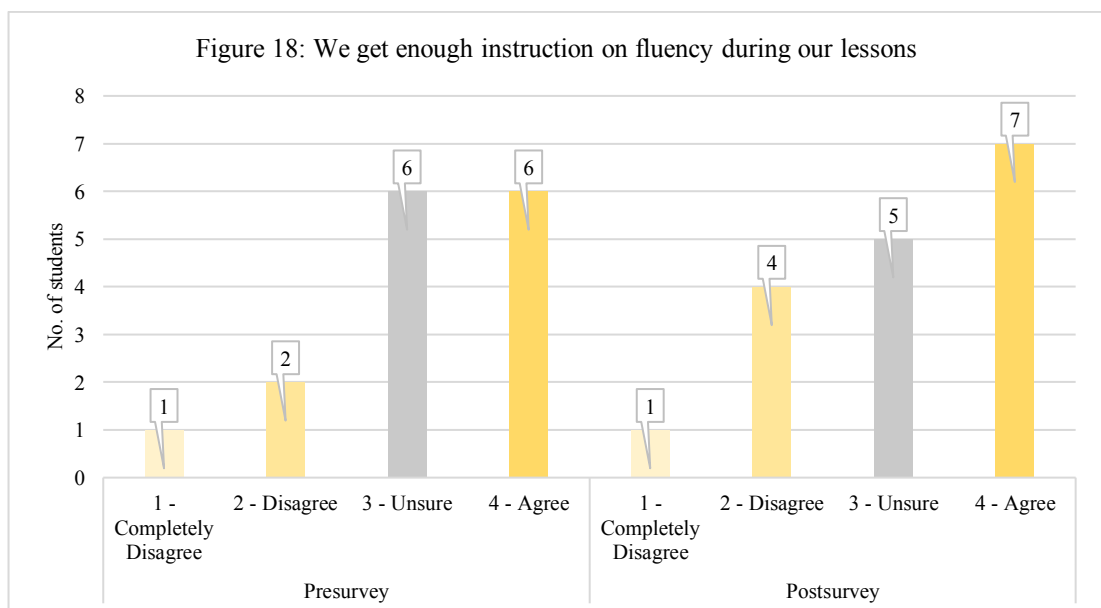
The majority of students indicate disagreement or uncertainty with the statement, with slightly more students disagreeing in the postsurvey. The two figures above suggest that while fluency is regarded as an important skill to practice almost exclusively by all students, both in the presurvey and the postsurvey, less than half of the students think that fluency is given enough attention during lessons (6 in the presurvey, 7 in the postsurvey). Moreover, these results provide some insight into what the students feel are valuable aspects to learn when it comes to speaking skills. For instance, if we juxtapose these results to the similar survey items on pronunciation in the previous section, there seems to be a lot more agreement among the students concerning the importance of fluency compared to pronunciation. This might certainly be due to the fact that fluency is generally regarded as more central to communication than many aspects of pronunciation, such as sound articulation.

The following Figures show the students' preferences and attitudes toward the importance of fluency versus accuracy:

Figure 19: I prefer speaking fluently over speaking correctly

Figure 20: It is more important to speak grammatically correctly than to speak fluently

From Figure 19 we can deduce that most students value fluent speech over accurate speech, which is in a way sensible since speech, as previously discussed, is rarely entirely grammatically accurate in the same way as the written form (Hughes, 2010). Very few students disagreed, i.e. indicating a preference of accuracy over fluency (2 in the presurvey, 1 in the postsurvey), whereas quite a few of the students indicated uncertainty, especially in the postsurvey (6).

The results in Figure 20 also attest to the students' perception of fluency as a more important aspect of speaking than accuracy, with very few students agreeing that accurate speech is more important than fluent speech (4 in the presurvey, 3 in the postsurvey). Figure 20 also shows that the majority of the students indicated disagreement, indicating that speaking fluently exceeds speaking grammatically correctly in perceived importance. The uncertain students in both figures could of course add some more dispersion to these results. However, in general it seems as if the students are agreeing with the previously discussed concept that speaking is by nature not an entirely grammatically correct form of producing language (in that errors are more common and accepted in speech than in writing). The results seem to indicate that this idea is reflected in the students' preferences and attitudes as well. This is further expressed in an additional comment provided by a student regarding what aspects of speaking are important to them:

"I think that the most important part when learning a language is to become confident enough to use it in a normal conversation and be able to discuss using the language. Therefore I don't think that grammar should be the most important part, although it still is important to be taught."

It seems as if the student is placing importance on communicating well in the language, while at the same time not disregarding the importance of developing grammatical skills in the language.

In conclusion, it could be stated that the students in this study place high value on fluency and would like to practice it more. It also seems as if speaking fluently is regarded as a more important skill than some other aspects of speaking skills, such as pronunciation and accuracy. One reason for this is that fluency might be regarded as more central to communication and interaction, than for example pronunciation and accuracy, that often place emphasis on more detailed aspects of speaking. For many, if not most, L2 learners the goal is often proficient communication in the language (Hammerly, 1991) which is why the students in this study might also be less interested in spending time on segmental aspects of speaking skills, as they can often be associated with the earlier stages of language learning, whereas practicing fluency may be a more central objective of more advanced students.

5.6. Attitudes on the Assessment of Speaking Skills

The fourth part of the presurvey-postsurvey comparison comprised of items asking the students about their experiences of and attitudes toward assessment of speaking skills. Figure 21 below shows the distribution of the responses in both surveys concerning the perceived importance of assessing speaking with a grade:

Figure 21: It is important that speaking skills are assessed with a grade
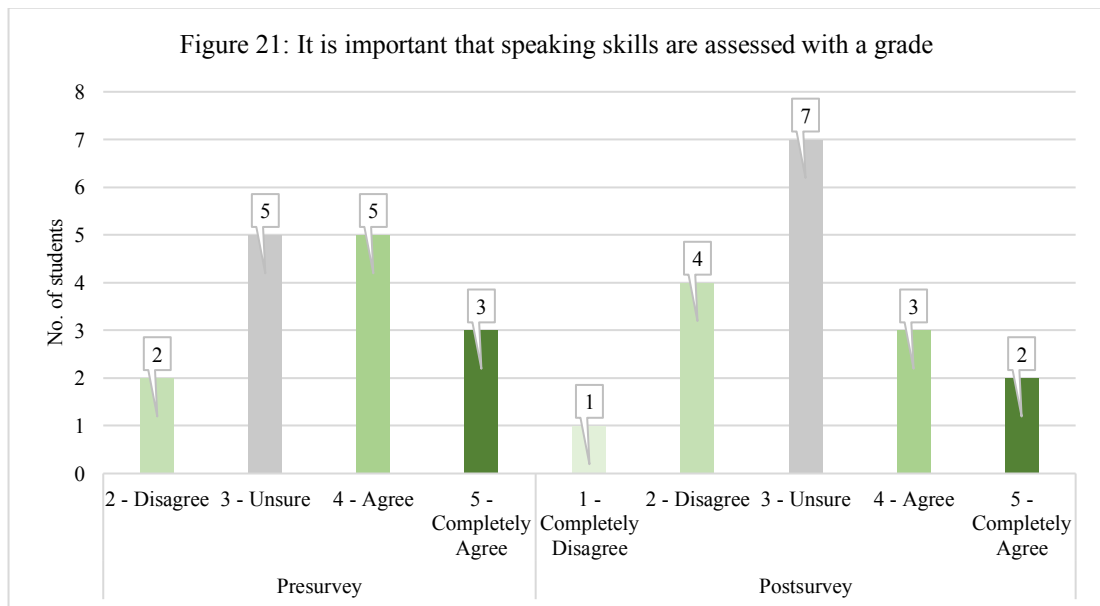
In general, the students seem quite divided on this question, although the level of agreement diminished by a few numbers in the postsurvey, while the level of disagreement increased. There were also quite a few students indicating uncertainty in both surveys. The high level of uncertain students might partly be due to the lack of experience with grading speaking and therefore it might be difficult to say whether or not it is important, as it has been a missing component throughout their years of study. It is also possible that, in the postsurvey responses, the students may have been reacting to their grade.

It could tentatively be argued that since more agreement is indicated in the presurvey and more disagreement indicated in the postsurvey, the student group in question may have modified their opinions concerning grading after the experience of receiving a grade during the intervention. One student also offered an additional comment on grading in the postsurvey:

> *"You can't really grade someone's speaking skill. You can tell if someone's good at speaking or not, but attaching a number to it doesn't really work."*

This student seems skeptical toward grading having any clear benefits and is expressing, in some ways, a valid doubt that "attaching a number" to speaking is not very functional, at least not in isolation of any other feedback or evaluation. Nevertheless, similar things could be said of any other language skills and grading with numbers/letters in any other subject: to what extent does a grade benefit the students learning as opposed to solely fulfilling a formal function of summarizing learning during a specific task or course? When it comes to speaking skills, it would be important to clearly communicate to the students that receiving a grade for an isolated task, exam or activity does not entail that this is the level of the student's 'speaking skill', but rather emphasize that it is an indication of the performance within the given framework of a subskill or topic.
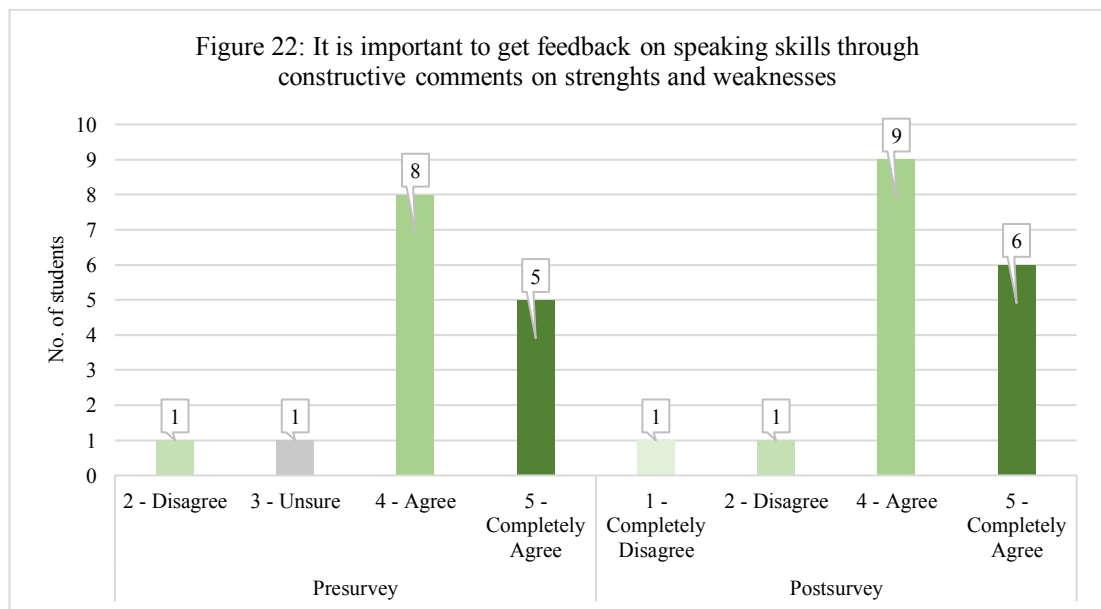
Another student also provided the following comment in the postsurvey:

> *"There isn't a right or wrong way to talk, and that's why grading speech seems like a bad idea to me. You can't be as objective when grading speech as when you grade everything else."*

This comment touches upon the highly personal dimension of speaking in stating that there is no right or wrong when it comes to speaking and also raises questions of validity when grading someone's speech. In a broader interpretation, this comment seems to reflect on the challenges of assessing speaking as it is such a multi-dimensional skill as well as it being central to the portrayal of our identities and personalities. It would be interesting to know whether this student would similarly deem the grading of a written composition or essay less objective as well, since free production of written language also projects the writer's identity, and the "correct" and "incorrect" are not predefined in the same way as they would be in some other tasks. For instance, factual questions or grammar/vocabulary activities usually allow for a very limited number of correct or accepted responses, resulting in what this student might have been implying with less objective grading when it comes to speaking skills. This does raise some valid points about the challenges of grading speaking and the importance of both knowing and defining as exactly as possible what specific aspect or feature is being assessed, so that the assessment does not rely on general impressions

or arbitrary evaluation of the act of speaking itself. As discussed in Section 3.2.3. it is essential to not only clearly define the area or subskill at the center of assessment but also to convey these criteria to the students (Luoma, 2004), which would optimally also reduce the students' perceptions of unreliable assessment.

In contrast to the perceived importance of grading speaking, feedback on speaking skills seems to be valued more highly by the students in this group, as evidenced by Figure 22 below:

Figure 22: It is important to get feedback on speaking skills through constructive comments on strenghts and weaknesses

Very few students indicated that it is not important to get feedback through constructive comments on strengths and weaknesses (pre: 1 + 1 uncertain, post: 2). All other students agreed that it is important (pre: 13, post: 15) to get this kind of feedback, which goes to show that feedback seems to be more valued than receiving a grade. Perhaps this might have been a self-evident result considering that feedback is always more elaborated and presumably more useful for the students' development through encouraging reflection on their performance in the task. One student backs up this conclusion with the following comment provided in the presurvey:

> *"If speaking skills were assessed with a grade I think many student[s] would take that as a stress and in worse case, talk less. But I think it would [be] important with feedback so one can develop his/her speaking skills."*

This comment also raises the issue of anxiety and pressure related to speaking and grading, which was mentioned by another student in the presurvey as well:

> *"Some students are shy and not comfortable with speaking in front of the class, assessing speaking skills may be difficult because of this."*

It is important to keep these issues in mind: that language anxiety and speaking in a formal setting (whether it be in front of the class or privately with the teacher) is never going to be exactly the same as speaking in an informal setting among friends. This fact alone can cause distortions in the performance of the student in any given speaking task, thus altering the medium of assessment and further providing a reason for why it is essential to have clear definitions on what aspects or features of speaking are being developed and assessed so that unrelated factors, such as nervousness or a shaky voice, do not factor in on the assessment.

Presuming that the assessment of speaking skills is largely a missing component, the students were also asked to indicate to what extent they agree that speaking should be assessed to the same extent as the other major language skills (listening, reading and writing) during the upper secondary school courses. The results are presented in Figure 23 below:

Figure 23: Speaking should be assessed in the same degree as reading, listening and writing are during courses
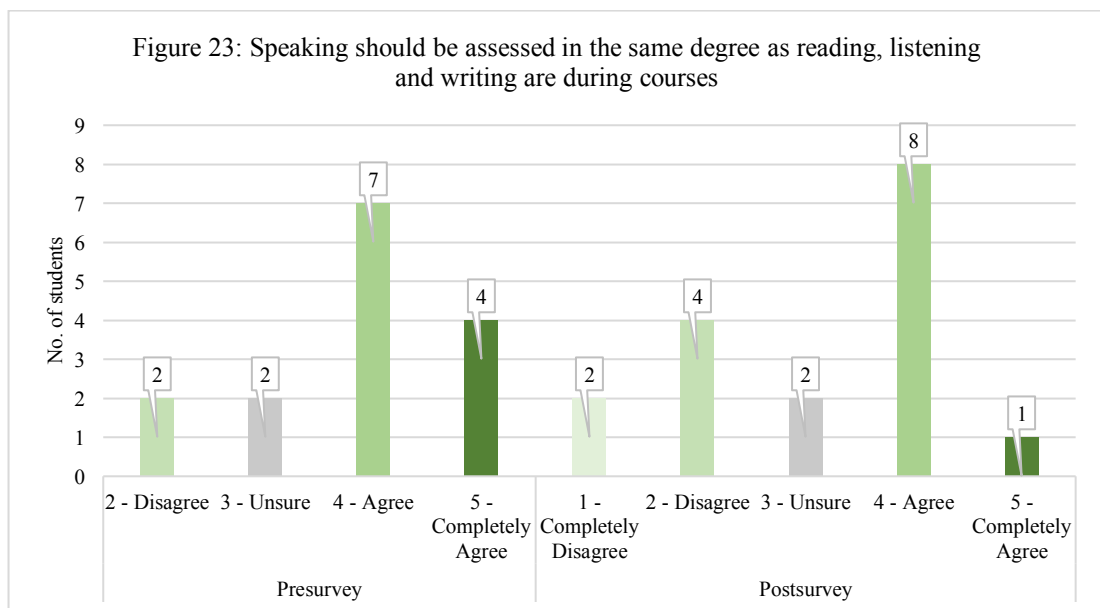
Looking at the results in Figure 23, we can see that slightly more students disagreed in the postsurvey (6, as opposed to 2 in the presurvey) with the statement that speaking

should be assessed in the same degree as reading, listening and writing during the courses. Nevertheless, the majority of the students still feel that speaking should receive the same amount of attention as the other skills when it comes to the assessment, even though fewer students opted for completely agree in the postsurvey. These results could indicate that a slight change of attitude took place in some of the students, but also that generally this group feels that speaking does have a place in assessment among reading, writing and listening during the courses.

The surveys also asked the students the same question in the context of the matriculation exam:

Figure 24: Speaking should be assessed to the same extent as reading, listening and writing in the matriculation exam
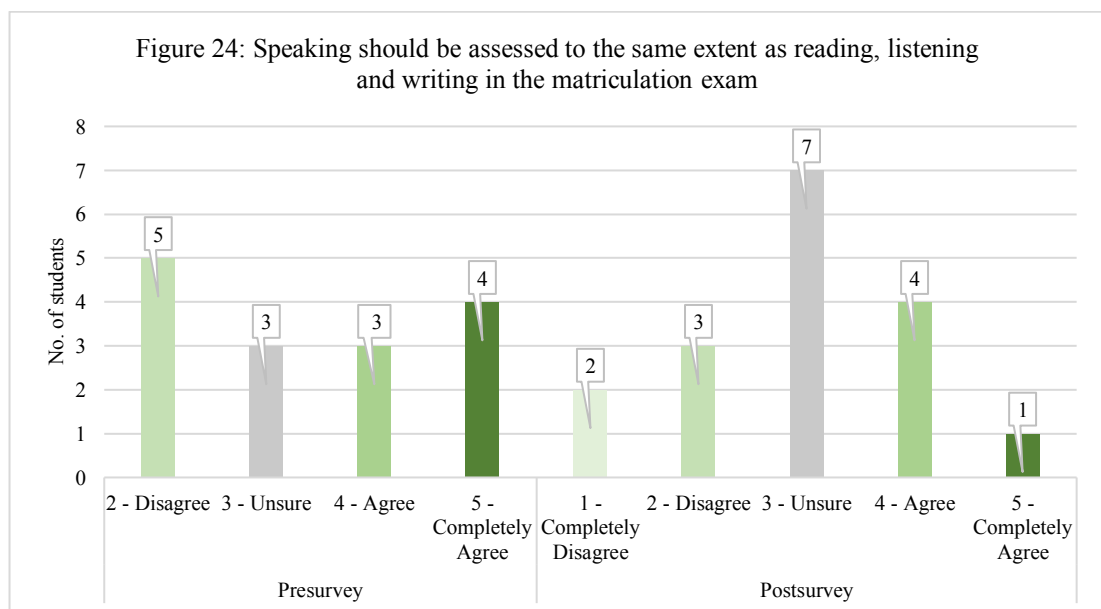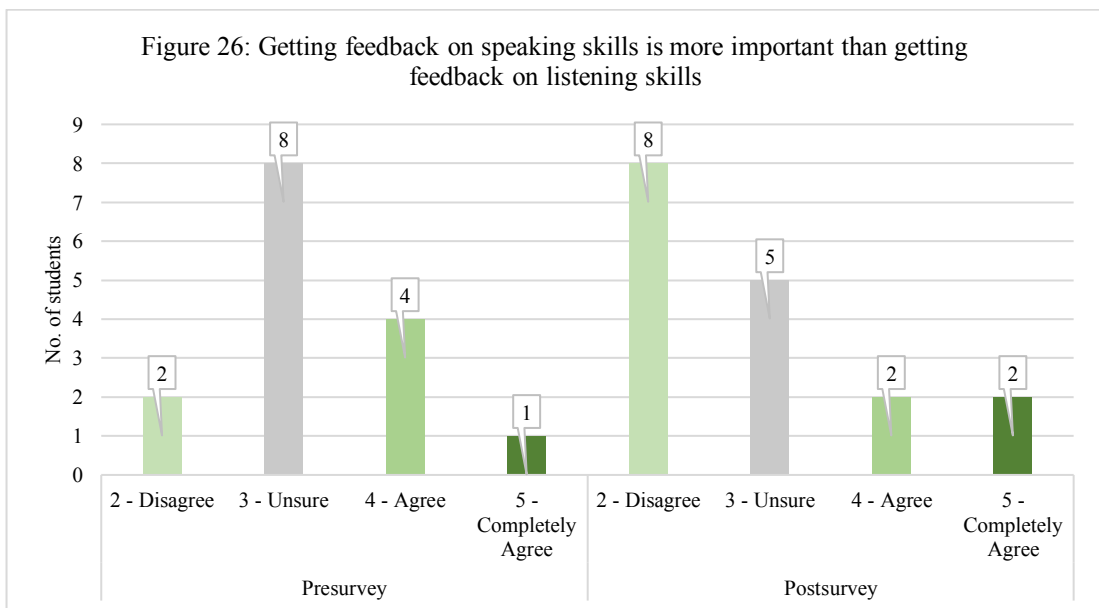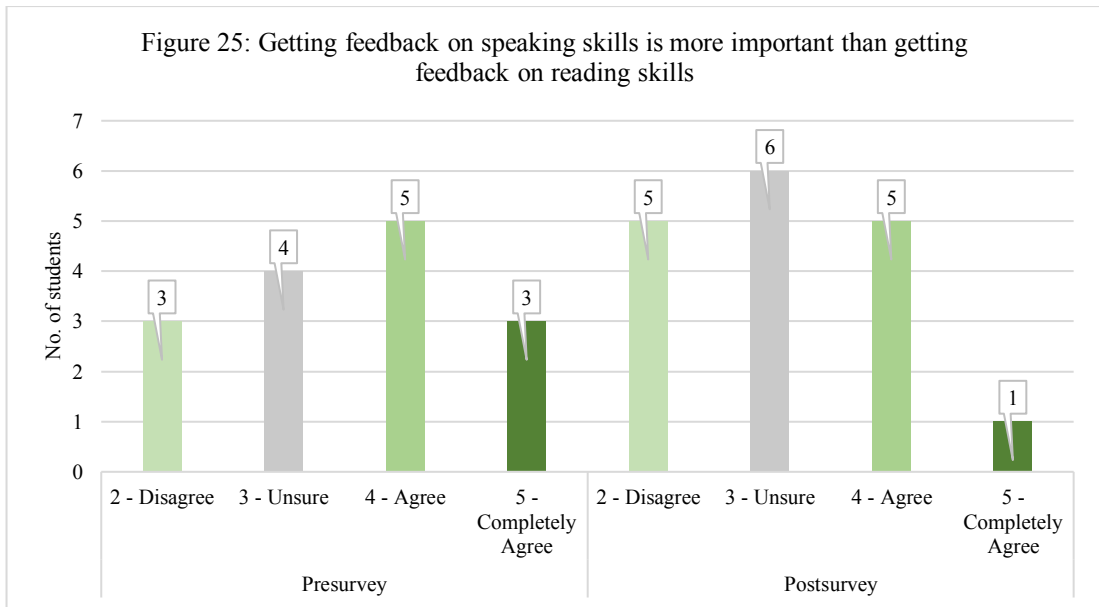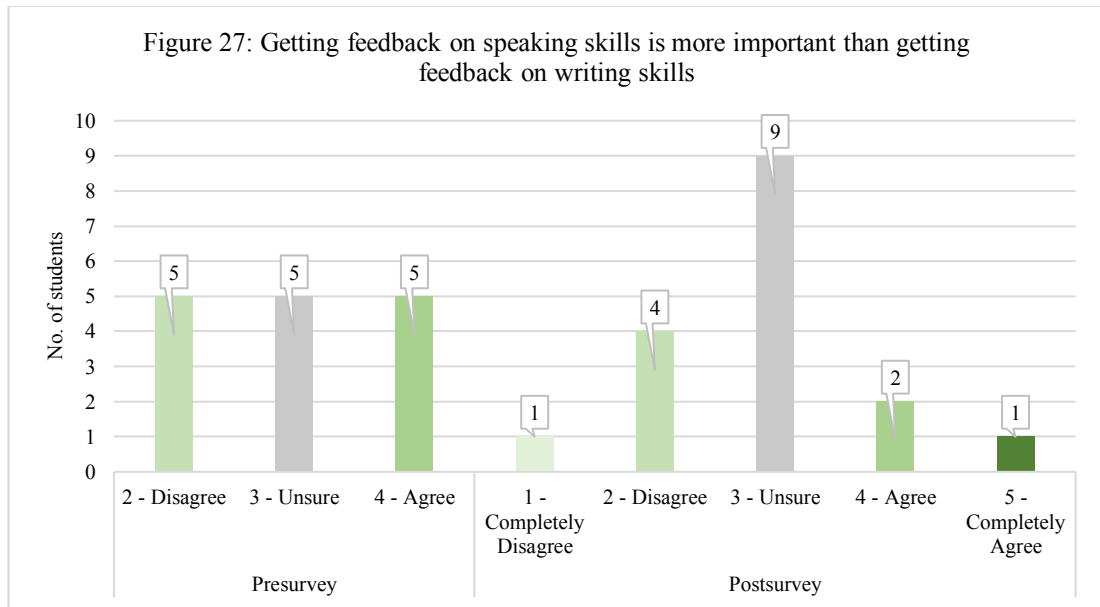
In the presurvey, around half of the students indicated agreement whereas the other half indicated either disagreement or uncertainty. In contrast, the postsurvey yielded more dispersed responses, with the majority opting for uncertain (7), and the remaining indicating either agreement (5) or disagreement (5). What these results could possibly tell us, is that the students, drawing from the experience of assessment during the intervention, perceive that the methods used in this particular course might not be a functional way of assessing speaking in the matriculation exam, hence the large number of uncertain students in the postsurvey. One of the limitations with the current design is that the students are naturally disposed to respond on the basis of the intervention in items that do not necessarily refer to the specific methods of assessment used during this course. Consequently, it could be concluded that according to these

results this group of students might generally be more uncertain whether speaking should be assessed in the matriculation exam in a similar way as they were assessed during this intervention, rather than whether speaking should be assessed to the same extent as reading, listening and writing in the matriculation exam.

Moreover, in comparing Figure 23 and Figure 24, it seems as if the students are more open to receiving assessment during the courses than being assessed in the matriculation exam. One of the reasons could be that the matriculation exam is the final exam that the students' graduation is based on, and any unfamiliar assessment could be interpreted as interfering with the chances of performing well. Introducing assessment in the courses on the other hand might be more welcomed since it would not affect the final results or assessment in the subject itself to as large an extent as the matriculation exam. Echoing the previously discussed influence that the content of the matriculation exam has on the teaching content in upper secondary schools (Tergujeff & Kautonen, 2017), it could also be deduced that when speaking is included the matriculation exam it will naturally also be incorporated into the courses as a preparatory measure, in which case the students would possibly be more open to the assessment in the matriculation exam as well.

The final three survey items concerning assessment asked the students to reflect on how important they think getting feedback on speaking skills is compared to getting feedback on reading, listening and writing. It should be noted that feedback on reading and listening may be a somewhat arbitrary concepts as they are receptive, internal processes; traditionally only measured through (written) comprehension tasks on a reading or a recording. Figures 25-27 show these results:

Figure 25: Getting feedback on speaking skills is more important than getting feedback on reading skills

Figure 26: Getting feedback on speaking skills is more important than getting feedback on listening skills

Figure 27: Getting feedback on speaking skills is more important than getting feedback on writing skills

Some changes can be seen in the presurvey and the postsurvey responses, although to a lesser extent in Figure 25 concerning the comparison between speaking and reading. It seems as if the students in this group are divided on this question, with around half of the students indicating agreement (8) in the presurvey and the other half indicating either disagreement (3) or uncertainty (4), whereas the number of uncertain (6) and disagreeing (5) students increased in the postsurvey. Nevertheless, there were also several students in the postsurvey (6) who agreed that receiving feedback on speaking is more important than reading, making the pre-postsurvey dispersion quite similar.

The pre- and the postsurvey responses are more clearly dispersed in Figures 26 and 27, comparing the importance of feedback on speaking vs. feedback on listening and writing, respectively. Figure 26 indicates that the majority of the students in the presurvey opted for uncertain (8), whereas in the postsurvey the majority of the students disagreed (8) with the statement of feedback on speaking being more important than feedback on listening. The amount of agreeing students remained similar in both surveys (pre: 5, post: 4).

On the other hand, Figure 27 shows that in the presurvey the responses are equally divided between disagree, unsure and agree for feedback on speaking skills being more important than getting feedback on writing. In the postsurvey, however, the majority chose the option unsure (9), and the remaining students either leaning toward disagreement (5) or agreement (3).

What these figures show us is that generally the students' disagreement with the statements increased in the postsurvey. This may have been the consequence of the students' not having had prior experience with feedback on speaking (basing their presurvey response on their idea of what it could look like) and then in the postsurvey basing their response on the way feedback was given during this specific intervention. It is impossible to know the angle from which any student approaches a survey item, meaning that many students possibly also considered the statements in isolation from the specific methods used during this intervention. The clearest postsurvey disagreement seems to be on feedback on speaking vs. listening, implying that the students in this group would value more feedback on listening skills over speaking skills. Also, there are quite a lot of unsure students in all three figures, especially in the item concerning speaking vs. writing skills, which could indicate a myriad of things including that the students might think that the feedback on the mentioned skills are equally important although it is of course impossible to know which stance the uncertain responses are actually taking.

In conclusion, we could still state that since the agreeing students are almost exclusively fewer than the uncertain and disagreeing in most instances, both pre- and postsurvey, the students tend to value the feedback given on listening and writing skills over the feedback on speaking skills. As for reading skills, the dispersion is not as clear, which could be an implication of the fact that listening and writing skills could be perceived as more important in terms of passing examinations, especially the matriculation exam. Also, since reading is in some way a more individual and inherent process, the students might not be familiar with receiving feedback on their reading skills (which is another challenge in and of itself), aside from the traditional reading comprehension activities which also comprise the evaluation of reading skills in the matriculation exam.

5.7. Content Analysis of Open-ended Questions

This section will discuss the results obtained from the open-ended questions in the postsurvey, with the help of content analysis to interpret the central tone, topic and/or issues raised by the students for each question. It should be noted that the open-ended questions were optional. However, the response rate was almost 100% for every question, with some questions occasionally missing responses from 1-2 students. The students were also instructed that they could write their response in Swedish if they preferred.

5.7.1. On Speaking Skills in General

The first open-ended question asked the students how important speaking skills are to them. The majority took a positive or agreeing stance (13/17), whereas fewer students expressed a more neutral position (3/17), and one student (1/17) expressed less agreement in their comment. Five major themes were also identified in the comments, the most popular one being the emphasis of speaking skills' importance for communication (7) as well as the highlighting of speaking skills as important for personal interest or gain (5). One student also highlighted the importance of practicing segmental and practical skills. Some students (3) also contrasted the importance of speaking skills to that of other language skills, while one student (1) took a more critical stance in suggesting that basic expression skills are enough. These results are summarized in Table 3 below:

Table 3: The importance of speaking skills to students

Central themes	No. of students	Example
1. Importance for communication	7	*"It's very important because English is a worldwide language, and it's important to be able to communicate with other people."*
2. Personal interest or gain	5	*"I find it important since it'll matter in the future, eg. if I study abroad or if I decide to move to an English-speaking country."*
3. Comparison to other skills	3	*"I Think being able to speak and listen are equally important but that Writing and Reading should be prioritized"*
4. Importance of segmental/practical skills	1	*"I believe speaking skills are important since you're practicing your speech and pronunciation and focusing a bit more on the practical skills in English"*
5. General skills enough	1	*"Not that important, I think that most important is that you can at least express yourself"*

It is evident that many of the students are grasping at the importance of proficient skills in speaking for the sake of being able to communicate well in the target language, which is of course one of the most central goals in language learning. One student also elaborated on the importance of communication vs. the perceived lesser importance of more form-focused aspects in the following way:

> *"[I]t is important to be able to communicate with others. Unless you're planning on becoming a public speaker, pronounciation [sic] etc. is not that important."*

However, another student did highlight the importance of speaking skills in terms of more segmental features and the practicalities of speaking (see Table 3), which may have been partly affected by the simple fact that these elements composed a central part of the intervention.

Quite a lot of the students also highlighted the personal importance of speaking skills, commenting on its significance for their future studies and travels, as well as general personal interest in the ability to speak well for varying reasons:

> *"I like speaking the most and you will be able to travel the world easier if you can talk fluent [E]nglish"*

> *"Important! Spoken English is used the most and it is important for me to be able to speak fluently."* (Translated from Swedish[1])

> *"Considering that halft [sic] of my family are Engish [sic] speakers, it's pretty important."*

These students seem to be basing their opinion of the importance of speaking skills with intrinsic motivation, which is generally considered to be more beneficial for students' development as well as correlating with "higher levels of achievement" (Ortega, 2008: 176). It could also be assumed that the students that highlighted speaking skills as important for communication in the language by extension consider proficient communication skills a personal asset as well, even though this is not explicitly stated in their comments. The similar theme in the comments regarding communication and personal interest is the significance of speaking skills in English

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[1] *"Viktigt! Den talade engelskan är den man använder mest och det är viktigt för mig att jag kan prata flytande."*

in terms of globalizing oneself and being able to interact with as many different people around the world as possible.

Interestingly, there was also one student who indicated that speaking skills are not that important aside from being able to "at least express yourself", which goes to show that even if proficiency in English is generally considered a global asset by many, not everybody will feel the need (or perhaps have the desire) to develop more advanced language skills. However, this comment may tentatively hint toward the importance of the communicative aspect of speaking, in that presumably the student means that being able to express yourself *so that you are understood* is what is most important when it comes to speaking skills.

Some students also stated quite neutrally that speaking skills are in fact important, but not necessarily any more important than other skills:

> *"In my opinion it is quite important, but I also think that listening is pretty important."*

Others also implied that speaking might be less important than other skills, as can be seen in the example in Table 1, where the student states that writing and reading should be prioritized over speaking (perhaps meaning in the formal educational setting, although this is not specified). Another student also commented similarly:

> *"It is an important part, although maybe not in the same way as reading"* (Translated from Swedish[2])

These comments might be a reflection of the traditional prominence of the written form in educative contexts and the fact that separate features of speaking are rarely focused on and speaking is, in general, rather used as a tool for encouraging general communication in the classroom (Tergujeff & Kautonen, 2017). The current formal requirements of the matriculation exam and the most commonly used written exams for course evaluation may also affect these responses leaning toward prioritizing the language skills needed in the exams.

The second question asked the students to comment on which aspects of speaking skills should be focused on more during lessons. This question received less

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[2] *"Det är en viktig del, dock kanske inte på samma sätt som läsande"*

elaborate responses, and the majority of the students mentioned pronunciation (7) and/or fluency (6) here. It can safely be assumed that the present intervention, which was focused on pronunciation and fluency, affected the way in which the wider term 'speaking skills' were approached in the survey. Nevertheless, two students also offered vocabulary range as one aspect they would like to see more of:

> *"Generally speaking with a wider vocabulary"* (Translated from Swedish[3])

> *"To actually speak and perhaps especially about more complicated topics so that you learn more complex words. It is also important to practice pronunciation and intonation, I for one strongly dislike my accent and would like to get rid of it"* (Translated from Swedish[4])

The second comment also brings up the topic of accented speech and the student seems to insinuate that their idea of pronunciation practice and development should follow the principle of achieving some kind of "native accent", in expressing their dislike toward and desire to get rid of their own accent. Another student also brought up the issue of the native speaker in their comment:

> *"Sentence stres[sic] is something that even native English speakers aren't perfect at. Definitey [sic] should be practiced more!"*

This comment also seems to somewhat elevate the native speaker, as a model for achievement or possibly also as a simple point of comparison, echoing the previously discussed desire of some students to achieve native-like and, as a possible consequence, more intelligible pronunciation (Levis, 2018). However, these were the only students that directly referred to the native speaker or implied the priority of a native accent in their comments, with the majority of the students more often leaning toward the importance of being understood.

Two students also highlighted general speaking practice and discussions in their comments, with a focus on alleviating the pressure/anxiety related to speaking that many students may feel:

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[3] *"Att prata allmänt med större ordförråd"*
[4] *"Att man faktiskt pratar och då kanske speciellt om lite svårare ämnen så att man lär sig mer komplicerade ord. Det är även viktigt att öva uttal och intonation, jag ogillar i alla fall starkt min accent och skulle vilja jobba bort den."*

"To speak more and more freely in pairs or smaller groups so that you get to practice without the pressure of receiving a grade based on it[5]" (Translated from Swedish)

"Just speaking, discussing. Teaching people to be more confident while speaking, because I know a lot struggle with that."

These comments reflect on the previously discussed different aspects of language anxiety in reference to the FLCAS (Horwitz et al., 1986), with the former addressing the component of fear of negative evaluation and the latter comment embodying issues of communication apprehension in the form of lack of confidence (to speak in the L2). It is clear that communication apprehension and issues of language anxiety seem to increase when it comes to speaking in a foreign language, a theme that occurs frequently in the students' comments.

One student also provided the following comment, albeit slightly off-topic from the question:

"The recording was an interesting concept and I can see them in future assignments and getting feedback was good to see what you can improve in speaking skills"

Even though the student might not be answering the question of which aspect of speaking skills should be practiced more, it could be interpreted that the student instead reflected on which methods might work in the development and assessment of different aspects of speaking skills, since they consider that recordings could be useful in future assignments as well.

5.7.2. On the Assessment of Speaking

Two of the open-ended questions focused on gaining some more insight into the students' perceptions of the assessment of speaking, the first of which asked them to elaborate on how important they think the assessment of speaking skills is. In general, the majority agreed that it is important, with some (5) agreeing and providing an explanation why and others (5) indicating vague agreement or uncertainty in their

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[5] *"Prata mera och mera fritt i par eller mindre grupper så att man får träna utan pressen att få ett vitsord baserat på det."*

response. Three students also agreed that assessment is important, but did offer their reflections on what kinds of methods and models for assessment might (or might not) be functional. Another three students also expressed disagreement. Table 4 below summarizes these results:

Table 4: The importance of the assessment of speaking skills to students		
Stance	No. of students	Example
1. Agreeing	5	"I think it's important! How elese are you going to improve your self if your not getti ng any feedback!"
2. Vague agreement, Uncertain	5	"semi-important, I think practising is more important than getting an assessment/grade."
3. Agreeing + reflective of methods & models	3	"I think it's important however I'm not trying to achieve a certain native-like accent nor do I know if I have one."
4. Disagreeing, Critical	3	"Not that important, I think it is just important that we learn and dare to talk loud"

Five students expressed agreement with assessment being important, backing up their opinion with varying reasons ranging from its importance for development and serving as proof of "how much you've actually learnt in school" to raising awareness on "how well you can actually speak [E]nglish". One student also expressed the view that it is important "because it is very needed in todays *[sic]* world", which is assumed to be in reference to the English language in general and not necessarily the assessment of speaking skills. Nevertheless, the comment was placed in the agreeing category as it does begin with stating the importance. It could be that the student misunderstood the question or considered that since English is important in the global context by extension the assessment of language skills is also important, although it is impossible to know for sure what is implied in any isolated comment.

Some students (3) also offered a more reflective stance on the assessment, agreeing that is important, but that some methods might be more effective than others:

> "Feedback is important but a grade can have the effect of decreasing self-confidence and speaking less instead of more" (Translated from Swedish[6])

This comment ties back to the discussion on FLCAS and the effect of test anxiety, which could have a negative effect on some students' willingness to speak. Students are of course used to receiving grades in all subjects, but it could be argued that

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[6] *Respons är viktigt men vitsord kan få effekten att man får dåligt självförtroende och pratar mindre i stället för mer*

receiving a grade for a speaking activity or exercise feels much more personal (thus increasing anxiety) than receiving a grade on an exam in biology, for instance. Since speaking is immediately tied to our identity, giving a grade (or feedback) could be viewed as an imposition on the speakers themselves, and therefore it would only be natural to feel more reserved about being assessed on something as personal as speaking. The students in this group mostly agree that assessment of speaking is important, but some have also considered the concerns it may entail for themselves or other students. As for the pedagogical implications, it is first and foremost essential to be aware of the fact that assessing speaking increases the dimension of anxiety for many students, which in turn may affect the performance itself and consequently not reflect the actual potential of the student. Therefore, it is important to clearly motivate the purpose of the assessment and define the scope of the task, as well as conveying this information to the students.

Another student also agreed on the importance of assessing speaking, but commented that it should not have as strong a presence in the course assessment in order to reflect the current requirements of the matriculation exam:

"It is important since it gives feedback on how to improve pronunciation. However I don't think that it should be considered as strongly in the assessment since it is not assessed in the matriculation exam" (Translated from Swedish[7])

This comment raises a valid point in relation to the discussion on how the matriculation exam to an extent limits and directs the course content (see section 2.3.). As the matriculation exams play such an important part, not only for the graduation from upper secondary school but also for the students' future studies and possibilities, it is only natural that the students would prefer to receive instruction and feedback during the courses on the language skills and activity types that will come up in the exam.

One student's comment also reflects on the general lack of assessment when it comes to speaking skills, stating that they "have not been specifically evaluated on my speaking skills earlier than this course". This comment reflects the fact that since no specific speaking assessment has been present in the students' language studies before,

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[7] "Det är viktigt eftersom det ger en feedback om hur man kan förbättra sitt uttal. Jag tycker dock inte att det bör beakats lika starkt i bedömningen eftersom det inte bedöms i studenten."

it might be difficult to evaluate the importance of the assessment. There were also a few (3) students who indicated that it is not that important to assess speaking, highlighting that the ability to express yourself and to make yourself understood, as well as having the confidence to speak, is what is most important. Although it could be argued that these are aspects that could also be at the forefront of assessment, these students' responses to this item were probably guided by the assessment received during the intervention.

One student also critically claimed that "you can't effectively grade someone's speaking skill", which might be reflective of the complexity of the spoken medium and the challenges of assessing something as transitory as speech, not to mention the individual nature of speech as connected to the speaker's identity. Another aspect that might affect this student's criticism could be the lack of experience of being assessed on speaking during their years of study, which might consequently affect the perspective on what can and cannot be assessed (effectively) when it comes to language skills.

The students were also asked to reflect on what they think would be the best way to assess speaking. Many (8) of the students mentioned using recordings (both in general and the one used during the intervention) as a good method of assessment. One of the reasons for this many of the responses commenting on the recording is presumably that the research design naturally affects the students' approach to the survey items. On the one hand, this might indicate that some students' comments might not be an actual reflection of what they think is a good way to assess speaking, but that they might simply be basing their response on their association of assessment with the recently used recording task and considered that it was a "good" way of assessing speaking. On the other hand, the large number of students mentioning the recording in this item could also be interpreted as reflective of the pros of using recordings since they are perhaps one of the most straightforward ways of reiterating speech which is essential in more detailed/systematic assessment, although recordings do not necessarily function as a method for assessing certain aspects of speaking skills, such as different interactive components.

Some students also alluded to the positive effect of recordings diminishing the frequently experienced anxiety related to speaking:

"The recording task was good since it works for shy students as well. To assess via e.g. presentations/speeches is also possible, but then many get nervous which affects speaking" (Translated from Swedish[8])

Another student similarly commented that a good way to assess speaking would be either via private tests with the teacher or recordings *"so that nervousness doesn't affect peoples' speaking skills."*. Speaking tests in which *"the teacher evaluates your speaking ability"* was also mentioned by another student. The popularity of these themes (recording/private testing/anxiety) in the responses indicate that quite many students might feel uncomfortable with being assessed on their speaking, especially if not approached from a sensitive/private angle. Two students also mentioned constructive feedback as useful in their comments (*"Just offer general feedback, things that you could take into account while speaking, etc."*), whereas three students did not respond to this question at all.

However, there were also a few (5) students who suggested that assessment could be executed in class via different exercises and activities, e.g. through discussions, presentations, speeches, reading aloud, and even *"just talking during lessons"*. Including some form of evaluation or assessment for these types of general class activities could possibly decrease the amount of anxiety for many students. Generally, I think it would be essential to base the assessment of any language skill on as many different types of activities/tests over a longer period of time, so as to help the student gain a more holistic overview of their speaking development, and in this way also place focus more on the process of speaking (Lowie et al., 2018), rather than basing the assessment on an isolated product of one performance.

The assessment during this intervention was of course more product focused, due to the brevity of the taught sequence as well as the simple fact that any formal speaking assessment was a novel concept for the group in question. Nevertheless, the students were given the opportunity to develop some features of pronunciation and intonation, based on the feedback given on the first recording, before the final re-recording which was given a grade and corresponding descriptors. Although this does not encapsulate the complexities of speaking as a process and as highly variable

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[8] "Inspelningsövningen var bra eftersom den fungerar även för blygare elever. Att utvärdera genom tex presentationer/tal är också möjligt, men då är många nervösa vilket påverkar talandet."

depending on the context, this was perhaps one of the few things that a brief intervention could use to encourage development and/or reflection on some aspects of speaking skills. The perceived effectiveness of these methods, and an evaluation of their necessity and usefulness, will be further elaborated on in the conclusion.

5.7.3. On the Intervention

The final open-ended question in the survey asked the students to indicate whether or not they found the recording task useful and/or effective, as well as to motivate their response. Space for any additional comments on speaking skills or the unit was also given. The students were also asked to indicate in closed format their opinions on both the recording task and the fluency task, in order to support the discussion on the students' comments in the open-ended fields.

Out of the seventeen students who responded to the postsurvey, twelve indicated that the recording task was useful and/or effective, nine of whom also offered their motivation for their opinion, whereas three students simply indicated that it was "useful" or "very helpful". The students' motivations as to why it was useful and/or effective were varied. Some mentioned it being awareness-raising to hear their own voice recorded and others emphasized that getting feedback helped them develop and notice different aspects of their pronunciation. A few examples of these comments are included below:

> *"Very, it helped me with my sentence stress and articulation."*

> *"I think it was useful and a new way of learning and getting feedback was a nice touch as well."*

From the previous analysis of the open-ended questions, it seems as if feedback has been valued more clearly than receiving a grade although the closed items on the recording task's assessment methods indicate a generally positive attitude to the grading as well:
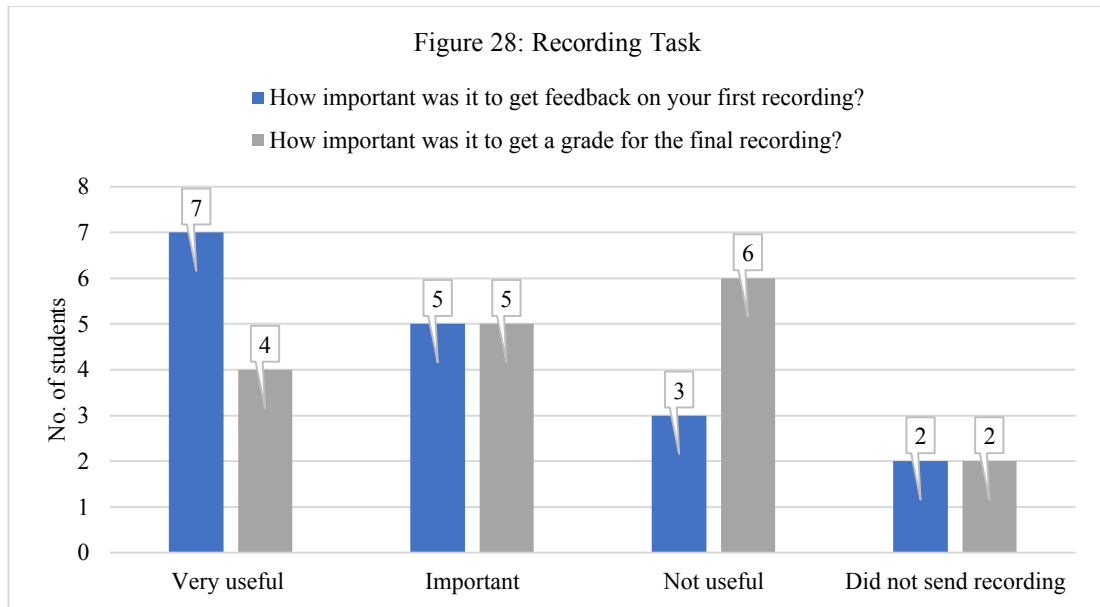
Figure 28: Recording Task

Figure 28 shows that feedback was in fact slightly more valued among these students, with only three students indicating that receiving feedback was "not useful". Nevertheless, the majority also rated receiving a grade for the final recording as either "very useful" (4) or "important" (5), with six students indicating that the grade was "not useful". These results show that the students might not be as opposed to the idea of receiving a grade as might have been supposed from some of the responses given in the open-ended items. One student also elaborated on the usefulness of the recording task by stating that *"[...] it counts as a part of your grade and that is good"*, exemplifying a more extrinsic kind of motivation governed by outside factors. The comment may also embody what Ellis (1997) defines as resultative motivation, which is a kind of extrinsic motivation that arises as a result of success in a task or an exam. Although intrinsic motivation has generally been considered more beneficial for language acquisition, it could be argued that students may often be motivated by both intrinsic and extrinsic factors at the same time, with extrinsic motivation often embodying something more concrete (for example a grade), whereas intrinsic motivation more often relies on the learner's opinions, interests and feelings toward a certain topic.

One student also reflected on the pros and cons of assessment methods used in the recording in the following way:

> *"The first part was informative whereas the second part was stressful as it was assessed with a grade" (Translated from Swedish[9])*

This comment reflects back to the pressure of being graded discussed in the previous sections, although it could also be argued that the students might consider receiving a grade for any task both useful and stressful at the same time. Many students often feel stressed and nervous prior to any exam, but oftentimes the perceived importance or effectiveness of receiving a grade at the end of it is not questioned as it simply indicates your performance in that exam.

Four students also took a negative or critical stance toward the question, with one student stating that they *"understand the point with the activity, but there are some things that have become habits at this stage, and you might not be able to change your pronunciation through some evaluation"* (Translated from Swedish[10]). Yet another student criticized the activity type, stating that *"[…]it forces you to speak in a way you normally wouldn't for no reason.",* which alludes to the mechanical nature of the task, and the obvious fact that reading a text aloud is not a frequently occurring form of spoken interaction in any language. Similarly, another student elaborated on the lack of interactional authenticity in the following way:

> *"The task taught you to be mindful of how you pronounce certain words. The problem is that you can't afford to be mindful of such things when speaking to someone for real. Pronunciation comes last, you should be focusing on making the listener understand you, not if you pronounced that word correctly or not. Once you get enough exposure and raw immersion to English, correct pronunciation comes naturally."*

The student is expressing the importance of making yourself understood over segmental issues in pronunciation. In terms of the feedback given to the students in this group, the main focus was always on improving the intelligibility of their pronunciation or intonation, with referring the students to their own recording for models whenever possible (e.g., "Think about the first sound in the word *gems*. You can use your own recording of the word *jewelry* as a model"). There were many students whose speech did not cause any issues in intelligibility or confusion on the

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[9] *"Den första delen var lärorik medan den andra var stressande eftersom den var bedömd med siffra."*

[10] "*Jag förstår poängen med det, men vissa saker har man kanske som vana redan vid det här laget och då kanske inte kan ändra på sitt uttal bara genom lite utvärdering."*

part of the listener, which resulted in their feedback comments focusing on other things that could be taken into account, for instance thinking about modifying features of stress or emphasis to further support the message, or more detailed suggestions on segmental aspects for phonological consistency.

One of the main reasons why many (9) of the students in this group may have appreciated receiving a grade for the task is the simple fact that, in a way, it serves as a reward for completed work, that is some extrinsic acknowledgement which may fuel their motivation toward similar tasks in the future. In the present study the grade also formed part of an exam that included all of the four major language skills, which in a way accommodates to students' varying strengths. Although the grade for the recording task only comprised 20% of the final grade, it composed an integral part of the assessment as a whole. Most importantly, in accounting for all language skills to a varying extent, the exam gave all students the opportunity to showcase their strengths, whether it be in speaking, reading, writing and/or listening. In fact, there were several students whose final recording positively affected their overall grade, especially some students with a weaker written performance.

Naturally, it could be also be speculated that the students who generally perform really well in traditional written exams, but perhaps did not make an effort in their recording or otherwise performed below their normal (written) standard, did not appreciate receiving a grade for the speaking component either. As such, receiving a grade for the task may also have alienated some students as they may have gotten the impression that since this is the only grade that they have ever received for a speaking activity the grade thus also reflects their level of speaking, which is of course not what the grade aims at describing at all. It could be beneficial to convey this as clearly as possible to students in the future, so as to avoid any presumptions that a grade or the sum of any number of exams cannot fully describe the development of each student.

The postsurvey also asked the students to indicate their opinion on how useful they felt that the fluency activity was, and if they perceived their speech as more fluent during the last 30 seconds compared to the first 2 minutes during the activity. These results are presented in Figure 29 below:

Figure 29: Fluency Task
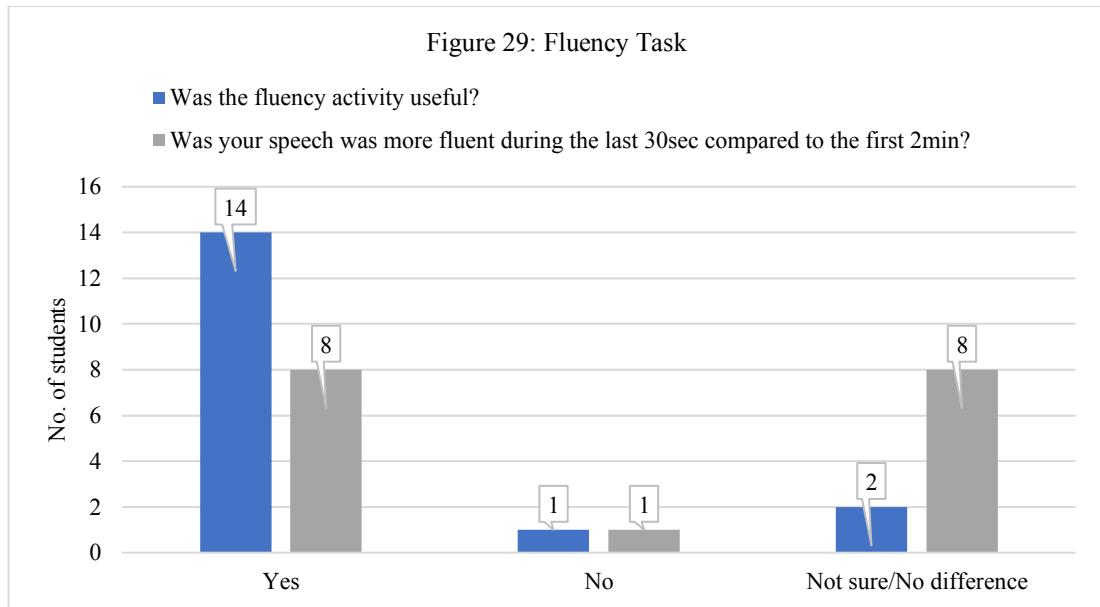
The results show that almost all students (14) found the fluency activity useful, whereas one did not and two indicated uncertainty (or that they were absent during the lesson). As for the second item, concerning whether the students noticed a difference in fluency during the activity, the group seemed equally divided between agreeing (8) and uncertainty or no perceived difference (8). One student also indicated that their speech was not more fluent during the last 30 seconds. In general, these responses seem to indicate that the activity did help some students to notice a change in their speech, whereas others may not have found that the diminishing time frame had any effect on their fluency. One difficulty with the execution of this task was of course the fact that it was completed through the screen in randomly allocated groups of students, a challenge which was not present in the recording task. Re-creating more interactive tasks, such as the fluency task, was in some ways made possible in being able to divide the students into smaller "breakout rooms" on Zoom, but it could also be argued that these activities could have turned out more effective in a traditional classroom setting. Moreover, the ability of the teacher to move in-between student groups and support the activity while it is ongoing is not nearly as effective through a screen as it is in a classroom.

Even so, generally the students seemed to appreciate the fluency activity, although somewhat less focus was placed on the fluency task during the sequence, at least in terms of individual feedback and more 'tangible' forms of assessment. The one

student who indicated that the activity was not useful also offered the following criticism:

> *"I'd rather just speak the language, like you tend to do with languages, instead doing some tedious fluency task. There's no shortcutting fluency. Fluency comes after a lot of time's been spent with the language. Just let us speak, give us a topic to discuss and we'll gladly do it."*

This student seems skeptical that fluency can be developed with specifically designed activities, although the 4/3/2 method itself has been shown to improve not only features of fluency during the activity, but also increased grammatical accuracy and complexity (Nation, 2007). It could also be argued that the fluency activity itself did just let the students speak by giving them a topic to discuss. Therefore, it would have been interesting to know whether it was simply the act of explicitly discussing fluency in class prior to the activity which affected the student's disposition toward task. It is true that there is no "shortcut" to fluency, but it can certainly be developed over time, which is something that the student also does imply in their comment. One interpretation could be that the student perhaps would prefer to not make the development explicit and instead would like to have development occur via general experience with the language. Nevertheless, it could be important for many students to become aware of different features and aspects of speech, as they may in fact support the development of the focused skill (Tavakoli et al, 2016; Galante & Thomson, 2017), and also encourage more reflection on their own language use, although I can also understand the desire to "just speak" during English lessons as it is much more common than the systematic focus on any specific aspect of speaking. It may also be the case that in raising awareness on fluency and thus making it an explicit extra component of a task may have made it more complex than the student felt it needed to be.

However, as with any kind of lesson content, it is impossible to accommodate every activity to fit all of the students' learning styles and preferences, but the general pattern in the results on the survey items concerning the intervention seem to indicate that this group of students generally appreciated the activities and the sequence, to varying degrees, aptly demonstrated by two comments provided in an additional field at the end of the postsurvey:

> *"The tasks were good but sometimes a bit stressful."*

"Interesting tasks, nice to do some new things for a change"

The following chapter will aim at summarizing some of the most central conclusions and topics that have been discussed in relation to the results so far in this chapter, as well as addressing the research questions this study set out to answer via these collected results.

6. CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study was to gain an insight into how students in their second year of upper secondary school perceive the teaching and assessment of speaking skills based on their own opinions and previous experience of learning English as a Foreign Language, as well as their experience of the intervention conducted in this case study. The aim of this concluding chapter is to synthesize the central results and discussion from the previous chapter, address the research questions, and draw conclusions about what the results might imply for future research as well as for the practical teaching context concerning the development and assessment of speaking skills in the EFL classroom.

To briefly summarize the results and discussion, the students in this group are, in general, positively disposed toward speaking English both inside and outside the classroom, as well as being exposed to English quite frequently in their daily lives (see sections 5.1 and 5.3). Moreover, the students' self-assessment on different features of spoken communication show that the majority consider themselves to fulfil the goals of the upper secondary school curriculum (see section 5.2). Generally, the students also consider pronunciation practice important (see section 5.4.) although the group in question indicated more agreement on the importance of fluency, in comparison to pronunciation development (see section 5.5.). As for the assessment of speaking skills, the students in this group agreed that it is important to include it in order to benefit continued development, although the students were slightly more critical toward grading than feedback (see section 5.6).

6.1. Conclusions on the Development and Assessment of Speaking Skills

The first two research question this thesis aimed at answering were (1) *What are the students' attitudes toward teaching and assessment of speaking skills?* and (2) *In what ways do students' perspectives on speaking skills and assessment compare before and after pedagogical intervention?* The main conclusions drawn based on the results and discussion are summarized in the points below:

- *The students in this group generally express positive attitudes toward speaking and agree on the importance of development and assessment of speaking skills, partly influenced by both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation.*

It is clear that the students agree that developing proficient speaking skills is important for communicative purposes, and that assessment is important in order to locate their current level of proficiency. In connection to theories of language learning, both intrinsic and extrinsic motivational factors seem to guide the students' responses. Many commented that developing speaking skills is important especially for their future goals and personal interests. Some also stated that the assessment of speaking is important for development, suggesting that there may not be one without the other, while others commented that assessment is positive in that it serves as a reward or testament of their level of knowledge. Generally, since intrinsic motivation has been shown to yield higher levels of acquisition (Ortega, 2008), it may be relevant to attempt to further highlight the concrete benefits to the students themselves concerning the development of speaking, since it is a skill that is very much needed in both personal and professional contexts. While extrinsic motivation may support the positive attitudes and efforts of students in the formal setting, it would be worthwhile to further clarify the objectives and benefits of spending time on the development and assessment of speaking skills, especially to increase the engagement of unmotivated students.

- *Speaking itself might not induce elements of language anxiety but the assessment of speaking may increase it. Nevertheless, the students in this group find the assessment of speaking, especially by way of feedback, to be essential.*

Centrally, the students' agreement that assessment is important for the development of speaking skills remained intact, although more reflection on methods and purposes was included in the postsurvey (facilitated by open-ended questions). One frequently occurring theme in the postsurvey responses concerning the assessment of speaking skills was the issue of language anxiety, in the forms of communication apprehension and test anxiety (Horwitz et al., 1986), for which the students themselves offered solutions such as private assessment opportunities with the teacher and sending in

recordings. Interestingly, the results from section 5.3. show that this group of students do not generally feel anxious about speaking English in class. This indicates that this group of students find that speaking itself does not necessarily induce elements of language anxiety, but rather that the assessment of speaking skills may have that negative effect. Nevertheless, the results also show that very few students in this group find the assessment of speaking skills useless, suggesting that the majority believe there is value in the assessment of speaking skills even though it may produce elements of language anxiety. Generally, the group also preferred feedback over a grade, with the relevance of receiving a grade for speaking skills yielding less agreement and more uncertainty in the postsurvey.

Although the group indicated that feedback was slightly more useful or important than a grade, the majority also ranked receiving a grade for the recording task as useful or important (9 in total, versus 6 students who indicated it as not important). The students' positive responses toward assessing speaking may be influenced by fact that a large part of language competence is missing from the context of educational assessment (Bygate, 2018). Including assessment on speaking would take a wider variety of language competence into account, considering that all students have different strengths and weaknesses. Assessment of speaking would therefore provide a more balanced base to language teaching as a whole, and not only reward students whose language strengths are rooted in their written performance, grammatical control, or other features of language skills that are traditionally assessed.

- *Speaking should be approached as a skill (not just the medium for communication) and students should be given the opportunity to develop different subskills of speaking widely.*

Speaking as a skill is highly multi-dimensional and thus poses many challenges in terms of its development and assessment in a formal setting, due to time constraints as well as the lack of resources and lack of previous incorporation of the skill in the educative context. Some students expressed a narrow view of speaking as solely a medium for communication (and therefore either impossible, difficult or useless to develop and assess systematically). The majority of the students approached speaking skills from the point of view of pronunciation and fluency, which is perhaps only

natural considering those were the subskills focused on. However, in future similar approaches, it would be important to convey more clearly to the students that whenever speaking skills are in focus, no single subskill (e.g., pronunciation) can describe speaking as a whole, in the same way that not *all* subskills can be the focus of development or assessment at the same time. Consequently, it would also be essential to then emphasize to the students that the evaluation of a separate task, activity or exam does not in itself comprise any final assessment of the student's speaking skill. One of the limitations of this study was that it did perhaps feel this way for some of the students, especially due to the fact that this was for many, or all, the first formal lesson sequence with the focus on speaking. The nature of speaking as a transitory medium (Bygate, 2018) may also have influenced a few students' opinions on speaking being something that cannot be objectively assessed, approached or developed via systematic tasks.

Additionally, since speaking is something that most feel a degree of personal ownership of (rightfully so) some may also feel critical toward the assessment of it for this reason alone. Therefore, whenever an aspect of speaking is formally introduced in the classroom, it would perhaps be essential to briefly comment on the different features of speaking as it may well reduce the initial skepticism of speaking as a skill, as well as help to concretize a language skill that may otherwise be approached as only the act of speaking. It is also worthwhile to point out that some students in this group may, at their advanced level, approach speaking from a less systematic point of view in that speaking is already something they are able to do, and thus feel that more form-focused aspects (such as pronunciation) may be irrelevant to their development.

However, as previously discussed, even pronunciation teaching may take a more meaning-focused approach in placing the focus on suprasegmental features that affect the communication of the message (Tergujeff, 2013), although in practice this approach may still come off as a more segmental way of developing speaking. Additionally, advanced students might in fact be more inclined toward developing and using the skills they already have acquired in the language, which may in part explain the more united agreement toward fluency than pronunciation by this group. Even so, it would still be important to approach speaking skills in a variety of ways, although the degree to which both form- and meaning-focused approaches are incorporated

should naturally reflect the level of the students as well as match the teaching objectives of the activity, course and curriculum.

As for the assessment of speaking, a central problem is that oftentimes what tends to be measured in any language assessment is the product of something (learning goals, course objectives, final exams), but especially speaking is generally considered to benefit from being assessed as a process instead (Lowie et al., 2018), which is quite difficult for the isolated educator to organize, since it would require different methods of assessment over a long period of time, as well as some coordination between municipalities and teaching staff. As the school system in Finland currently stands, formal assessment of speaking in this manner would be made difficult for a variety of reasons, such as teacher autonomy (different approaches to teaching content) and national standards that do govern the classroom content to a large degree.

6.2. Conclusions on the Intervention

Finally, the conclusions to the third research question of how successful the pedagogic intervention was in making speaking skills an explicit part of lessons and assessment are summarized as follows:

- *Explicit teaching of a skill may encourage development through being awareness-raising, but its influence might not always be positive.*

As discussed in the previous chapters, one limitation of this study lies in the fact that the intervention was extremely brief and both surveys were taken by the same group of students. However, what the analysis of these results did indicate, is how this particular group of students perceived the features of speaking skills and assessment before the intervention concerning especially features of pronunciation and fluency, as well as how (or if) their impressions changed after the intervention. Generally, the most notable fluctuations were found in the results of the sections concerning pronunciation and assessment, possibly due to the fact that these topics were most explicit during the intervention and perhaps became more familiar to the students, who were then able to approach the items in the postsurvey based on new impressions and attitudes concerning their development and assessment. Another note-worthy observation may be that fluency seemed to gain slightly more favor from the students

in this group than pronunciation, possibly reflecting a desire to emphasize macro-level skills and communication over the more segmental aspects of speaking such as pronunciation.

Additionally, these results seem to correlate with the previously mentioned studies that attest that explicit focus on a specific skill tends to increase the awareness and performance of that skill (Galante & Thomson, 2017; Tavakoli et al. 2016). The explicitness of instruction may not always be received well, as one student noted that sometimes it may seem needlessly excessive. In some cases, the explicitness may even increase the possibility of a task becoming more complex or time-consuming than it needs to be. Some students may find more benefit in explicit methods, whereas for others they may provoke the opposite effect, which is why it is important to vary teaching methods as effectively as possible, using both implicit and explicit strategies depending on the context and activity type, while also carefully reflecting on the purpose and execution of the tasks.

- *Systematic development and assessment of speaking skills is largely missing from the current Finnish educational context, naturally affecting the ways in which students react to being introduced to them.*

Due to the brevity of the intervention, it has been impossible to account for a wider variety of features and competences that the skill of speaking encompasses. Moreover, a longer period of intervention and a more sizeable sample of respondents would facilitate making inferences and drawing more generalizable conclusions from the results. A longer intervention would also make it possible to include a wider variety of assessment methods and approaches, which would increase both the validity and reliability of the results. The data collected from this group was undoubtedly influenced by the limited number of activities and assessment methods that could be used during the brief sequence of lessons, especially considering that formal speaking assessment has not been introduced before. However, the strengths of this study were the straightforward collection of actual Finland-Swedish students' attitudes and opinions on speaking skills and their assessment, as well as their reactions and impressions after having experienced one method of approaching speaking skills and their more systematic assessment in the EFL context.

6.3. Future Studies

In the future, it might be interesting to conduct a similar study in a traditional classroom setting to see if it would yield similar results as this study conducted via the computer screen. A similar design could also incorporate a group of students with Finnish as their L1, in order to compare possible differences in attitudes toward speaking between the two language groups. The high level of positive attitudes reflected in the responses in this study show that the students are in general receptive to the introduction of new methods of developing and assessing speaking as a skill. Future studies could benefit from a similar approach, while adding a wider selection of features and aspects of speaking to be developed and assessed, since pronunciation or fluency do not account for the wide array of language competence included in speaking. Students should therefore be given the opportunity to develop and demonstrate their oral skills through even more varied activity types and forms of assessment over a longer period of time, in order to be able to draw more comprehensive and generalizable conclusions in research.

7. SWEDISH SUMMARY – SVENSK SAMMANFATTNING

Finlandssvenska gymnasieelevers åsikter om undervisning och utvärdering av muntliga färdigheter i engelska:
En fallstudie om effekten av pedagogiskt ingripande

INTRODUKTION

Utvecklandet av goda muntliga färdigheter är ett centralt mål inom språkundervisningen, samtidigt som den kanske är den mest komplexa och abstrakta förmågan att undervisa i. Därför är det också viktigt att de som undervisar har beredskap till att stöda utvecklandet av muntliga färdigheter. Det talade språket ger också ett första intryck av talaren, så det är naturligt att man även i främmande språk vill utveckla goda färdigheter i muntlig förmåga.

Utvecklandet och utvärderingen av muntliga färdigheter betonas även i Grunderna för gymnasiets läroplan 2019, där det står på följande vis "I samband med de obligatoriska och valfria studierna i de främmande språken bedöms även den studerandes muntliga språkfärdighet." (Utbildningsstyrelsen, 2019: 183), men som Ahola (2017) noterar så belönas oftast utåtriktade elever mest, ifall muntliga färdigheter antas vara synonymt med timaktivitet, vilket de ju inte är. Ibland saknar även många lärare mera utvecklade handlingsmodeller för undervisning och bedömning av mängden olika färdigheter som ingår i talande, till exempel flytande tal (Galante & Thomson, 2017), vilket leder till att de muntliga färdigheterna inte beaktas lika mångsidigt som läsande, lyssnande och skrivande i språkundervisningen. En annan orsak till att de muntliga färdigheterna i främmande språk inte betonas lika starkt som de tre övriga språkfärdigheterna är faktumet att gymnasiekurserna ämnar förbereda studerande inför studentskrivningarna, som tillsvidare inte innefattar en muntlig del. Detta leder till att bedömningen av muntliga färdigheter även faller bort till en viss del under kurserna.

Därmed är det primära syftet med denna avhandling att ta reda på gymnasieelevers åsikter om och erfarenheter av utveckling och bedömning av muntliga färdigheter i engelska, samt att undersöka ifall dessa åsikter förändras efter en sekvens

av lektioner, som explicit fokuserat på utvecklingen och bedömningen av två delaspekter av den muntliga förmågan, nämligen uttal och flytande tal. Ett annat centralt syfte är att evaluera undervisningsmetoden som använts i studien och att dra slutsatser om dess effektivitet samt metoderna som använts i undervisningen och bedömningen.

TEORETISK BAKGRUND

Uttalet är en delaspekt av den muntliga förmågan, och forskning betonar främst att utvecklandet av ett förståeligt uttal är viktigare än en eventuell utveckling av ett modersmålsliknande uttal, vilket numera anses vara både orealistiskt och onödigt, speciellt då mängden icke-modersmålstalare av engelska överskrider språkets modersmålstalare i världen (Tergujeff, 2013). Eftersom undervisningen av uttal ofta kan vara relativt form-fokuserad, och därmed motstridigt till den kommunikativa språkundervisningen, har uttalet i viss mån åsidosatts i undervisningen. Fastän den kommunikativa kompetensen bör stå i fokus i språkundervisningen, finns det ändå en hel del fördelar med att också arbeta mera fokuserat kring uttal. Tidigare forskning har antytt att det kan finnas ett kommunikativt mervärde i att främst fokusera på de suprasegmentella delarna av uttal, till exempel intonation och betoning, och att i samband med dem också ta upp de mera formfokuserade segmentella delarna, som exempelvis uttal av enskilda ljud (Tergujeff, 2013).

Flytande tal är ett annat delområde som ofta försummas i språkundervisningen på grund av bristande kunskap om hur det kan utvecklas i praktiken (Galante & Thomson, 2017). Eftersom flytande tal är ett relativt abstrakt koncept, är det även komplicerat att mäta och fästa uppmärksamhet vid det som bör utvecklas, men Skehan (2009) har föreslagit att flyt kan mätas med hjälp av följande tre mått: 1. *breakdown fluency*, som indikeras genom placeringen av pauser i talet, 2. *repair fluency*, som indikeras genom bland annat omformuleringar och upprepningar, och 3. *speed fluency*, som indikeras genom antalet stavelser per minut. Denna modell kan användas som grund för att uppmärksamma och ge feedback på det talade språket med fokus på dess flyt.

Undersökningar visar också att explicit undervisning om och övning av aspekter som ingår i flytande tal, har positiva effekter på utvecklandet av själva förmågan (Tavakoli et al., 2016; Galante & Thomson, 2017). Därmed finns det ett

värde i att undervisningen inte enbart fokuserar på att ge möjligheter till att generellt öva muntlig kommunikation, utan också på att samtidigt baka in systematisk undervisning om vad till exempel flytande tal går ut på. I enlighet med resultaten gällande flytande tal i de ovannämnda undersökningarna, kan man tentativt anta att explicit undervisning av uttal kan öka studerandes utvecklande av också det delområdet. Därför vill jag genom denna undersökning få en inblick i studerandenas åsikter om systematisk undervisning och bedömning av muntliga färdigheter, speciellt med tanke på att dessa färdigheter inte utgjort en lika stor del av den systematiska bedömningen som färdigheter i det skriftliga språket.

UNDERSÖKNINGENS UPPBYGGNAD

Metoden som används i undersökningen är baserad på aktionsforskning, som beskrivs av Burns och Kurtoglu-Hooton (2016) som en form av forskning som utförs i ett socialt sammanhang där undervisaren är både en aktiv deltagare och forskare av en viss företeelse. I korthet går den ut på att aktion och forskning kombineras genom att den praktiska undervisningssituationen och den teoretiska bakgrunden formar en slags cykel, som gemensamt samverkar för att resultera i en vidareutveckling av undervisningsmetoder (Burns & Kurtoglu, 2016). Aktionsforskning som verktyg har sina fördelar i och med att den möjliggör fokus på ett specifikt undervisningsområde, och kan därmed bidra till konkreta och icke-generaliserande resultat och slutsatser (Barbre & Buckner, 2013: 3). Den bidrar även med möjligheten att konkret reflektera över aktionen, vilket i sin tur stöder vidareutveckling av den.

Själva undersökningen är uppbyggd som en kortvarig fallstudie, där en grupp gymnasieelever deltog i en sekvens av lektioner, vars fokus låg på utvecklandet och utvärderingen av muntliga färdigheter, speciellt uttal och flytande tal. Sekvensen av lektioner gavs i samband med den sjätte obligatoriska engelskakursen i gymnasiet. Insamlingen av data skedde genom två enkäter, varav den ena besvarades före sekvensen och den andra efteråt. Därmed följde studien en experimentell *pretest-posttest*-design, i och med att en del av analysen går ut på att utvärdera ifall en förändring har skett. Det finns dock en hel del begränsningar med uppbyggnaden av denna studie, eftersom samma grupp elever fyllde i båda enkäterna och dessutom var själva aktionen väldigt kortvarig. Det är också viktigt att poängtera de rådande omständigheterna kring undervisningen som ägde rum våren 2020, då

coronaviruspandemin gav upphov till distansundervisning. Detta medförde självklart vissa begränsningar för arbetssätt och evalueringsmetoder, speciellt med tanke på att muntlig kommunikation och växelverkan inte fungerar likadant via en skärm. Likväl bidrog omständigheterna samtidigt till möjligheten att reflektera över aktionsforskning under exceptionella förhållanden.

Innehållet i sekvensen omfattade varierande arbetssätt, aktivitetstyper och bedömningsmetoder, varav den kanske mest explicita och centrala var studerandenas inspelning av en textsnutt, på vilken de fick skriftlig feedback angående olika aspekter som ingår i uttal, bland annat betoning och intonation med fokus på att uppnå så förståeligt och tydligt tal som möjligt. Därefter fick gruppen spela in samma text på nytt, som sedan bedömdes med vitsord som en del av ett prov.

Analysen av resultaten genomförs kvalitativt utifrån åsikterna studerandena uttryckt i enkäten. Den första enkäten (Bilaga A) bestod av olika delar, i vilka studerandena ombads beskriva tidigare erfarenhet av att tala engelska både i klassrummet och på fritiden. I enkäten ombads studerandena även att indikera på en femfaldig Likertskala deras medhåll i frågor gällande deras åsikter och attityder kring att tala engelska i allmänhet, uttal, flytande tal och bedömning av muntliga färdigheter. Den andra enkäten (Bilaga B) bestod av samma frågor som använts i den första enkätens del med Likertskalan, vilket möjliggjorde jämförelsen mellan studerandes svar före och efter det pedagogiska ingripandet. Dessutom innehöll den andra enkäten en mängd öppna frågor kring undervisning och utvärdering av muntliga färdigheter, där studerandena kunde skriva fritt om sina tankar kring dessa teman.

Själva analysen av enkätsvaren bestod främst av kvalitativa metoder, eftersom svaren besvarades av en liten grupp. Femton studerande svarade på den första enkäten, medan sjutton svarade på den andra. Därmed var det inte gynnsamt att använda statistikanalys för att undersöka resultaten, utan enkätsvaren ställdes upp i tabeller som visualiserade spridningen av de individuella svaren. De öppna svaren analyserades med hjälp av en innehållsanalys (Dörnyei, 2010), där svaren grupperades i enlighet med sitt innehåll, vilket förenklade identifieringen av centrala teman som uttryckts via svaren.

RESULTAT OCH DISKUSSION

Generellt anser gymnasieeleverna i denna grupp att bedömningen av muntliga färdigheter är viktig, och speciellt feedback på styrkor och svagheter ansågs vara väldigt ändamålsenligt. Ett tema som ofta lyfts upp i enkätsvaren var dock att många studerande förknippar ångest med bedömning av den muntliga förmågan, vilket är viktigt att ta i beaktande med tanke på att talande är en stor del av den personliga identiteten och kan därmed lätt ge upphov till känslofyllda reaktioner i bedömningen. I motsats till många andra bedömningskontexter, till exempel faktabaserade essäer eller grammatikuppgifter, kan bedömningen av muntliga färdigheter kännas mindre objektiv och även stressande. Därför nämnde många studerande att detta gärna får tas i beaktande i bedömningen och att det kan underlätta för studerandena om den muntliga färdigheten bedöms utifrån en inskickad inspelning, som i denna studie, eller utifrån ett enskilt muntligt test tillsammans med läraren.

En av de mest centrala slutsatserna som dragits utifrån de teman som framkommit, är att muntliga färdigheter ska både undervisas och bedömas under de obligatoriska kurserna i gymnasiet på varierande och ändamålsenliga sätt. Majoriteten i gruppen var positivt inriktade mot både utvecklandet och bedömningen av muntliga färdigheter. Många svar antydde att både inre och yttre motivationsfaktorer påverkade de studerandes positiva förhållningssätt till muntliga färdigheter, fastän inre motivation, som baserar sig på individens egna målsättningar och personliga intresse, i allmänhet anses utgöra ett större stöd för språkutvecklingen än yttre motivation, som däremot påverkas av utomstående faktorer och krav.

Många studerande indikerade i enkäterna att bedömningen är speciellt viktigt för vidareutveckling av vilken förmåga som helst, och att bedömningen av muntliga färdigheter därför bör inkorporeras som ett stöd för den språkliga utvecklingen. Dessutom faller en stor del av språkförmågan bort, ifall de muntliga färdigheterna inte bedöms i samband med kurserna, och då belönas främst de studerande med en starkare skriftlig förmåga. Flera studerande i denna grupp uppskattade att inspelningen utgjorde en del av slutprovet, eftersom deras starka prestation i övningen höjde deras slutvitsord i provet.

Det framkom även en del studerande som varken ansåg utvecklandet eller utvärderingen av muntliga färdigheter som viktiga. Det kan antas att de studerande

vars slutvitsord i provet sänktes på grund av inspelningen inte heller uppskattade den som en del av bedömningen, speciellt då muntliga färdigheter inte tidigare utgjort en systematisk del av språkundervisningen. Dessutom uttryckte en minoritet av studeranden att explicit utveckling och speciellt bedömning av muntliga färdigheter inte går att utföra på ett tillräckligt ändamålsenligt och objektivt sätt. Detta kan bero på att muntliga färdigheter inte utgjort en systematisk del av undervisningen förut och därmed baserar sig mångas uppfattning om muntliga färdigheter som enbart ett medium för kommunikation i klassrummet. Följaktligen borde olika förmågor av muntliga färdigheter lyftas fram i undervisningen och dessutom klargöras för de studerande, för att undvika att själva bedömningen anses orättfärdig eller arbiträrt baserad på själva talet eller talesättet.

En annan central slutsats gällande bedömningsmetoder är att det bör finnas ett tydligt syfte med att ge vitsord för muntliga färdigheter, eftersom ett vitsord i sig inte nödvändigtvis stöder utvecklingen, samtidigt som den i isolation av andra bedömningsmetoder kan ge en snäv och förvrängd uppfattning åt studerandena om en mycket komplex språkförmåga. Därmed är det viktigt att klargöra för studerande att muntliga färdigheter är ett minst lika brett kompetensområde som exempelvis skriftliga färdigheter, och att muntliga färdigheten således innefattar en mängd olika kompetenser, varav alla inte kan samtidigt vara i fokus för utveckling eller bedömning. Följaktligen är enskilda bedömningstillfällen enbart en indikation på var studerande står inom ramarna för en viss övning eller uppgift, vilket är viktigt att betona för studerande för att undvika en förvrängd uppfattning om den egna muntliga förmågan. Enstaka kurser eller provtillfällen som fokuserar på att utveckla och bedöma studerandes muntliga färdigheter är därför inte tillräckligt omfattande, eftersom de inte tar i beaktande talets natur som en process i stället för en produkt (Lowie et al., 2018). Därför borde utvecklandet och bedömningen av muntliga färdigheter vara en naturlig del av språkundervisningen under hela studietiden.

Den största begränsningen med studiens utformning var tidsbristen. Därmed har det varit omöjligt att ta i beaktande alla aspekter av muntliga färdigheter, och att således få resultat om hur studerandenas attityder förändras efter en mera långvarig intervention, där det finns bredare möjligheter till att utföra en mer komplett undervisnings- och bedömningshelhet av muntliga färdigheter i engelska. Framtida forskning kan utgå från en liknande modell, där en större mängd aspekter utvecklas

och bedöms, eftersom varken uttal eller flytande tal i sig omfattar alla aspekter som ingår i muntliga färdigheter. Studerandena bör alltså få en möjlighet att utveckla och demonstrera sina muntliga färdigheter genom varierande aktivitetstyper och bedömningsformer under en längre tidsperiod för att man i forskningen ska kunna dra mer omfattande och generaliserbara slutsatser.

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Appendix A: Presurvey

Survey: Speaking skills ● English Language and Literature, Åbo Akademi

Speaking skills: opinions and experiences

Read the questions carefully and answer them based on **your own personal opinion and/or experience** . This means that there are no correct or incorrect responses; only your opinions!

This material will compose a part of my research project and pro-gradu thesis, which is why your answers are extremely valuable to me and I hope you take the time to consider the questions carefully and answer as accurately as possible.

NB! All responses are confidential, meaning that the responses in this survey will only be used for teaching and research purposes. Your personal response will also remain anonymous, meaning that your responses will not be traced back you personally in the analysis and presentation of results.

If you have any questions regarding the survey or the questions you can message me via email or whatsapp.

Thank you in advance for your response!

Jannika Siimelä
jsiimela@abo.fi
0401803917

Part 1: General Questions

1.1.
How often do you speak English during English lessons?
- ◯ Every lesson
- ◯ Most lessons
- ◯ Sometimes
- ◯ Rarely
- ◯ Never

1.2.
How often do you have a conversation in English during your free time?
- ◯ Every day
- ◯ Every week
- ◯ Every month
- ◯ Rarely
- ◯ Never

1.3.
What is the longest period of time you have spent in an English-speaking country?
- ◯ A few days
- ◯ 1-3 weeks
- ◯ 1-3 months
- ◯ 4-12 months
- ◯ Over a year
- ◯ I have never been in an English-speaking country

1.4. Which variety of English would you say is most commonly spoken by your teachers?
--Välj--

1.5. Which variety occurs most frequently in the teaching material? (e.g. textbook, digital resources, videos, etc.)
--Välj--

1.6. Do you prefer one variety over another?
--Välj--

1.7. Comments ?

Part 2: Experiences and opinions

Answer the statements based on your own experience or opinion of English lessons only. Choose the alternative on the scale (1-5) that you think **best describes** your feelings about the statement.

In question 2.3., *fluency* refers to a **naturally flowing** rate of speech, with minimal amount of hesitations, pauses and stuttering/searching for words while speaking (i.e. it **does not** include pronunciation, lexical or grammatical choices during speech)

2.1. Speaking English during lessons

	1. Completely disagree	2. Disagree	3. Unsure	4. Agree	5. Completely agree
It feels natural to speak English during lessons	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
I feel nervous about speaking English during lessons	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
I speak English more often than Swedish during lessons	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
I find it difficult to convey what I want to say in English (e.g. choosing the content of my speech)	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
I find it difficult to express myself in English (e.g. choosing appropriate expressions and words)	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯

I find it difficult to articulate myself in English (e.g. pr onunciation of wor ds and sentences)	○	○	○	○	○

2.2. Pronunciation

	1. Completely disagree	2. Disagree	3. Unsure	4. Agree	5. Complete
I think it's important to practice pr onunciation during lessons	○	○	○	○	○
I think we practice the pr onunciation of individual sounds and wor ds enough during our lessons	○	○	○	○	○
I think we practice mor e general pronunciation patter ns enough during our lessons (e.g. intonation and str ess)	○	○	○	○	○
It is important for me to achieve native-like pr onunciation	○	○	○	○	○
Having an accent when I speak English does not bother me	○	○	○	○	○

2.3. Fluency

	1. Completely disagree	2. Disagree	3. Unsure	4. Agree	5. Completely agree
It is important to practice fluency during lessons	○	○	○	○	○
We get enough instruction on fluency during our courses	○	○	○	○	○
I prefer speaking fluently over speaking corr ectly (using appropriate vocabulary & corr ect grammar)	○	○	○	○	○
It is more important to speak grammatically corr ect than to speak fluently	○	○	○	○	○

2.4. Assessment of speaking skills

	1. Completely disagree	2. Disagree	3. Unsure	4. Agree	5. Comple
It is important that speaking skills ar e assessed with a grade	○	○	○	○	
It is important to get feedback on speaking skills thr ough constructive comments on str engths and weaknesses	○	○	○	○	
Speaking should be assessed in the same degr ee as reading, listening and writing ar e during courses	○	○	○	○	
Speaking should be assessed to the same extent as r eading, listening and writing ar e in the matriculation exam	○	○	○	○	
Getting feedback on speaking skills is mor e important that getting feedback on r eading skills	○	○	○	○	
Getting feedback on speaking skills is mor e important than getting feedback on listening skills	○	○	○	○	
Getting feedback on speaking skills is mor e important than getting feedback on writing skills	○	○	○	○	

2.5. Comments ?

[ ]

Part 3: Self-assessment

In this part you are to take a stance to some statements concer ning **your current level of speaking skills in English.**

Follow the same scale and guidelines as in the pr evious part, that is, choose the alter native you think **best describes** your opinion of your own speaking skills in English.

In questions 3.1. & 3.2., *communicative strategies* refer to the tools we use to **contol and maintain a conversation** , e.g. taking tur ns & giving tur ns (to speak), repairing breakdowns in communication thr ough rephrasing the message and minimizing long pauses in conversation thr ough expressions like "that is a di fficult question..." or "let me think about that for a second...", etc.

3.1.

	1. Completely disagree	2. Disagree	3. Unsure	4. Agree	5. Completely agree
I can communicate without hesitation in new situations that also contain mor e advanced language	○	○	○	○	○
I can discuss the meaning of complex wor ds and expressions	○	○	○	○	○
I can correct myself while speaking if needed	○	○	○	○	○
I can vary my language use to fit di fferent communicative situations	○	○	○	○	○
I can use different communicative strategiers while speaking	○	○	○	○	○

3.2.

	1. Completely disagree	2. Disagree
I can give clear descriptions and expr ess viewpoints on most general topics, without sear ching for words too much	○	○
I can speak without making err ors which cause misunderstanding, and can corr ect most of my mistakes	○	○
I can speak during a longer period of time with a fairly even tempo and few noticeably long pauses	○	○
I can use different communicative strategies to support interaction	○	○
I can use some cohesive devices to link my utterances into clear , coherent speech (e.g. however , firstly/secondly/thirdly, for instance, in conclusion, etc.)	○	○

3.3. Comments ?

[ ]

Part 4: Speaking Exercises

4.1. Which of the following speaking exer cises are used most commonly during English lessons? Choose the thr ee most frequent.

☐ Discussions in pairs

- [ ] Discussions in groups
- [ ] Discussions with the whole class
- [ ] Presentations
- [ ] Pronunciation exercises
- [ ] Fluency exercises
- [ ] Debates
- [ ] Drama, role-play
- [ ] Reading aloud in class (from a text)
- [ ] Reading aloud in pairs (e.g. dialogue)
- [ ] Interviews
- [ ] Games (e.g. alias, problem-solving)
- [ ] Recordings (e.g. video, voice recordings)
- [ ] Other? Please, write what type of exercise in the box below.

Other

4.2. Which of the following speaking exercises are most useful for you? Choose the 3 most useful.

- [ ] Discussions in pairs
- [ ] Discussions in groups
- [ ] Discussions with the whole class
- [ ] Presentations
- [ ] Pronunciation practice
- [ ] Fluency practice
- [ ] Debates
- [ ] Drama, role-play
- [ ] Reading aloud in class (from a text)
- [ ] Reading aloud in pairs (e.g. dialogue)
- [ ] Interviews
- [ ] Games (e.g. alias, problem-solving)
- [ ] Recordings (e.g. video, voice recordings)
- [ ] Other? Please, write what type of exercise in the box below.

Other

4.4. Comments ?

Part 5: Additional information

5.1. Native language

5.2. Gender   --Välj--

5.3. Year of study   --Välj--

Sändning av uppgifter

Skicka uppgifterna

Kom ihåg att klicka "Skicka uppgifter" för att sända in dina svar . Tack för ditt deltagande!

Järjestelmänä Eduix E-lomake 3.1,   www.e-lomake.fi

Appendix B: Postsurvey

Survey: Speaking skills ● English Language and Literature, Åbo Akademi

POST DATA COLLECTION: Speaking skills: opinions and experiences

Read the questions carefully and answer them based on **your own personal opinion and/or experience** . This means that there are no correct or incorrect responses; only your opinions!

This material will compose a part of my research project and pro-gradu thesis, which is why your answers are extremely valuable to me and I hope you take the time to consider the questions carefully and answer as accurately as possible.

NB! All responses are confidential, meaning that the responses in this survey will only be used for teaching and research purposes. Your personal response will also remain anonymous, meaning that your responses will not be traced back you personally in the analysis and presentation of results.

Thank you for your response!

Jannika Siimelä
jsiimela@abo.fi
0401803917

Part 1: Research consent

1.

My response in both surveys can be used anonymously for the research purposes described above   ◉ Yes
    ○ No

Part 2: Experiences and opinions

Answer the statements based on your own experience or opinion of English lessons only. Choose the alternative on the scale (1-5) that you think **best describes** your feelings about the statement.

In question 2.3., *fluency* refers to a **naturally flowing** rate of speech, with minimal amount of hesitations, pauses and stuttering/searching for words while speaking (i.e. it **does not** include pronunciation, lexical or grammatical choices during speech)

2.1. Speaking English during lessons

	1. Completely disagree	2. Disagree	3. Unsure	4. Agree	5. Completely agree
It feels natural to speak English during lessons	○	○	○	○	○
I feel nervous about speaking English during lessons	○	○	○	○	○
I speak English more often than Swedish during lessons	○	○	○	○	○
I find it difficult to convey what I want to say in English (e.g. choosing the content of my speech)	○	○	○	○	○
I find it difficult to express myself in English (e.g. choosing appropriate expressions and words)	○	○	○	○	○
I find it difficult to articulate myself in English (e.g. pronunciation of words and sentences)	○	○	○	○	○

2.2. Pronunciation

	1. Completely disagree	2. Disagree	3. Unsure	4. Agree	5. Complete
I think it's important to practice pronunciation during lessons	○	○	○	○	○
I think we practice the pronunciation of individual sounds and words enough during our lessons	○	○	○	○	○
I think we practice more general pronunciation patterns enough during our lessons (e.g. intonation and stress)	○	○	○	○	○
It is important for me to achieve native-like pronunciation	○	○	○	○	○
Having an accent when I speak English does not bother me	○	○	○	○	○

2.3. Fluency

	1. Completely disagree	2. Disagree	3. Unsure	4. Agree	5. Completely agree
It is important to practice fluency during lessons	○	○	○	○	○
We get enough instruction on fluency during our courses	○	○	○	○	○
I prefer speaking fluently over speaking correctly (using appropriate vocabulary & correct grammar)	○	○	○	○	○
It is more important to speak grammatically correct than to speak fluently	○	○	○	○	○

2.4. Assessment of speaking skills

	1. Completely disagree	2. Disagree	3. Unsure	4. Agree	5. Comple
It is important that speaking skills are assessed with a grade	○	○	○	○	○
It is important to get feedback on speaking skills through constructive comments on strengths and weaknesses	○	○	○	○	○
Speaking should be assessed in the same degree as reading, listening and writing are during courses	○	○	○	○	○
Speaking should be assessed to the same extent as reading, listening and writing are in the matriculation exam	○	○	○	○	○
Getting feedback on speaking skills is more important that getting feedback on reading skills	○	○	○	○	○
Getting feedback on speaking skills is more important than getting feedback on listening skills	○	○	○	○	○
Getting feedback on speaking skills is more important than getting feedback on writing skills	○	○	○	○	○

2.5. Comments ?

[   ]

Part 3: Open-ended questions & Evaluation

Answer the questions below briefly, in **2-3 sentences,** with your honest opinion. If you prefer, you can write your response in Swedish.

3.1. How important are speaking skills to you? / Hur viktigt är talande för dig? (I motsats till lyssnande, läsande och skrivande)

3.2. Which aspects of speaking skills should be focused on more during lessons? / Vad borde övas mera när det gäller talande, under engelska lektioner?

3.3. How important is the assessment of speaking skills? / Hur viktigt anser du att utvärdering av talande är?

3.4. What would be the best way to assess speaking? / Vad tycker du vore det bästa sättet att utvärdera talande?

3.5 Did you think the recording task was useful/effective? Why (not)? / Tyckte du att inspelningsövningen var lärorik? Varför (inte)?

3.6. Recording Task

	Not at all important	Not important	Important	Very important	Did not get feedback/grade/send in recording
How important was it to get feedback on your first recording?	○	○	○	○	○
How important was it to get a grade for the final recording?	○	○	○	○	○

3.7. Fluency Activity

	Yes	No	Not sure/no difference	Absent, did not participate
Would you say the fluency activity was a useful activity? (In terms of practicing/developing spoken fluency)	○	○	○	○
Would you say your speech was more fluent during the last 30sec compared to the first 2min?	○	○	○	○

3.8. Any comments you want to give on the speaking activities and assessment during this unit, or in general?

Sändning av uppgifter

[Skicka uppgifterna]

Kom ihåg att klicka "Skicka uppgifter" för att sända in dina svar. Tack för ditt deltagande!

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Appendix C: Grading Criteria for Recording

Grade (20% of final exam)	*Assessment criteria for recording*
10	Articulation of sounds is extremely precise, and words are appropriately stressed throughout the entire recording, without any mispronunciations that could cause misunderstandings. Sentence stress and intonation patterns are used very effectively to convey and enhance meaning, through emphasis and with consideration for the content of the speech.
9	Articulation of sounds with a high degree of control. Words are appropriately stressed to ensure intelligibility, in practically every case in the recording. Sentence stress and intonation patterns are used effectively to convey and enhance meaning, with only occasional lapses in control which do not affect the intelligibility/effectiveness.
8	Articulation of sounds is clearly under control and word stress is placed appropriately. Although a few systematic mispronunciations may occur, the speaker is intelligible throughout the recording. Sentence stress and intonation patterns are used to support the message that the speaker intends to convey, though with some influence from other languages.
7	Articulation and word stress are generally intelligible throughout, despite regular mispronunciation of individual sounds. Sentence stress and intonation patterns help convey the message of the speaker in an intelligible way, in spite of a strong influence from other languages.

6	Articulation is generally intelligible in simpler sentences and word stress is placed relatively well, although the listener may have to put in some effort to ensure intelligibility. Sentence stress and intonation patterns are used in some simpler utterances, despite strong influence from other languages.
5	Turned in recording and followed the instructions only partly – e.g. turning in only a small part of the section.
4	Did not turn in a recording.