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## **How to Improve Students' Writing and Speaking Skills**

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## **ABSTRACT**

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### **How to improve students' writing and speaking skills**

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English is one of three core subjects in upper secondary school and it is essential that students receive a good education in this subject. Since writing and speaking are such prominent parts of the English language, the teacher is obliged to possess knowledge of how to improve students' proficiencies in an efficient way. The question is how to use this knowledge when the teacher is supposed to compose different methods for lessons, evaluate the exercises and give proper feedback to the students.

This investigation is based on various literary sources, interviews with teachers and questionnaires with students and the background information is the basis for the interview questions and the questionnaire.

There are endless possibilities for appropriate exercises to improve writing and speaking and it is impossible to investigate every single one there is in a relatively short essay. I have, however, found a fair number of methods, which will be described in this paper. In order to evaluate exercises, the teacher needs to be prepared and know what to focus on in the exercise as it is in progress, but also listen to the students' opinions since they know if they have learned anything or not. Correction of spoken errors should be handled cautiously by the teacher but the students should be made aware of the written mistakes they make.

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Search words: English teaching, writing, speaking, feedback, evaluation

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# 1 Introduction

Writing and speaking are two essential aspects of any language, including English. Since English is said to be the lingua franca<sup>1</sup> of the world, it is essential that Swedish students possess knowledge of the English language. Otherwise it would complicate their ability to interact beyond Swedish borders. Thus, they need to be aware of the importance of knowing this language.

To simplify the process of learning, variation is a key word in this case. If a teacher uses the same writing and speaking exercises over and over again the students are less likely to learn than if the lessons are varied. Concerning students' speaking development, Susan Brindley has a good example where a student promotes student participation by explaining that students learn a lot more by interacting with others rather than just listening to a teacher (S. Brindley 55).

There is a large number of goals that the pupils should aim for in upper secondary school. I have listed some goals which I found on *Skolverket's* website where students should:

desire, have the confidence and be able without preparation to take part in discussions on familiar subjects and exchange information, personal views and experiences (EN1201 – English A)

have the ability to present contents in writing in a clear and well-structured way as well as be able to express themselves in a varied and personal manner with respect to the audience and situation (EN1202 – English B)

be able to compile and produce a written report and demonstrate a critical attitude to using and examining different sources (EN1203 – English C)

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<sup>1</sup> Lingua franca – Common means of communication. If two persons from for example Sweden and Japan meet, they would probably speak English to each other. By doing so, English becomes a lingua franca, since it is native to none of the involved persons.

The most likely guarantee for students to develop their writing and speaking skills is that the English language is used frequently during class. The more the students get used to the English language, the more natural it seems for them to think in English and transform those thoughts into spoken and written English.

There are various reasons why I have chosen this topic. Together with speaking, writing is the most important way of expressing oneself and I believe that this quote strengthens this opinion:

Students and their teachers are finding that writing can be a powerful means of making sense of experience and constructing meaning. Whether first graders or engineering majors in college, students can be shown how to use writing to think, understand, and learn (R. Indrisano, J.R. Squire 14).

The purpose of everything you do in English classes is to help students to develop their writing and speaking skills, regardless of whether it is grammar, drama or national tests. I want my future students to have the will to develop their vocabulary and be able to express themselves in both speech and text.

## 1.1 Aim

The purpose of this essay is, as I have briefly mentioned above, that I with the help of studying want to gain the required knowledge to be the kind of English teacher that could help the pupils to develop their writing and speaking skills. This paper is aimed at pupils in Upper Secondary School, which means that the main purpose is not to teach the pupils to write or speak, but to help them write and speak better than they used to, to improve their abilities. There are some questions I must ask myself and by investigating these areas I aim to be able to answer them as well as possible.

- What kind of different exercises of writing and speaking should be used in class?
- How should these methods be evaluated?
- In what ways can a teacher correct students' mistakes without decreasing their confidence?

## 1.2 Method

The information described in the background is based on various literary sources which concern writing and speaking. By reading this literature I received necessary knowledge to be able to create the framework of my questions for my interviews with two teachers and the questionnaire with three classes. I thought that I could not have only information about the specific topic. To be able to receive as valuable information as possible from the interview and questionnaire, I formulated my questions for the interview by using *The Helping Interview* as a source. There I learned the importance of letting the interviewee be a significant part of the conversation instead of making the interview a monologue. If the interviewer says everything the interviewee might be irritated about not getting to speak at all (A. Benjamin 14). I also thought that it would be best if I used mostly open questions since I believe that closed questions more or less would give yes- or no-answers. By using open questions, the answers could be much more informative (P. 83).

The information in the interview questions is based on the background but the questions are structured according to Benjamin's tips.

When I composed the questionnaire I thought that I should link it up with the interview questions, since it could be valuable to know if the teachers and the students would agree or disagree and to what extent. It should be mentioned that one of the two teachers are responsible for two of the three classes and the other teacher is responsible for the third class. I chose to not use questions in my questionnaire, but to use statements instead.

## **2 Background**

Studying writing and speaking is essential for students to develop their language skills. Some say that writing is more important than speaking and vice versa. While some people have the opinion that written language is a reflection of spoken language, others claim that written language is worth more than spoken language since it is a more proper form (S. Cushing 15).

To be able to conduct good interviews, to make a good analysis and to come to a sensible conclusion, I need to have knowledge of these two specific items. I will in this background present information required in order to achieve my goal which is to find out how a teacher can develop students' writing and speaking abilities.

### **2.1 Methods for writing**

Several methods can be used to improve students' writing. I will not bring up every single method there is since that would take too long. Instead I will focus on a few methods that I think will be useful in a classroom, but of course all the methods will be taken from certain sources that I have chosen.

In many cases, the hardest thing for a student concerning writing is to get started with the entire writing process. According to Cowley, there are different reasons why students have trouble with this. One reason could be that the students are afraid of failing and that they are under pressure to perform. The teacher must calm them down and persuade them that if they do make mistakes, it is not a disaster. They will just have to correct them afterwards. There could also be other methods. Cowley mentions warm-up exercises, rewards and challenges for the students to increase their motivation (S. Cowley 3-5).

What to write about is a quite common problem. The process of collecting information and coming up with ideas is not easy for everyone. Making mind maps is a recommended option. If you have the topic Christmas, the teacher tells the students

to close their eyes and think of all the things they can come up with that are connected with Christmas. This is an efficient method and Hedge maintains that this works with almost any topic (T. Hedge 30-31).

Brainstorming is a second alternative where the students gain information by discussing in groups. White and Arndt write that both the teacher and the students have important roles in this session. One example of brainstorming is that every student starts by writing down their own ideas about a certain topic. After a few minutes they join a partner and they discuss their ideas. Some time later the two students become four and they elaborate their ideas. At the end of this activity the discussion stops and each group suggests at least three ideas that are written down on the board by the teacher. It is, according to White and Arndt, crucial that the teacher goes through all these ideas with the students before the writing starts so that everyone understands what the ideas mean. After this session the writing can start, with the students' minds filled with ideas (R. White, V. Arndt 18-21).

Besides these different methods for writing, Cowley mentions in her book that the teacher should give students inspiration and create an atmosphere for writing. One idea is that the students could write a letter to their favorite person or to pretend that they are producers of a TV-documentary. In order to create an atmosphere Cowley claims that if certain students work best when they are listening to music they should be allowed to have a Walkman while writing. Dramatic sounds like wind or maybe owls howling could be a good inspiration if the students are supposed to write for example ghost stories (S. Cowley 8-10).

## **2.2 Methods for Speaking**

Just as there are many ways of improving students' writing skills, there is also a fair number of methods on different levels for improving their speaking skills. Luoma has listed several methods in her book *Assessing Speaking*. She mentions exercises both for the less advanced levels, such as describing pictures in pairs or making up a story from a series of pictures, and exercises for the more advanced levels, like describing diagrams or discussing current issues, for example, how violence can affect children (S. Luoma 139-154).

The next method I will bring up is something I have used myself in one of my school placement periods and that is role play. This is an excellent way of developing language, especially the design of the social language or everyday language (Davison. J, Moss. J 83). By using this method Ur claims that the students can develop their speaking skills by pretending they are in a situation outside the classroom. The term role play can mean both performing a play, the original play or rewritten, and simulation. Simulation means, in the case of Penny Ur's book, that the students receive a task where they are supposed to imagine being a group with a practical problem to solve. The only way to come to a solution is to discuss (P. Ur 131-132).

In the book *Teachers exploring tasks* by Edwards and Willis I read about story telling and the advantages conveyed by it. The exercise consisted of a few steps:

- The teacher forms groups of four
- Every student tells a story, it does not matter about what.
- When the student has finished the story the other three students ask questions about the story or things they have not completely understood.
- When all students in the group have told their stories they receive fifteen minutes of preparation where they look up words in the dictionary or ask the teacher for support.
- After the fifteen minutes, the students retell their stories (C. Edwards, J. Willis 203-204).

Edwards and Willis describes this exercise as individual development since the retelling part of the story will sound different in some ways. Not only will there be better vocabulary, but there will be more fluency and fewer pauses (P. 203-204).

One problem with speaking tasks, especially concerning group work, is that there are always students in every group who talk more than others, and they dominate the groups. Wright lists a few ideas how this can be solved. First of all, groups should not be any bigger than four persons. Otherwise there will be too many. Wright also mentions that the students should be given certain roles in the discussions:

- A leader – The one with the most responsibility. He/she leads the discussion, make sure that everyone gets to speak and also watches the time.

- Note-maker – Writes everything down and put in pauses in the discussion to summarize.
- Arguer – Is the most critical person in the group. He/she argues about everything that is said in the discussion.
- Pacifier – The sort of peace-maker in the group. He/she tries to persuade the group to come to an agreement (T. Wright 74-75).

It could be difficult to get into this character for some persons. To make this easier, Wright advises that the students should have role-cards with written arguments and characteristic instructions. This could take time but, according to Wright, it is definitely worth it (P. 74-75).

Another problem with group discussions is that the students may discuss things that do not concern the topic and they may also speak Swedish. The fact that they talk about other things than the topic is not necessarily only negative, as long as they speak English. If that is the case, at least they are talking. If they go back to Swedish, it could be a bigger problem. The teacher is the supervisor during activity and Wright has a few tips for efficient methods the teacher can use in group discussions in general. The teacher should start off in the middle of the class-room and go to different groups to listen. He/she should not just circle around since the students will become aware of the teacher's pattern. After the teacher has listened to a group, he/she should return to the centre of the classroom and then just go to different groups randomly. By doing so, the teacher will be unpredictable and the students would have to focus more (P. 77).

## **2.3 Feedback**

When the students have finished these different tasks, the next issue will be how to correct what is done. To start with the written assignments, the problem in most cases for the teachers is what to focus on in the correction. According to Penny Ur, the most important part of the written task is the content, but that is far more difficult to correct than grammar or spelling. Ur also claims that the pupils want their mistakes to be

corrected. One piece of advice is that corrected mistakes could be replaced with suggestions of how to do it instead. Another question is whether all mistakes should be corrected or not. If teachers correct everything then there is a risk that they fail in their role as supportive mentors; but on the other hand, as mentioned above, students *want* to know what mistakes they are making. Some sort of compromise is required and Ur advises that only mistakes that could make the reader confused since the meaning could change should be corrected. Otherwise the students' confidence might sink (Ur 170-171).

Correcting all kinds of written tasks requires a great deal of time and the teacher must cope with the tempo in upper secondary school. One option to simplify this issue is peer review, a method which means that the student correct each other's work. Apart from saving some valuable time for the teachers, the students can learn to be more responsible, they can learn from each other and after being critical of their classmate's work, they can gain the ability to be more self-critical (Morgan, *English Teaching Professional* 29).

Antunes mentions different ideas she has about correction techniques. She has the opinion that students should not be served with the correct solutions whenever they make mistakes. Instead they should try to recognize their errors for themselves in order to develop their writing ability. A few examples of ways the teacher can use are that the teacher will underline each mistake and let the students come up with the correct answer or that the teacher puts a cross next to a sentence where an error has been spotted. The students are supposed to locate the mistake and correct it. Antunes says that the main reason for having these methods is that the students become aware that they can find and correct their mistakes if they are careful (*English Teaching Professional* 30).

Concerning speaking correction, Baker and Westrup point out some tips for teachers. When a student says an incorrect word or an incorrect sentence the teacher should correct it immediately, at least on most occasions. The question is *how* the teacher is supposed to correct the student. Here are some options:

- Raise your eyebrow or make a facial expression so that the students know that something is wrong.

- Repeat the sentence mentioned by the student, e.g. *Not I come yesterday but I...* (and let the student fill in the correct sentence).
- Let the other students help if the first one does not know.
- If there is a discussion exercise during class, the teacher should walk around in the classroom, listen to the groups and check if there is any incorrect word that he/she hears. Write it/them down and write them on the board later. The teacher must not mention who has said this/these incorrect word/words (J. Baker, H. Westrup 80-82).

## 2.4 Evaluation

Evaluation is an important part of teaching in general. There are two main reasons why teachers should evaluate their work.

- To improve students' learning
- To improve their own teaching.

In order to be able to evaluate any classroom-activity, whether it is writing or speaking, you need to know before the lesson starts what you should evaluate, i.e. how can you tell if the students have learned something? (Wright 82-87)

When teachers evaluate something there are, according to Wright, three questions that they need to ask themselves.

- What were they supposed to learn?
- Did they learn what they were supposed to learn?
- How can the teacher tell that they learned it?

(P. 82-87)

For example we can imagine that the students are going to have group discussions on different cultures. At this point teachers already need to evaluate in a way. In order to make this lesson work the teachers must be very clear when he/she explains what culture *is*. If the students do not entirely understand this, the lesson will fail. A teacher can never be too clear about the content of a lesson. It would be the same if the students were to discuss a famous politician like Tony Blair. They must be sure who he is, otherwise there would be no point in having the lesson (P. 82-87).

So how can we make sure the students comprehend the purpose of the exercises that has been done or are in progress? Teachers cannot just ask them if they understand because they will probably say that they do even if they do not. The teacher needs to go deeper and have some evaluation activities with the students after a lesson. Here are some examples that Wright gives us:

- Divide the students into pairs and let them come up with major points about learning.
- Let the students invent their own questions of how an evaluation process should happen.
- If there are any particular learning objects that are supposed to be in focus, let the students come up with new names for these objectives.
- They could put the recently finished lesson in relation to the previous lessons and see what similarities and differences there are (P. 82-87).

White and Arndt are also of the opinion that students should take part in the evaluation process and they should definitely evaluate their own work, in the sense that if they do not, they will have difficulties in correcting their work afterwards. These two writers mention that the students should prepare in their minds that several people are supposed to read what they have written. If they think like that, they will become more careful in their writing which is essential for the students (White, Arndt 116-117).

## **3 Analysis**

In this analysis I will present the results of the interviews and the questionnaires and I will also discuss the results here.

### **3.1.1 The Participating School and the Participating Teachers**

The school which has been the place for my investigation is an upper secondary school in an average size town. The school is quite large and has both theoretical and practical programmes.

I have interviewed two different English teachers from this school.

Teacher A is female, has worked as a teacher for several years and teaches English, Swedish and Psychology. She teaches A- and B-course of English in upper secondary school.

Teacher B is also female and has not worked as a teacher for very long. She teaches English and History and is responsible for English A and, unlike teacher 1, English C in upper secondary school.

## **3.2. Interviews**

### **3.2.1. When you are choosing writing tasks, do you involve the students in the choice of topics? If so, how do you decide?**

Teacher A says that her students are not involved in choosing topics since she thinks that they do not like to have that freedom. They would rather that the teacher gives them a topic. They mainly write about current events or happenings.

Teacher B, however, points out that her students are involved in choosing topics, especially in the C-course. How they choose depends very much on the subject but they do use brainstorming as one method. She claims that her students in the C-course are full of ideas and very motivated.

These two teachers face this process differently. I mentioned brainstorming and mind mapping in the Background, methods where the students get to take more responsibility in their own writing. Teacher A never uses this method with the motivation that the students do not like this responsibility, while teacher B involves her students frequently. Is it possible that the students in the C-course are more creative than those in the A- and B-course or does teacher 1 underestimate her students?

### **3.2.2. How do you evaluate the writing tasks you are doing?**

Teacher A explains that she tries to remember the students' previous results, but that it could be difficult since there are so many of them. She claims that everybody, more or less, has problems with verbs and that could be a good way to see if they have developed.

Teacher B evaluates her writing tasks differently from Teacher A. She discusses with her students whether they feel that the current exercise is rewarding for them or not. She also tries to see if they have been able to stick to the topic or if it is too narrow, i.e. if they understand what they are writing about.

It is, I think, possible to answer the questions whether or not they have learned anything by evaluating the exercises like this. They should always try to avoid verb errors and if those mistakes are reduced, then there is a definite development. These two teachers do not, however, do very deep evaluations. It describes in the Background how students work in pairs and evaluate themselves, by coming up with their own evaluation questions, while teacher B prefers discussing exercises in the whole class.

### **3.2.3. Many students have problems getting started to write. How do you work on that issue?**

Teacher A usually gives them an opening sentence and the students are supposed to continue from that. They can choose from different beginnings. She also mentions two other methods: writing a different ending or a continuation of a story.

Teacher B also uses opening sentences when she teaches students from the A-course. In the C-course, however, she uses brainstorming and they all develop a beginning by discussing different ideas.

Teacher A brings up methods that are not described in the background, such as opening sentences or different endings which are creative methods. Teacher B once again uses brainstorming, which involves the students. None of them talks about the students' possible fear of making mistakes and how they face that issue, at least not concerning writing exercises.

### **3.2.4. Do you have any particular methods to create a specific atmosphere for writing sessions?**

Teacher A says that she does not have any particular methods for writing sessions but that she does have methods for speaking exercises. Those who write better when they listen to music are allowed to do so if they do not disturb the others.

Teacher B demands that they are quiet during writing sessions and sometimes she

tries to create a specific atmosphere. If they are supposed to write a ghost story she reads a short story before the session begins. Just like Teacher A, she allows her students to listen to music if they do not disturb the others.

Both teachers agree with the authors in the Background when it comes to students listening to music during writing sessions. This is essential since some students work better by listening to music. They do differ on one point though. Teacher A does not have any other particular methods for creating a certain mood in the classroom while teacher B does.

### **3.2.5 What do you think is an appropriate group size for discussions?**

Teacher A one thinks that six in a group is enough.

Teacher B claims that it depends on the topic. She tells me that her class in the C-course consists of only fifteen students and therefore she often uses the entire group when there is a discussion. In bigger classes she does not want more than four or five students in a group.

Wright claims that four people are enough for group work, a number which the two interviewed teachers do not entirely seem to agree upon. Teacher B even has group discussions with the entire class of fifteen students which are far too many if you refer to Wright's opinions.

### **3.2.6. Do you speak only English in class?**

Both of them immediately state that they do.

There is no need for further comments. They are supposed to speak only English and they do.

### **3.2.7 How do you manage to get the students to speak only English?**

Teacher A says that even though she only speaks English, the students sometimes

answer her in Swedish. She tells me that some of her students are very shy and that they find it difficult to speak English when many students are listening. She therefore quite often sits outside with small groups in order to make them speak. She tells me that some of the shy students are actually quite good when they find the courage to speak.

Teacher B keeps telling her students that it does not matter if they do not pronounce certain words correctly. They are allowed to make mistakes. Instead she answers with correct words without pointing anyone out.

There were examples in the Background of drama and group discussions where English is obligatory and the teacher is the supervisor with the task to keep them speaking English.

### **3.2.8. Role play is said to be a good way of improving students' speaking abilities. Do you ever use this method?**

Teacher A uses this method quite often. She claims that shy students dislike drama when they have to perform in front of the class. As mentioned earlier, they find more courage when they speak in smaller groups. She says that they sometimes pretend to be journalists and that they interview, for example, characters from Pippi Longstocking, characters that everyone recognizes and can identify themselves with.

Teacher B also uses drama every once in a while. She mentions that when she teaches her students who are studying to become mechanics, she makes situations where they are mechanics and they talk to customers. Other forms of drama she uses are classical plays such as Shakespeare's work.

The answers I received from the two interviewees were very helpful. The information is filled with many details which is good. They both believe that drama is necessary, maybe not for the same reason as the Background shows, but they seem to see an obvious development by having drama in class.

### **3.2.9. How do you correct written errors and spoken errors?**

Teacher A is very careful about correcting spoken errors since she fears that if she corrects everything, the students might lose confidence and stop speaking. She corrects every written error though. She says that one method she uses to prevent certain mistakes is that her students get an English text which they are supposed to translate to Swedish. When they have done that they translate it back to English. By doing so, they become more careful.

Teacher B is also very careful about correcting spoken errors for the same reason as Teacher A. As mentioned above she answers the students with the correct word(s) without pointing out that it was wrong. Just like Teacher A, she corrects every written error, since she feels that they need to know what they did wrong. She does not fill in the correct words, but she lets them look them up themselves. Instead she marks for example *gr* (grammatical error) or *sp* (spelling error).

There is a clear agreement between the teachers about not correcting every mispronounced word. Neither of them wants to make their students feel awkward by telling them that they made mistakes, just as Baker and Westrup write in their book. Considering written errors, the teachers agree with Antunes in the way that they do not give correct solutions, as they want the students to find out for themselves. They seem to apply the principle of correcting everything so that the students know what mistakes they are making.

### **3.2.10. How do you evaluate whether a students' speaking skills have developed or not?**

Teacher A thinks that it is hard to do that since she has so many students, but by using small groups often she gets to know her students better and is able to see changes.

Teacher B claims that if you have students long enough you can hear changes in their vocabulary and their fluency very clearly. She uses small groups and she also uses so called student-teacher interaction which means that she talks alone with a student.

The information in the background about evaluation appears to be a little defective in comparison to the answers I received from the two teachers. The teacher should be aware of how to evaluate things when an exercise is in progress and the students should be involved in the evaluation. If they evaluate their own work there is an increasing chance that they will avoid certain mistakes in the future.

### **3.2.11. How do you make sure that everybody gets to speak as much as possible?**

Teacher A sometimes uses exercises in class where everyone is required to speak, but she also believes that it is cruel to force very shy students to speak in large classes. Once again she mentions small groups as a good method.

Teacher B has the opinion that it is hard to make everyone speak in classes of 30 students. According to her, a teacher knows who speaks a lot and who are more reticent, but she does not like to force students to speak. Just like Teacher A, she claims that the use of small groups is a good method. She also points out that the A- and C-course differ a great deal from each other.

Group discussions seem to be the most valuable speaking exercise together with role play. They both have the opinion that it is mean to force students to speak and that they speak more if they take part in small groups. In ordinary group discussions they do not give the students specific roles, e.g. leader and note-maker, as Trevor Wright takes up in his book.

### 3.3 Result of Questionnaire

The questionnaire (see appendix A) was answered by 62 students from the A-, B- and C-course of upper secondary school. They were supposed to give their opinions on ten statements.

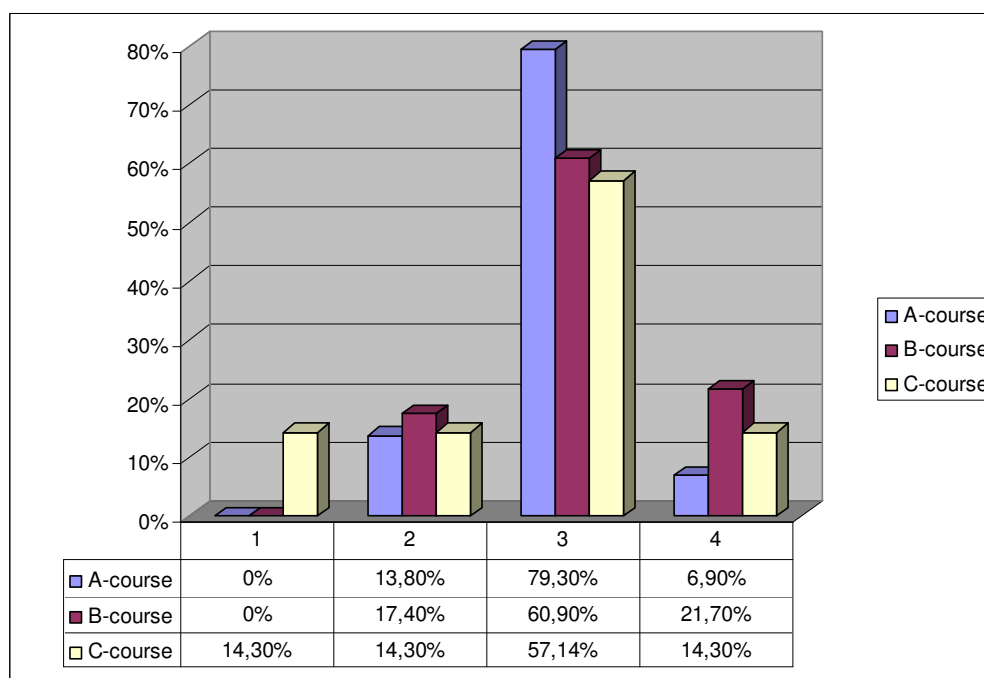
It should be mentioned that I took away the 11<sup>th</sup> statement from the result since the opinions were too similar for each class and the question maybe was too obvious as it was.

It should also be mentioned that there was quite a difference in the total amount of students from each class. The class from the A-course consisted of 29 students and the class from the B-course 23. The class from the C-course normally has fifteen students but more than half of the students were not present at the moment when they did the questionnaire. There were unfortunately no more than seven.

I have chosen to show the results in bar charts. The questionnaire will be shown in the appendix but I will explain how the diagram works. For each diagram there is a statement which the students were supposed to rank by a 1-4 scale. These numbers mean as follows:

- 1 – I disagree completely
- 2 – I disagree a little
- 3 – I agree a little
- 4 – I agree completely

### 3.3.1 I want the teacher to correct every error that I say/write

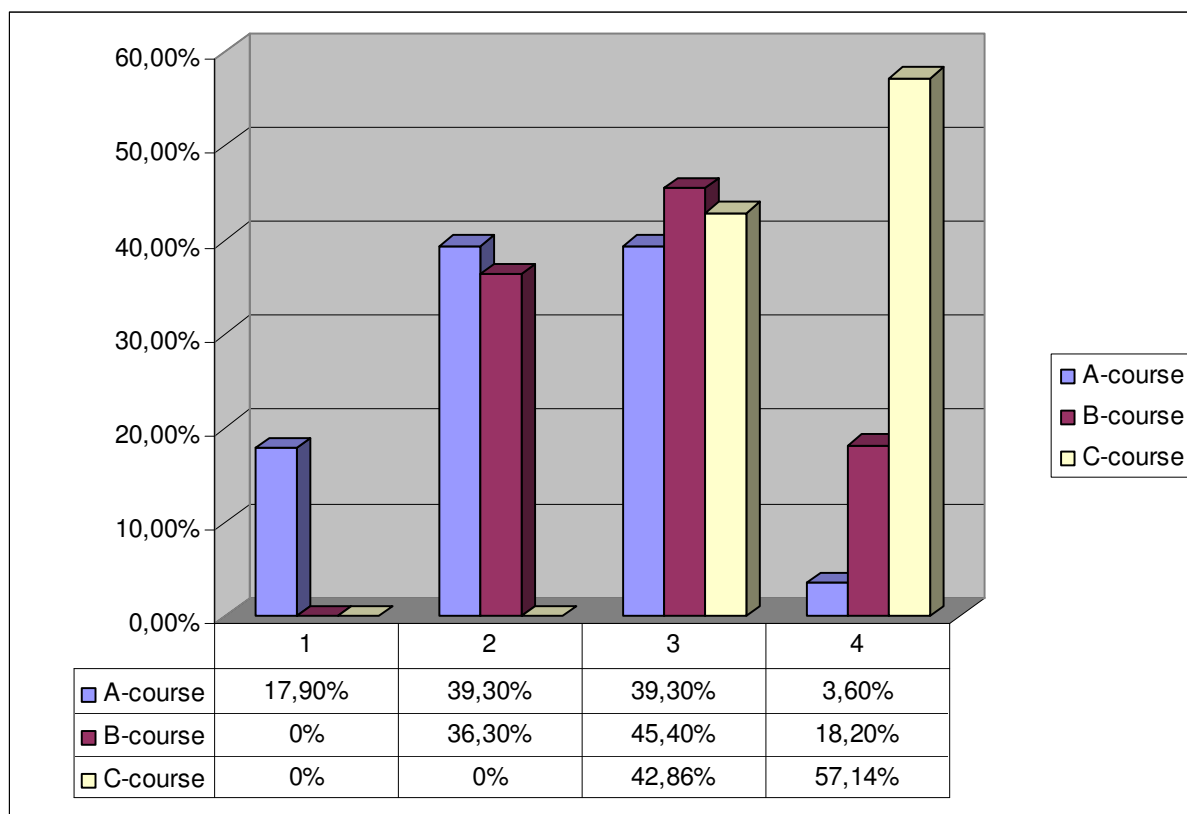


As we can see here, none of the students from the A- and B-course refuse to allow the teacher to correct any errors that they make even if some of them have a few doubts about it. They are not terrified of being corrected even if Teacher A, who is responsible for the A- and B-course, says that she is careful about correcting spoken errors. The students in the C-course, however, do not entirely agree on this point, since at least two of them are very skeptical about being corrected.

To summarize this statement, the majority of the students in all three classes like being corrected even they are not entirely convinced that this is a good method. Nevertheless, they prefer being corrected than not.

There is a surprisingly high percentage of students who are positive about having every error corrected. This seems to be the reality, despite the fact that the teachers warn about correcting every spoken word, since it might affect the students' confidence. On the other hand, Ur claims that the students *want* to know what mistakes they are making and the teachers also have the opinion that the students should be aware of their faults.

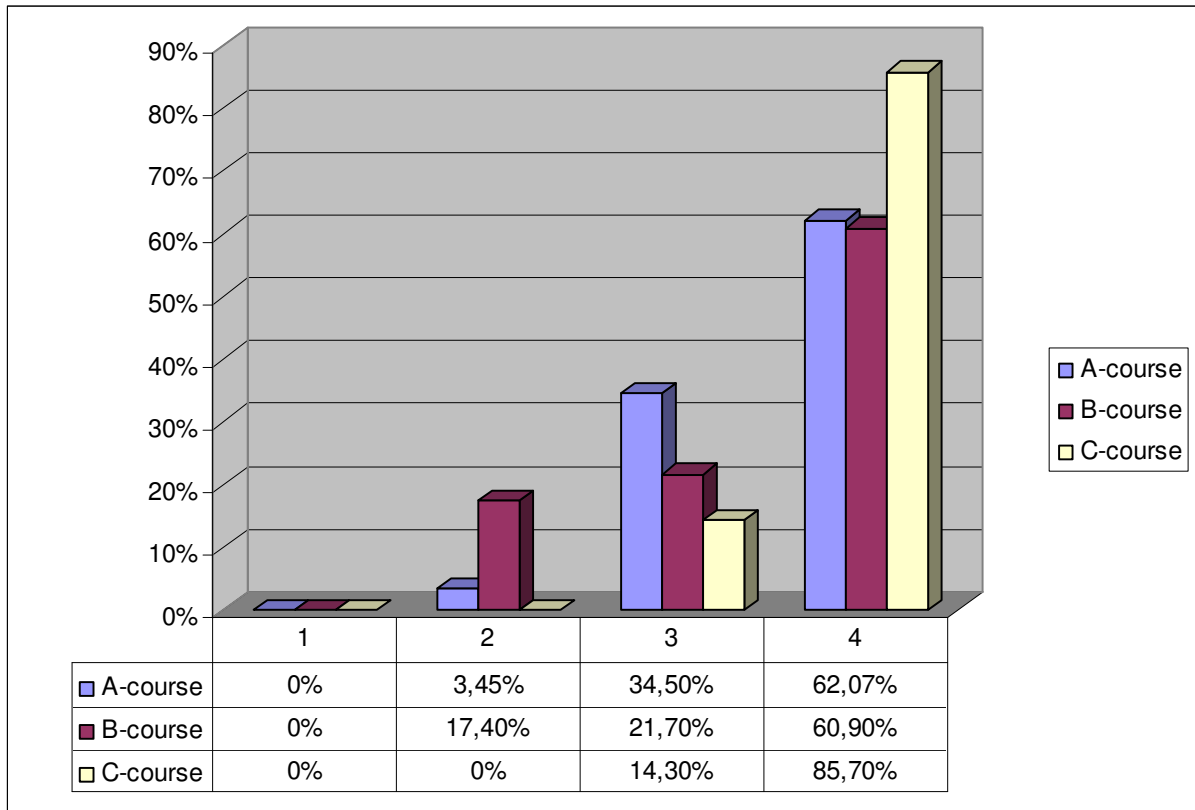
### 3.3.2 We get to decide writing topics together with the teacher



This diagram shows that the students in the C-course are more involved in choosing writing topics than the two other classes, which should be correct according to the two teachers. There are no particular arguments against the C-course students' answers since none of them doubt that they are involved. The A- and B-course, however, appear to be more involved than they are supposed to be, based on the answers from teacher A. She said in the interview that they do not take part in this process at all, but some of them apparently feel that they do.

It is quite difficult to link these answers with the information given in the background since the background more or less is about different methods that could be used by the teacher and do not consist of arguments for or against student involvement.

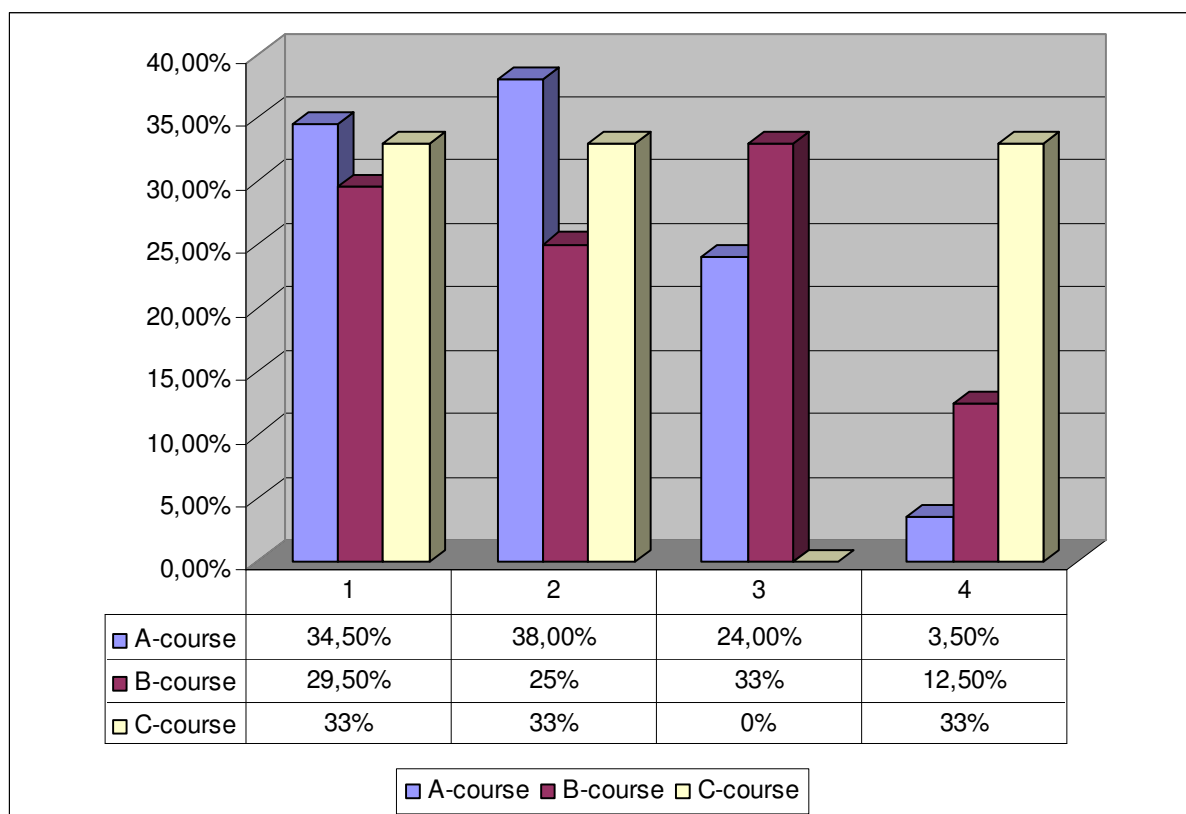
### 3.3.3 Everyone gets to speak when we have group discussions



The general consensus in all three classes is that everyone gets to speak during discussions. Unfortunately, this diagram could be a little misleading since it does not say if it refers to discussions when the entire class is involved or if it concerns small groups. Either way, the important point is that everyone gets to speak and, according to this diagram, that seems to be the case. Only a few students disagree.

This diagram is, like the previous one, not filled with enough necessary information compared to the Background and the interviews. The question here is whether they get to speak or not, not if there are any particular methods to get everyone involved.

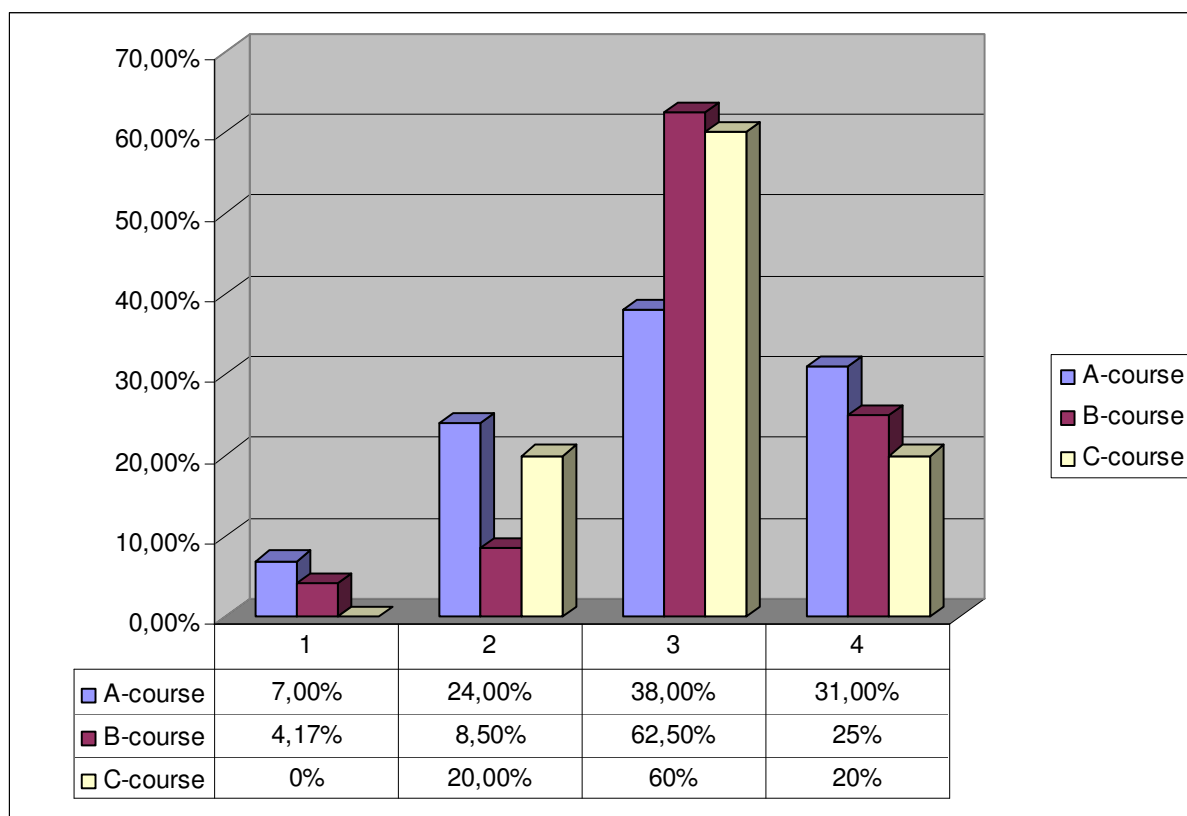
### 3.3.4 I speak only English during English class



This investigation shows that there is a very clear trend; the higher the level the students are attending, the more they seem to understand the importance of keeping to the target language. Some students obviously find it convenient to answer the teacher, or discuss in Swedish, but as I mentioned, there is an increasing awareness when the students reach a higher level.

The fact that so many students disagree with this statement is not a sensation. Even though every English teacher in upper secondary school aims for their students to speak only English it is inevitable that they sometimes fall back on their mother tongue. It said in the Background that the teacher could walk around in the classroom without a particular pattern, but even by doing so it seems to be impossible to check everybody at the same time.

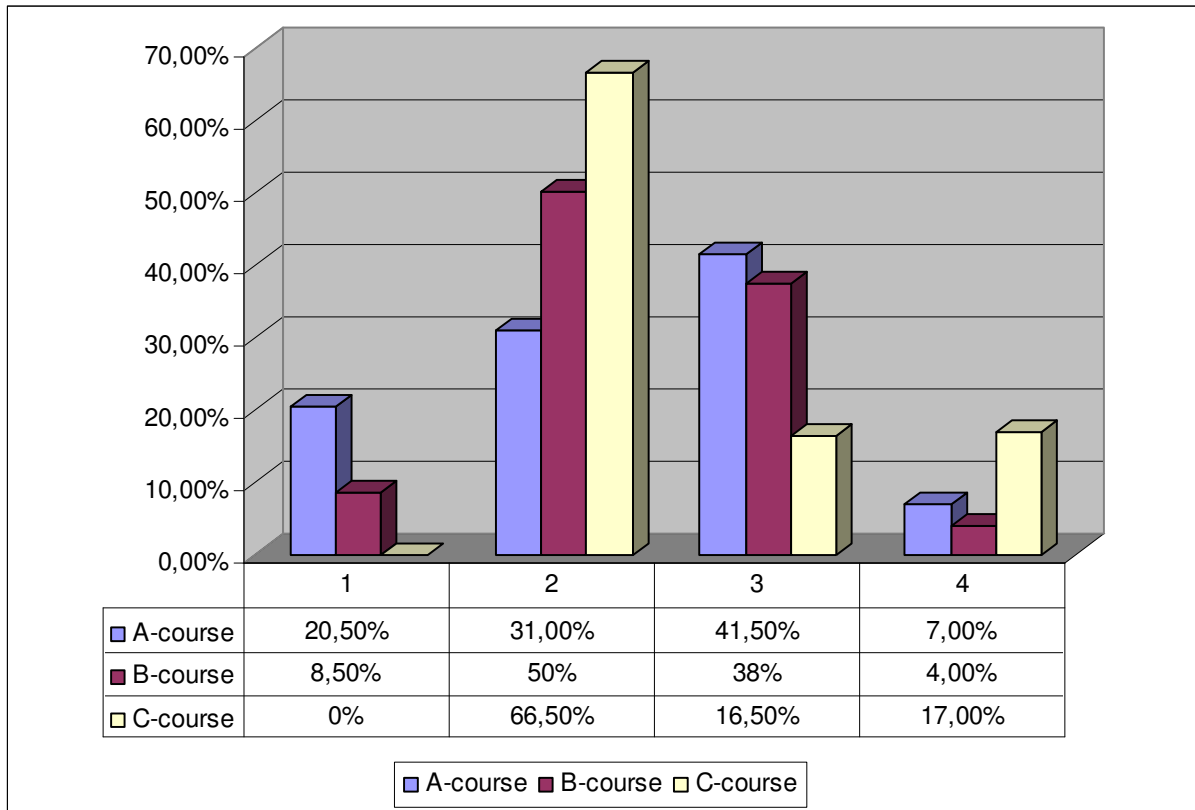
### 3.3.5 The teacher speaks only English during English class



There is a surprisingly high percentage of students who think that the teachers do not speak only English during class. The students do not fully agree with the teachers in this case. Still, the majority of them believe that the teachers speak English most of the time.

This is also hard to link up with the Background. It seems obvious that the teachers are supposed to speak mainly English in English class, especially in upper secondary school.

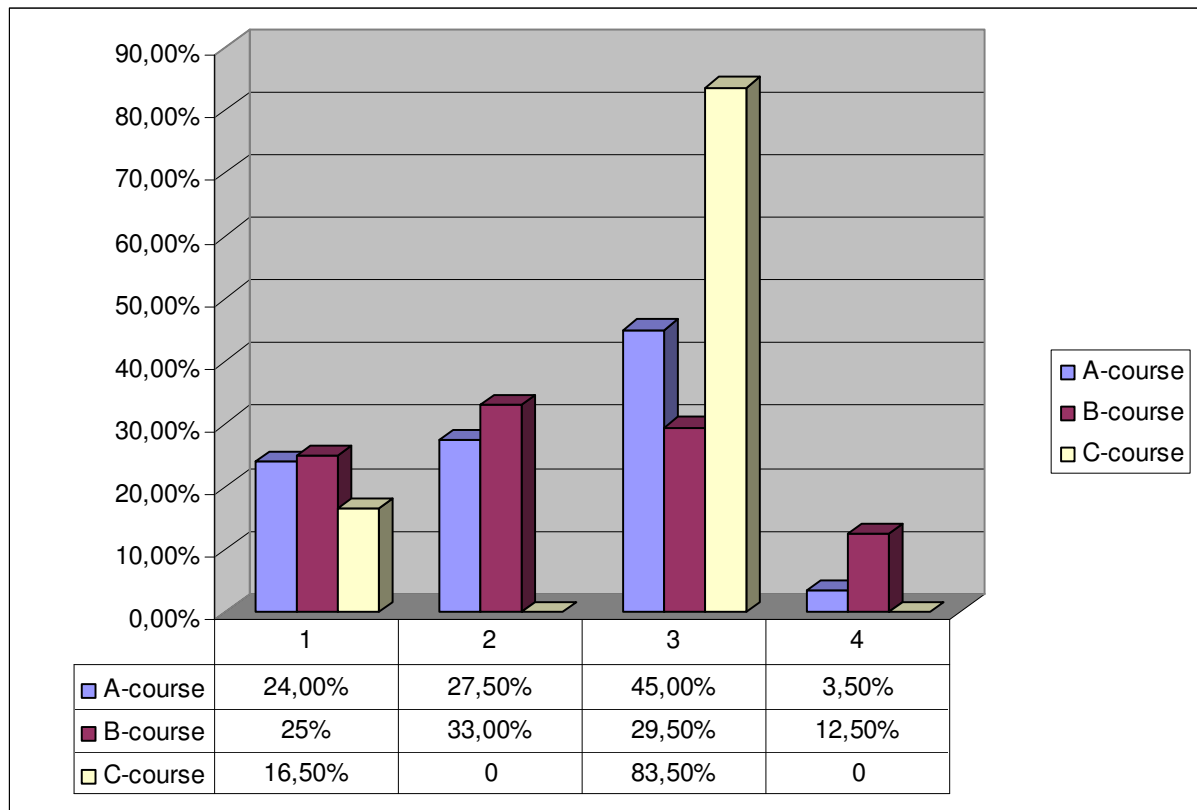
### 3.3.6 I believe that writing is difficult to get started with



The spontaneous thought I got before investigating this area is that the students' creative writing abilities should increase when they reach a higher level. This diagram would beg to differ though. We can see that there are a few students from the A- and B-course who do not think that it is difficult at all while there are a few students from the C-course who completely agree on this matter. Most answers come on level two and three which tell us that the majority of the students find it neither very easy nor very difficult.

The diagram does not really correspond with the Background on this issue. Sue Cowley gives the impression that almost every student has problems with this, but when we read this diagram, more than 50% of the students disagree with this fact.

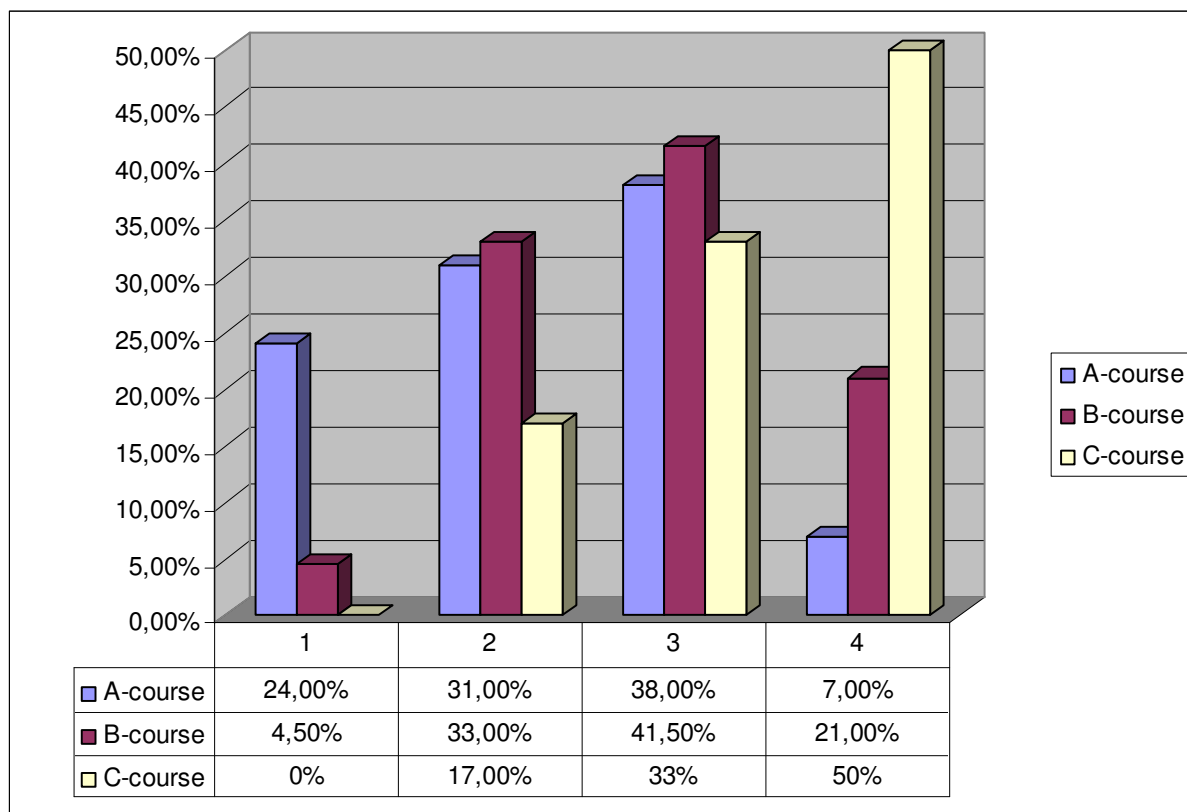
### 3.3.7 I write better when I listen to music



Listening to music while writing is obviously not extremely popular but quite a large percentage agree a little though. Both teachers say in the interviews that they allow students to listen to music while they are writing if they do not disturb the others and it seems that half of the students prefer it while the other half does not.

The ability to write better while listening to music is obviously individual and these facts do not conflict with the Background either. It says clearly that it should be allowed if needed. It is allowed and those who like it accept this method.

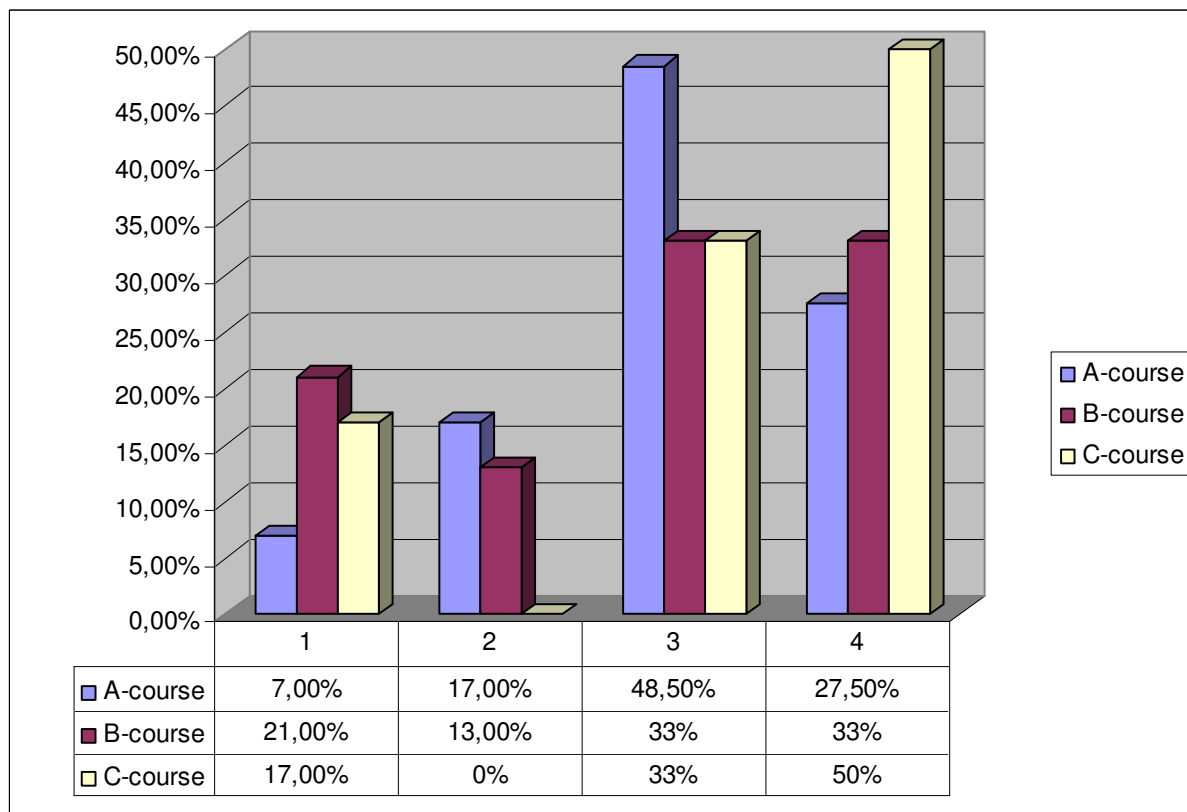
### 3.3.8 I write better when there is a particular atmosphere in the classroom



There are, as we can see, various opinions on this statement. A rather large majority of the C-course students say that they write better when there is a particular atmosphere in the classroom, but that can also have to do with the fact that teacher B, who is responsible for this C-course, uses this method while teacher A does not. The fact that there are quite a few students from the A- and B-course that partly agree that they write better that way, could be that they imagine that this method would make them write better.

The idea about creating an atmosphere seems to work, even for those students who have never written in that way. Over 80% of those who are used to this method enjoy it, so Cowley is probably on the right track with her idea.

### 3.3.9 Sometimes we do drama and I think that develops my speaking abilities



Drama is, according to this diagram, a very successful method. That is clear since more than 50% of the students in all three classes agree, completely or partly. Teacher 1 claims that shy students do not like drama, when they are supposed to perform in front of the whole class, so that could mean that some of those students belong to the group who disagree. But they could also belong to the positive category since they seem to like it better when drama is performed in small groups.

Penny Ur recommends drama in her book and the students obviously agree with her. Unfortunately, there are no reasons given in this diagram why and how their vocabulary increases, which could be interesting to know.

## 4 Conclusion

Now that I have completed my investigation involving reading of appropriate literature, teacher interviews and student questionnaires, the question now is whether or not I have reached my goals that I set out in the introduction. I could answer both *yes* and *no* considering all three questions. I feel that I have partly solved those problems but that there is still information that I have not been able to get since there was a time limit and my questions were a bit insufficient in that I could not get enough information out of every question.

The question of what kind of different writing and speaking exercises a teacher can use in class is very difficult to answer to the full, if not impossible. Despite this fact, I feel that I have learned about several methods I had never thought about which were the first of my aims. I knew that drama could make students lose their inhibitions, as could small groups but I had never thought about creating specific atmospheres for different sessions. Before I started to investigate this entire area, I was not sure whether students should participate in the selection of an exercise or not. I am still not entirely convinced that they should, but I am more positive than before. The one thing that makes me doubt is the answer I received from teacher 1, that students prefer that the teacher chooses for them. I feel that I made a mistake when I composed the statement about whether or not the students decided writing topics together with the teacher. I think that I should have asked if they wanted to participate or not. The next time I do a project like this, I should be careful when I formulate my questions in order to receive as much information as possible.

The question of how to evaluate different tasks is also quite difficult to answer, but even here my knowledge has definitely increased. I realize that it can be difficult to remember every single student a teacher has, but one simple approach probably is, as mentioned in the interviews, to sit down with every single student and get to know them a little more. The personal image of every student might increase, which could make the individual evaluation easier. As mentioned in the Background, the teacher must know what to evaluate in every single exercise that is implemented. If the teacher knows what he/she should observe when the exercise is in progress, the

evaluation will be simpler. But as I see it, the most important aspect of evaluation is that the students get to participate and say whether or not they feel that they have learned anything from the exercise. Unfortunately, I did not have any statement for the questionnaire concerning students' participation in the evaluation process. That was a mistake, since it would be valuable for me to know if the students would be interested in expressing their opinions about the different exercises.

How a teacher should proceed with correction of spoken and written errors is a very important question. Earlier I had the opinion that teachers should be extremely cautious about correcting students' spoken errors and after studying this I am even more convinced. Wrongly pronounced words could be brought up in class but the teacher should not say who made the error. I was not sure how to correct written errors though. During my previous school placement periods, the teachers did not correct every error since they said that "as long as it can be understood by a native speaker it does not matter". Those periods were in secondary school and since this investigation was done at upper secondary school level I had the opinion that the demands should be a little higher and apparently I was right. Like the other two questions I am sure that there are quite a few methods that I have not discovered but that is not possible in a word limited C-essay and my findings have been satisfactory.

Daily life is becoming more and more global which means that the importance of the English language will increase and the demand for English speaking employees will rise as well. This basically means that regardless of what people's future occupation will be, they will be expected to possess adequate knowledge of proper English. That is a fact that should encourage everybody to develop their language.

(7443 words)

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## Appendix - Questionnaire

### Instructions

My name is Fredrik Elftorp and I am studying the Teacher Training Programme at the School of Education and Communication (HLK), Jönköping. When I have finished my studies I hope to be a teacher in Upper Secondary School, teaching English and History. Right now I am doing my C-essay, which is to be my degree project.

The reason why I am here today is because I want to investigate how you as students may develop your writing and speaking abilities. This Questionnaire will be anonymous, which means I do not need your name. I just want to know if you are male or female and which course you are attending. Please do not answer too quickly, but try to think and give an honest answer. Remember that there are no right or wrong answers.

Jönköping December 4, 2007

Fredrik Elftorp, 0705-199385

### **Fill in this before you start!**

Date: 2007 /...../.....

Male\_\_\_\_\_ Female\_\_\_\_\_

A-Course\_\_\_\_\_ B-Course\_\_\_\_\_

C-Course\_\_\_\_\_

Answer each statement by writing 1-4 in the boxes.

The different alternatives stand for:

1	2	3	4
I disagree completely	I disagree a little	I agree a little	I agree completely

1. I would like to win a million dollars..... \_\_\_\_\_
2. I want the teacher to correct every error that I say/write..... \_\_\_\_\_
3. We get to decide writing topics together with the teacher..... \_\_\_\_\_
4. Everyone gets to speak when we have group discussions..... \_\_\_\_\_
5. I speak only English during English class..... \_\_\_\_\_
6. The teacher speaks only English during English class..... \_\_\_\_\_
7. I believe that writing is difficult to get started with..... \_\_\_\_\_
8. I write better when I listen to music..... \_\_\_\_\_
9. I write better when there is a particular atmosphere in the classroom (by that I mean if you are writing for example a ghost story, there could be some scary sounds in the classroom)..... \_\_\_\_\_
10. Sometimes we do drama and I think that develops my speaking abilities \_\_\_\_\_
11. Group discussions work better if we are few than if we are many..... \_\_\_\_\_

**Check that you have filled in everything!**

Thank you very much for participating!