

**UNIVERSITY OF JYVÄSKYLÄ**

*”Se on sit helppoo, kun sitä osaa!”*

**FINNISH ELEMENTARY SCHOOL STUDENTS AS ENGLISH LEARNERS**

Master’s Thesis

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<p>Tiivistelmä – Abstract</p> <p>Vieraan kielen opettamista on varhaistettu ja jopa ensimmäisen luokan aloittavat voivat alkaa opiskella vierasta kieltä. Englannin kieli on pitänyt paikkansa suosituimpana vieraana kielenä, jonka suurin osa nuorista oppilaista valitsee ensimmäiseksi vieraaksi kieleksi. Koska englannin kieli on osa monen suomalaisen arkea, sen on huomattu myös vaikuttavan myös kielen oppimiseen koulussa (ks. Leppänen ym. 2007). Kielen oppimisen tutkimuksessa on kiinnitetty huomiota oppijan tunteiden ja oppimisen väliseen yhteyteen (ks. esim. Perkun 2014; Järvelä 2011).</p> <p>Tämän maisterintutkielman tavoitteena oli selvittää, miten nuoret kielen oppijat kokevat itsensä kielenoppijoina. Tutkimuksen taustaosiossa käyn läpi englannin kielen asemaa Suomessa sekä suomalaisessa perusopetuksessa oppiaineena. Tutkimusaineisto on kerätty kahden eri menetelmän avulla ja kohteena oli ryhmä 5. luokan oppilaita, jotka opiskelevat englannin kieltä ensimmäisenä vieraana kielenään. Oppilaat piirsivät kuvia itsestään englannin kielen oppijoina, jonka jälkeen haastattelin heidät yksitellen ja kysyin tarkempia kysymyksiä piirrosten pohjalta.</p> <p>Tutkimuksen tuloksena saatiin selville, että lähes kaikki oppilaista olivat käyttäneet tai käyttävät englannin kieltä joissakin arjen tilanteissa. Sekä kuvissa että haastattelussa korostuivat tunteiden lisäksi tilanteet, joissa opitaan englantia sekä välineet, jotka helpottavat oppimista. Osalle oppilaista oppikirja tuki oppimista, kun taas osalle oppiminen tuntui tehokkaammalta esimerkiksi puhumalla kieltä tai kuuntelemalla musiikkia.</p>	
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## 1 INTRODUCTION

Finland is globally known as the homeland of good quality education. Furthermore, various studies refer to Finland when discussing about high level English skills. During my studies at the university I have discovered innovative and inspirational ways of teaching that were not used when I started studying English. As an English teacher trainee I have realized that not all children learn in the same way. Every person is different also in terms of learning. My goal in this thesis has been to find new practices that would work in my teaching and would allow my students to study in a safe environment and to discover their strengths and weaknesses as learners. Balance in classroom teaching seems to be the key as different kind of learners need different kind of support. Furthermore, as a teacher I find it important to encourage each student to further consider their weaknesses and find ways to overcome these, thus also developing as a language learner. Student's negative feelings may be the result of e.g. low self-esteem, low test scores or the lack of encouragement.

The new principles of early language teaching have been outlined by the Finnish National Agency for Education. According to the current minister of education Grahn-Laasonen (2017) language learning could start before the first grade to maximize the results and in order to develop the co-operation between pre-education and primary education. The importance of good language skills is growing as children should be able to communicate in the global world from an early age. Furthermore, Grahn-Laasonen claims that "We should identify what kind of language skills people in Finland have and ensure that people have possibilities to develop their skills throughout their lives" (2017). Language learning starting in the first grade is not only expected to benefit the concrete language skills, but also to get young children accustomed to internationality.

The teaching of English in Finland is starting at an earlier stage than ever before. The Finnish National Agency of Education is encouraging schools, parents and children to start studying languages during the first year of basic education. Students starting school in Finland are 6 or 7 years of age. The government grant set for the language study pilot project has been worth 4,5 euros for year 2017.

According to The Finnish National Agency in Finland, schools are able to decide how they will use the grant to develop the foreign language education. The schools participating in the new project have been encouraged to come up with new ways to teach languages for younger students. Introducing language learning at an earlier stage has been considered to benefit the attitude towards language as a subject. The reasoning behind the project is based on studies of beneficial results of early language learning (FNAE 2017).

This study takes a keen interest in emotions in the learning process and how young learners view themselves as language learners. The feelings that young students express towards learning English language and the reasons behind them are timely research interests as the foreign language teaching starts earlier. Each of the students in the classroom have different level of interest and ability to learn. The study shows that teachers have to invest in the pedagogical skills and to recognize the needs in the classroom.

Naturally, the positive and negative feelings affect the learning process (Dewaele 2014). Not every student will like studying English, but could learning it be motivational if the teacher put some thought into finding the correct tools for each student? Or could it be a little bit more pleasant if the teacher would take the time to plan the classes for the students in the classroom rather than repeating the same practices each year without considering the current needs?

The theoretical background of this study introduces first, the current status of the English language in Finland, and second, the situation of English in foreign language education. The connection between education and the level of English skills is evident, but there are various other reasons why Finnish people speak English well. Next, the study will move onto discussing the individual feelings towards English. The study has been conducted by having the participants completing a drawing task. The data is complimented by individual interviews with each student. The students were asked to draw themselves learning English and after finishing I invited each of them to discuss their drawings with me.

The purpose of the study is to find out how young students feel about learning English and their positive and negative feelings. These 5th graders were chosen as the target group, because at the time of collecting the data they have been studying English for a couple of years. In addition, at the age of 10 and 11 children have gained experience as students and may be aware of how they are and are not able to learn new things. Although feelings are subjective, and positive and negative feelings towards learning do not necessarily mean that learning has been successful or unsuccessful, they are an important part of the learning process. Learning is possible through different methods and just using some of them in teaching may be fruitless for the most students in one classroom. This study has been conducted to inspire language teachers to take children's skills and especially feelings into consideration in teaching.

## **2 FINNISH STUDENTS LEARNING ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE**

In this chapter I will discuss English as a foreign language teaching and learning in the Finnish context. The focus of the study is on young learners. As previously mentioned, English teaching is currently beginning at earlier stage of children's education than ever before in Finland. First the status of English as a language in Finland is discussed. After that, background on Finnish foreign language teaching and learning in Finnish elementary schools and the development and current issues in second language education will be presented. Finally, the approaches suitable for young learners in language education serving the needs of young students will be discussed and the perspective of emotions and self image as a major factor in the learning process will be introduced.

### **2.1 English in Finland**

According to Crystal (2003) the world needs a global language, which English has become. In order to gain mutual understanding in today's world, learning English seems to be the key to success. Finland is a bilingual country with Finnish and Swedish as the two official languages, about 90 percent of the population speaks Finnish as the mother tongue, whereas the rate for Swedish speaking citizens is about 5 percent. In addition, the English language surrounds us in our daily life. It is not only the most popular

language to be chosen as the compulsory second language in Finnish elementary schools, but it has several functions outside the educational premises.

Finnish students become familiar with English early in their childhood due to education, media and entertainment. The ability to communicate in English is appreciated in professional life, but it is now used among young pupils and even in situations that would not require the use of “foreign” language. (Leppänen et al. 2007). Furthermore, the popularity of the English language as the lingua franca is unlikely to decrease in the near future (Graddol 1997).

Because of the easy access to international media and intercultural channels provided by the evolving information technology, instead of being limited to professional or educational environment, English is now part of our free time. Along with language education, young Finns have had access to music, movies and TV shows in English since the 1950s. English can be heard on the radio and movies on a daily basis and therefore these can be expected to appear in the drawings (Kalaja et al. 2008). According to Sjöholm (2004:220) “a considerable amount of exposure to English output has been found to take place via mass media outside the school context, which has led to positive attitudes towards English”. Because majority of the productions presented on Finnish TV are subtitled, the viewers have been able to hear new words and connect the meanings by following subtitles. (Leppänen et al. 2007).

Furthermore, the popularity of social media is bringing the English-speaking world closer to children that would not speak the language at home otherwise. The interest in English itself is not necessarily enough to learn the language, but the status of English as the world wide has been widely acknowledged. English language skills connect individuals who may not have found contacts from their inner circles or want to expand their network. In addition, as the Internet provides limitless sources of information about any given topic, English is used as a tool to gain more knowledge about the field of interest. (Sjöholm 2004).

The status of English as the mutual language between nationalities and cultures has resulted into foreign words being mixed with rather than translated to Finnish (Leppänen

2007). Although, Finland has two official languages, Finnish and Swedish, English seems to be accomplishing a new role as the third language rather than a foreign language (Leppänen & Nikula 2008). Previous studies have found out that “the incidental learning taking place outside the classroom is primarily beneficial to the development of conversational proficiency and especially to the development of receptive skills” (Sjöholm 2004:221). Children are introduced to the English language from a very young age in Finland. Crystal (2003:4) claims that “a language can be made a priority in a country’s foreign-language teaching, even though this language has no official status”.

Moreover, Finnish children do not have to leave their homes to learn English, as they can hear it on television or in the neighborhood. The language is not completely new to the children starting their English studies and therefore the learning process of the language may have positive results (Sjöholm 2004). Based on previous studies, I decided to study whether or not the students aged 10 to 11 are aware of the factors that may affect their learning of English.

## **2.2. English as a foreign language in Finnish elementary schools**

The Finnish basic education syllabus contains foreign language studies as one of the core subjects. Alongside with mother tongue and the second national language, it is mandatory for students to choose a foreign language to their personal syllabus. Students are able to start their foreign language studies in first grade in some schools.

English is the most popular choice to be studied as the compulsory foreign language in the comprehensive school. In 2016, over 70 percent of the students in grades 1 to 6 had studied English as “a compulsory or optional foreign language” (Table 1). The first chosen language to be studied is called A1 and an optional language, which can be started later is called A2. Finnish and Swedish are options for the students speaking one of the other as the mother tongue. As the table shows, other options for language studies are French, German, Russian, Spanish, Italian, Sami and others. The variation in language course selections is highly dependent on the area, as some schools do not offer all of these languages for the students.



Table 1. Language choices of students in grades 1-6 in 2016 (Tilastokeskus, 2017)

Studied language	Compulsory language A1	Optional language A2	Compulsory language B1	Elective language B2	Total	Share of pupils in grades 1-6 (%)
English	240 669	15 646	.	.	256 315	70,5
Swedish	3 265	13 268	.	.	16 533	4,5
Finnish	17 401	1 112	.	.	18 513	5,1
French	2 949	4 641	.	.	7 590	2,1
German	2 951	11 198	.	.	14 149	3,9
Russian	1 080	1 588	.	.	2 668	0,7
Spanish	576	2 627	.	.	3 203	0,9
Italian	0	0	.	.	0	0,0
Sami	5	238	.	.	243	0,1
Other	429	78	.	.	507	0,1

According to the Finnish Basic Education Act, foreign language instruction is suggested to begin on the third grade of basic education. The duration of basic education is nine years in Finland. However, each elementary level institution is entitled to form an individual procedure in terms of language instruction before the third grade; therefore, in some cities younger students are able to study languages from an earlier age.

According to previous studies, learners are not just passive receivers of information, but their role is rather active in the learning process. However, each learner has a set of

capabilities and desire to select the most pleasant way to study (Sjöholm 2004). The individual's potential to learn a foreign language is also "dependent on learner internal factors, such as general linguistic ability, verbal and lexical inferencing skills, metacognitive skills, ability to use communication and learning strategies etc" (Sjöholm 2004:222). Therefore, the not only the individual skills and challenges should be considered by the teacher, but also the individual feelings and emotions should be taken into account as they affect our learning.

### **2.3 Teaching young students**

Due to the current reforms in language teaching in Finland it is important to study how young learners are taught English. In order to accomplish a realistic perspective about the efficient teaching approaches, individual feelings, preferences and thoughts about the foreign language teaching as a new subject should be considered.

Each student has a way of learning, which is based on personality, experiences and skills (Silkelä 2000:122). As the methods of language teaching develop, examining the students' feelings towards the process of learning a new language will give insights for developing teaching materials and classroom practices that take take individual experiences and feelings into consideration at the macro-level.

#### **2.3.1 Emotions**

According to Hakkarainen, Lonka & Lipponen (2004:9-14) as the world itself constantly develops, the methods of teaching and learning require updating as well. Furthermore, positive and negative feelings can either enhance or deteriorate the results within the individual learning process. Positive feelings and emotions as a part of the learning process depend on the individual preferences, but techniques that support students at different levels at the same time may encourage a positive attitude towards language learning at larger scale. Pekrun claims that (2014:28)

"positive emotions do not always benefit learning, and unpleasant emotions do not always impede learning. However, for the vast majority of students and academic learning tasks,

enjoyment of learning is beneficial, whereas anxiety, shame, hopelessness and boredom are detrimental”.

In addition, Pekrun (2014) states that it is important for teachers to understand the emotions their students may experience, the privacy of each student should be taken into consideration. Sharing deep feelings, such as humiliation, is not easy for young students.

On the other hand, emotions and mood remind of each other, but differ “regarding their object and temporal constraints” (Järvelä 2011:59). According to Järvelä (2011:59)

“an emotion typically follows a specific eliciting stimulus or event, and is intense but limited in duration. Certain action tendencies, such as whether one is more likely to approach or avoid the target of one’s current emotional feeling, are associated with specific emotions. These action tendencies do not imply that the person will necessarily engage in the action is present. A mood, on the other hand, is usually not attributable to a specific stimulus, is of low intensity, and of longer duration. Since the source of mood is often ambiguous, the feeling can be incorrectly attributed to stimulus under consideration, thus leading to various types of affective influences on evaluation and cognitive processing --”.

Providing the right amount of comfort and challenges to a student is the key in the procedure. Although, learning is a result of challenging one’s present knowledge and building new information on top of it, the process becomes distressing if the student is not ready to reach the goal. In other words, when the aim does not meet the skills, the student experiences feelings of incompetence and stress among other negative feelings, which are directly linked to the capability to learn. However, if the challenges do not offer the experiences of success and development, the motivation towards learning may decrease. (Hakkarainen et al. 2004:195). Furthermore, the possibility of students experiencing negative emotions should be considered. A student who has the potential to learn English may face difficulties learning it, if the methods of teaching cause anxiety. According to Gregersen (2008), when anxious students are put into situations that require e.g. oral exercises, they are incapable to focus on learning. Anxiety hinders learning results, because the student is too distracted by the possibility of making mistakes. On the other hand, focusing solely on studying the negative feelings and learning does not necessarily reveal the whole truth (Schutz & Pekrun 2007). Dewaele (2014:239) introduces the notion of Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA) that has interested researchers to study how negative feelings affect learning. Expectedly, previous studies on language learning and emotions ”have consistently shown that FLA negatively affects

learning and communication, and those effects are both complex and multidimensional”.

Finding materials that serve each learner in the classroom is one of the greatest challenges to any teacher, but examining students with different skill levels, mindsets and prejudices may reveal helpful information in terms of lesson planning and composing teaching material. Furthermore, learning to enjoy the activities that do not interest is beneficial to the student as they will discover new ways to study. If the student considers the source of positive feelings outside the language learning situation, it may be difficult to re-set that opinion. Furthermore, previous studies have pointed that discovering the individual preferences can be utilized in the classroom (Hakkarainen et al. 2004:194). Therefore, a study on young students’ feelings and ideas of their own identity and attitude towards learning English is a salutary addition to the field.

According to Schutz (2007:13) “educational settings are infused with intense emotional experiences that direct interactions, affect learning and performance, and influence personal growth –“. Both negative and positive emotions are to be recognized, as they give information about different learners and ways to support them. The activities in the classroom may cause negative feelings, such as boredom and hopelessness to one student and cause positive feelings to another, which are linked to motivation. Schutz implies that the positive feelings in the learning process guide the student to take part in the activities rather than worry about the outcome.

On one hand, the negative feelings are usually caused by “failure-related anxiety” due to previous experiences. The student experiencing anxiety is less likely to actively take part in new tasks due to the low motivation level. On the other hand, negative feelings “can reduce interest and intrinsic motivation, but can also strengthen motivation to invest effort to avoid failure” (2007:26).

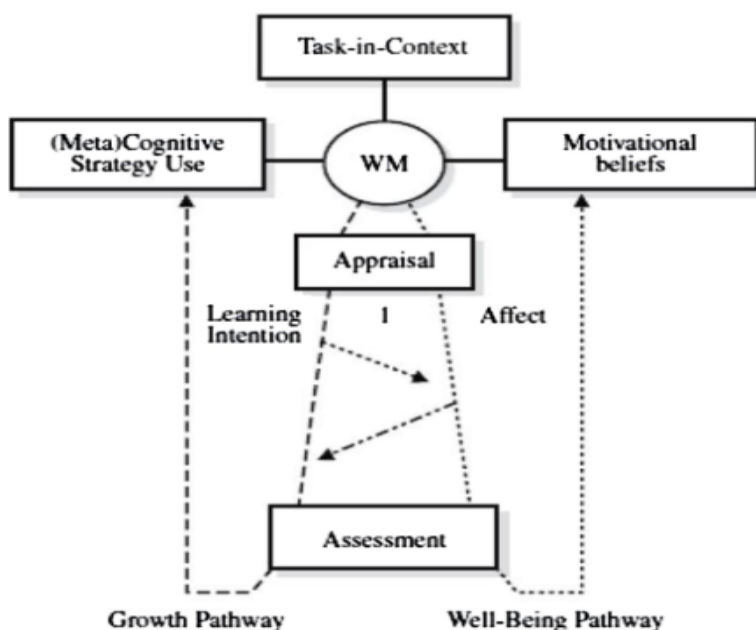


Figure 1. Dual processing self-regulation model (Boekaerts 2006; Schutz 2007).

According to Schutz (2007:38) the dual processing self-regulation model suggests that

"the assumption is that the former students perceive the task as congruent with their personal goals, values, and needs, and therefore, the learning activity is energized from the top down. By contrast, students who perceive environmental or internal cues during the learning process that signal a mismatch between the learning activity and their personal goals, needs and interest, experience negative cognitions and emotions, which prompt them to switch to the well-being route".

### 2.3.2 Self image

Dörnyei and Ryan (2009) have studied motivation in L2 learning. Their focus is on context and learning, as well as on the individual learning experience. According to Dörnyei and Ryan (2009:91) "As part of this general move towards understanding the interrelationships between context and the individual, there has been a significant shift towards considering the individual learning a language as a 'person' rather than as an abstract, depersonalised 'learner'". This statement supports what has been mentioned earlier: each child has the individual strengths and weaknesses that also affect the ability and desire to learn languages.

In their study, Dörnyei and Ryan (2009:91) state that "Language learners do other things in addition to learning languages and in order to understand fully their motivation to learn a language it is important to look at the person as a whole, not just those aspects that mark them as a 'language learner'; we need to understand more about who is learning, with whom, where, when, and why". Therefore, studying emotions towards language learning is important in terms of development of new teaching methods. According to Dörnyei and Ushioda (2009), labeling student as motivated or unmotivated does not define them as language learners. Although, motivation and identity have been studied as factors in learning, a motivated or unmotivated student may or may not learn English fluently.

The learner's self image has a significant effect on the motivation in L2 learning. According to MacIntyre and Vincze (2017:62), emotions and motivation are connected and as researchers:

"In SLA, the literature on individual differences and learner factors such as working memory, strategies, intelligence, aptitude factors, and others, but in SLA they have been discussed relatively cold cognition, as if emotion played no part in these processes".

How the student judges and evaluated himself or herself as a learner is based on his or her self image (Sahinkarakas & Inozu 2017). If the student learning English has previously experienced negative emotions in the learning process, it may be difficult to maintain the motivation (Gardner 2010). In addition, if the learning results have been low, the student may have difficulties in thriving for success and will start to dislike the subject (Dörnyei and Ryan 2009). Furthermore, as the social norms become more and more stable in students' life as they grow older, it can be more difficult to find out how older students in the classroom view themselves as learners and what kind of experiences have influences their perceptions. Fifth graders are still young and therefore I can expect honest answers for this study.

The importance and accuracy of individual characteristics has not been overlooked in linguistic research: "Educational researchers have commonly used the traits of learners to explain schooling outcomes and second language acquisition (SLA) research has often taken learners' characteristics as a central concern" (Toohey 2000). Although, the learning capability is considered to be connected with motivation "good language learners (both adults and children) have different mental strategies and traits from poor language

learners” (Toohey 2000:6.)

### **2.3.3 Drawings as tools in researching emotions and self image**

Alanen, Kalaja and Dufva (2013) conducted a study that based on pictures drawn by soon to graduate language teacher students. They were asked to draw themselves teaching in the future. The study aimed to examine the beliefs these students had about foreign language teaching. According to Alanen et al. (2013) the individual beliefs may direct the way the teachers plan and carry out their classes in the future. In addition, visual narratives help individuals to understand and to build their very own identity.

Previous studies including tasks of which visual data has been the product of, such as drawings and writings, have contributed results based on individual experiences and feelings. According to Dufva et al. (2007:315) visual data as the tool of linguistic research can be used to research identity, skills, personality and the level of development. The drawings could be analyzed from the artistic point of view, but in that case the focus would be on the picture itself rather than the student behind the drawing; therefore, the analysis would not serve the purpose of the study. Pavlenko (2007) argues that drawings in research are beneficial as they can be used for a number of purposes.

Moreover, the focus of this study is on the student’s own perspective and the drawing will support the idea of self. Dufva et al. (2007) state that this type of focus examines conscious, as well as subconscious decisions and values and as expected, the drawings have revealed scenarios and contexts that individuals consider critical or symbolic. Although, the students are given a simple task to draw themselves from a certain perspective, I expect to gain multidimensional insight due to individual interpretations. A study by Nikula and Pitkänen-Huhta (2006) takes advantage of photographs, which represent the environment and context the students participating in the research consider to learn English in. Furthermore, the visual narratives stimulated the interviews and functioned as the base for the verbal discussion to further examine the student’s viewpoint.

### **3 PRESENT STUDY**

#### **3.1 Data and Methods**

In this chapter I will discuss the research questions and aims of the study and I will also present the data. I will review the process of collecting the visual data and making interviews, as well as transcribing the data. I will discuss the methods of analysis used in the present study in the last section of the chapter. Eleven children participated in the study by drawing a picture and answering a few questions after drawing. The students live in a monolingual town in Central Finland. I will present the informants more closely in chapter 3.1.1. (Salkind 2010).

As discussed in previous chapters, studies have revealed that emotions, feelings and learning are connected to each other. This study aims to examine how young students view themselves as language learners. Furthermore, the feelings towards language learning at school and elsewhere are studied.

The aims of the study were to examine whether elementary school students could describe themselves as language learners and to recognize the situations they have learned English in.

##### **3.1.1 Research participants**

Eleven 5<sup>th</sup> grade students participated in the study, five of them were girls and six of them were boys. All of them were 10 to 11 years of age. I had not met the students before the day of the assignment and the interviews. The school and the class were selected as the objects of the study, because my close relative works at the school. She had told about me and study to the children before I went there to meet them. The study was gathered at their school, where they completed the drawing assignment in the English classroom and attended the interviews in the hallway.



Table 2. The names of the students participating in the study.

GIRLS	BOYS
Ella	Olli
Aino	Pauli
Vilma	Kasper
Aurora	Jussi
Maria	Akseli
	Vili

The informants were all asked the same questions, but some of them were asked additional questions to get a better understanding of what they meant. Names of the participants are pseudonyms.

### 3.1.2 Data Collection: Drawings and interviews

For this study, the informants were asked to draw pictures of themselves learning English and to take part in a short interview, which provided further details about the drawings. As discussed in chapter 2.3.3, visual elicitation has been used in linguistic research frequently (Dufva 2007) and the method has provided useful information about the individual beliefs. Furthermore, interviewing as a method has been a typical way to gather material in e.g. sociolinguistic research (Dufva 2011). Interviewing informants is an effective way to study individual viewpoints and experiences in terms of language use or learning. In this study, the interview was used as a method to complement the results of the first assignment, which was producing visual elicitation.

Interview is a useful tool to “gain insight about a phenomenon, but is also gives a voice to the informant” (Dufva 2011). An interview can be arranged in several ways. The focus of the interview might be on the linguistic choices the informant makes during the

interview. Interviewing may be useful if the research takes a focus on the thoughts related to a certain perspective. The interview can be built as a structured or half structured interview, an open interview or a theme interview (Hyvärinen 2017).

Theme interview was chosen as the type for the present study. In this type of an interview, the questions do not follow a strict pattern as in a structured interview, but the informants are asked questions about the same theme. The researcher has selected the interest of the study and researched previous studies in advance. The interview reminds of a discussion, because the questions may vary between the informants depending on the answers (Ruusuvuori & Tiittula 2005). In this study, the informants were asked the same questions, but some of them were asked additional questions, as well to gain a deeper understanding of what they think. The study takes an interest in the experiences as a learner and feelings towards the second language studies. In other words, the study does not target factual analysis or to test or evaluate the students' level of development in terms of second language learning in any way.

I selected a combination of two methods, interviewing and visual elicitation, to support each other. The use of different methods broad deepens the overall understanding of the methods and may enhance the credibility of the study. The different methods used to conduct the data for a study should be carefully selected in order to achieve versatile results that answer the purpose of the study. (Hirsjärvi & Hurme 2014).

Before gathering the data, I investigated previous studies and what results have been found related to the topic of the present study. After that, the interview questions were designed and a plan for the interviews in terms of the number and age of the informants was made. Before collecting the data, the students' parents were asked for permission to use the children's drawings and to interview the children. I asked permission to gather data from fifteen students and received eleven positive answers. Before the students drew pictures of themselves learning English, I introduced myself and the purpose of the assignment, and asked the class some questions about their English lessons. After the drawing assignment the students were interviewed individually. They answered questions about their pictures and general feelings towards English language as a school subject. The data was transcribed after the interviews.

Utilizing a semi-structured interview was chosen for the present study. The semi-structured interview follows a pattern to cover certain topics during the interview (Hyvärinen et al. 2017). In structured interview, the topics and possible follow-up questions are strictly determined before the interview. The latter one is more binding in nature and the semi-structured interview allows the interviewer to rely on their judgement more (Kvale 2007). The questions were formed as open as possible to avoid yes or no answers. According to Alasuutari (2005) interviewing children has advantages and disadvantages that are connected to the power relations between an adult and a child. The researcher is expected to ask questions and the child is expected to answer them in truthful manner. Because children are social beings and aware of the rules of social situations, the interviewer should build a safe environment and encourage the child to answer in natural way. The child should not have a feeling that he or she should produce answers that the researcher expects, if the purpose of the interview is to learn about the individual thoughts and experiences. Alasuutari (2005) claims that a child may see the researcher and his or her professional status superior to him or her, which may cause insecurity when answering questions. If the child faces questions that seem critical or testing, answering may be difficult. In this case, the interview has the power to reformulate the question and ask additional questions to reinforce the answer.

The data was gathered during an English class. First, the students were asked to draw themselves learning English. As mentioned above, further instructions were not given. However, before the students began drawing I asked them whether or not they had any questions concerning the assignment. The students asked if they could draw themselves at school or at home and if they should draw a facial impression. I told the class that they could draw anything that would describe how they have learned English and for all of them it may be different. The importance of being free to express one's own views was highlighted. The students were given about 20 minutes to draw the pictures. After the time was up, all of the students had to stop drawing and I invited one student at a time to an individual interview. The rest of the class were studying in the classroom.

The interview consisted of ten questions and each student was asked the same questions, but all of the conversations were different and all of the participants were asked additional questions.

My aim was to examine how the students view themselves as language learners and to gain information about the emotions related to English and foreign language learning. The focus in gathering material was to find out the so-called spectrum of feelings, the positive, negative and even neutral, towards language learning and what may have caused them. Furthermore, I wanted to research how positive and negative feelings might have a link to a positive or negative self-image as a language learner.

### **3.1.3. Data Analysis: Qualitative content analysis**

Qualitative analysis is typically based on data gathered by interviews, questionnaires, observation or other documents providing information. (Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2009). One of the most common characteristics of qualitative research is collecting information from selected participants and studying the answers individually instead of as a mass (Hirsjärvi, Remes & Sajavaara 2009). I have selected to interview the students after they have completed the drawing task, as I was able to request more descriptive answers if needed, whereas students filling in questionnaires could leave questions unanswered easily. The qualitative analysis aims to describe the interest points of the research in a versatile and informative manner, rather than to create statistical data (Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2013).

The method chosen for this study is qualitative in nature as I have given the drawing task for a number of students and interviewed them. I am analysing the answers and results one by one and a limited comparison was conducted in terms of similarities and differences. Qualitative analysis was chosen over the quantitative method, because the goal is not to compare the statistical differences, but rather to find examples of the students with different experiences and discuss them. The study is focused on the individual experiences, emotions and views; therefore, qualitative analysis benefits the purpose of the research. In addition, I will not aim at comparing the answers. Thus, a

considerably low number of participants were selected, but the task and interviews are expected to provide in-depth results.

The analysis of the data followed the process of qualitative content analysis (Gay et al. 2006). First the data by each student was studied separately, the interviews were transcribed and the distinct themes were inferred. Then the drawings and the answers supporting the visual data were described. Using content analysis is beneficial in presenting the initial meanings found from the data (Hsieh & Shannon 2005). In the final stage, the topics pointed out in the individual drawings and interviews are categorized and discussed. After studying the topics and meaning individually, any connections, frequent answers and inferences may be presented.

#### **3.1.4 The research questions**

The research questions are following:

1. Based on their drawings and interviews, how did the students see themselves as learners of English?
2. What kind of feelings towards English could be observed in the drawings and interviews?
3. How did the participants describe their learning of English in their drawings and interviews?

#### 4 THE FINDINGS

This chapter will present the findings of the research. Each child drew a picture of themselves learning English. The students asked some questions, such as “Do you mean I only have to draw myself at school?” and “But what if I have learned English in many places?”. I told them to draw what they thought would be the right answer to the task. Once the students started drawing, they did not try to discuss with each other or ask any more questions. I will also report how the students explained their drawings when I interviewed them. After the drawing task, the children stayed in the classroom with the teacher and were asked to work individually on their exercise books.

The combination of the drawings and interviews revealed similarity in the answers, but also surprising differences. As expected, both negative and positive feelings related English language learning were described. The students drew themselves learning English and the oral answers to questions about the drawings further explained the individual views. I will report on how the children view themselves as language learners, how they think they learn and what the general thoughts about learning English are found based on the drawings and interviews.

The drawings will be presented one by one, as the individual thoughts give a more throughout description of how young students may view themselves as language learners. In addition, the most descriptive parts of each interview will be presented and analyzed. As the process of learning is different for everyone, hearing the different views as individual reflections rather than comparing the differences and similarities may be the road to new and fruitful results. Moreover, due to the amount of participants, comparing the answers would be problematic and therefore a qualitative analysis on each drawing and interview was chosen. Each student was asked the same questions, but naturally the interviews were a bit different as I wanted to ask further questions after their interesting, but short answers.

After drawing their picture, children were asked to explain what they had drawn. Ten out of eleven children drew a picture and one of the informants did not draw anything. All of the informants answered questions regarding their drawing as well as the open formed

questions designed for the study. In addition, all of the students were asked additional questions to gain more information of their personal experiences, views and emotions.

A variety of places were presented in the picture. Majority of the students had drawn themselves learning English at school, home or both. In terms of tools, the school book, TVs, tablets and computers were the most commonly elements in the portraits. The students have drawn themselves learning English at school are mostly sitting at their desks and studying from the book. A couple of the students have pictured themselves speaking with a classmate and one them listening to the recorded text book chapters. In addition, a couple of rather unexpected contexts for learning English were mentioned. The rare approaches were driving a car, fishing and riding a bicycle. Furthermore, additional themes, such as traveling and communicating with non-Finnish speaking neighbors were discussed with some of the informants. Only one of the informants did not provide a drawing or describe the way he has learned English.

#### **4.1 Learners as individuals**

I will focus on the students as individuals and discuss their drawings and report extracts from their interviews. All of the students are in the fifth grade and have started their English studies at the same time and with the same teacher.

ELLA

In the picture Ella has drawn herself in three different situations; in the classroom, speaking at home and in her room watching a movie. She seems to be aware of informal learning environments as discussed by Leppänen et al. (2009). All of these three characters represent herself and not e.g. her classmates. The first of these eleven drawings focuses on different learning methods. Ella has come to the conclusion that she is capable of learning in various ways, in class and outside the classroom. In the picture, Ella is speaking and listening to the language.

Ella seemed very excited when drawing the picture. The picture itself gives a quite detailed description of herself and she has followed the given task carefully. It seems like Ella is

well aware of how she has learned English and has taken the different surroundings into account when completing the task.

The drawing does not only give information about the situations and places she has learned English in, but by taking a look at the facial expressions, it would seem that these experiences may have been more positive than negative (Gardner 2010).



Figure 2. Ella's drawing.

(1)

E: Mä opin ku mä puhun ja katon jotain enkun kielisiä ohjelmia.

S: Osasitsä enkkaa jo ennen ku tulit noille enkun oppitunneille? Tai ennen ku sulla alko englannin tunnit.

E: En.. Kyllä mä ehkä jotain sanoja, mutta.

S: Täällä sitä on alettu sitte. Miltä toi enkun opiskelu on tuntunut susta?

E: Ihan kivalta.

S: Okei. Miten sä kuvailisit sun omaa englannin taitoa?



E: No en nyt... tiiä. Ihan ok.

*E: I learn when I speak and when I watch some English spoken TV series.*

*S: Did you know English before you started it in school?*

*E: No... Maybe some words, but...*

*S: Started here then. How has that English learning felt in your opinion?*

*E: Pretty nice.*

*S: Okay. How would you describe your English?*

*E: Well I don't... know. It's ok.*

Ella thinks she learns English by speaking and watching TV programs. According to the picture she seems to have had the opportunity to practise speaking at school, which is a good way for her to learn. Unlike to some of the students presented later in the study, Ella seems to be well aware of the ways she thinks work for her when studying. As the first interviewee, Ella has provided two expected ways of learning English: through communication with other people in her everyday life and informally learning by watching television, which is common in Finland (Leppänen et al., 2009). On the other hand, she hesitates when I ask whether or not she knew English before she started studying it at school, but she thinks that she knew some words in English. She claims that English as a subject is *nice*. According to the picture and the overall interview Ella seems to have gained positive experiences in the English class, but it could be that she is trying to find the "right" answers to the questions (Ruusuvuori 2010).

Ella mentions that she learns by speaking and watching TV programs when I first ask her what she had drawn. Although, she has drawn a white board, she does not refer to the school environment when talking about learning English during the interview. Furthermore, she has recognized her capabilities to learn by watching and listening to TV programme and speaking English. According to studies, by watching movies spoken in English with subtitles in native language, children can pick up words and phrases from the other language and connect the meanings between the two languages. Moreover, regular exposure to output strengthens a child's theoretical knowledge and may support their interest in a new language (MacIntyre and Vincze 2017).

Further analyzing how learning feels or how she views herself as a language learner seem to be rather difficult to her at this point. Although her attitude towards learning the language seems positive and enthusiastic, she considers her skills to be at an *ok* level. Her

drawing and her talk in the interview are not in exactly in conflict, as the overall experience seems to be positive, but the oral answers are more limited than the visual presentation.

#### AINO

Aino drew a picture of herself sitting at her desk at school. She is holding the English book *Wow 5*, which she currently studying in class. She has drawn a serious facial expression with a straight line as her mouth. By looking at the picture, it would be difficult to tell how she feels about studying English, as the expression could point out that she is serious about studying the language. On the other hand, the expression might reveal negative feelings towards language studying. The picture seems to imply that when she thinks of herself learning English, she is studying from the book.

The importance of text books in language learning has been discussed in various studies (e.g. Luukka et al. 2008). The written learning material is one of the most common sources that language learners name when they are asked about the ways of learning a new language. The traditional method of following a text book in language teaching has affected the way language learners think that the book is needed in order to learn the language. On the other hand, text books may support the logical and systematic thinking in language learning and therefore a book might be a necessary tool for some learners (Kalaja 2015).



Figure 3. Aino's drawing.

(2)

S: Okei. Miten sä tykkäät opiskella tota enkkua tai miten sä opit parhaiten?

A: En tiää, varmaan silleen, että jos määhän puhun.

S: Joo. Mikä tossa enkun opiskelussa on kivaa?

A: No öö... Jotkut laulut.

S: Okay. How do you like to study English or how do you learn the best?

A: I don't know, probably when I speak.

S: Yes. What is nice about learning English?

A: Well öö... Some of the songs.

Aino has drawn herself at school studying the course book, but when I asked her what is the best way to learn English she answered *speaking* and that she enjoys *songs*. She seems to be quite hesitant during the interview, but she answers that the most boring thing about studying English are the exercises from the book.

(3)

S: Laulut on kivoja. Mikäs on tylsää?

A: Kirjan tehtävät.

S: Songs are nice. What is boring?

A: The exercises from the book.

The interview gives more information about Aino's view of herself as an English language learner than the drawing by itself. She has drawn herself learning English, but the book does not mean that it is the best way for her. She implies that she does not like studying English at school and that is the reason why she has drawn the facial expression as it is. Furthermore, Aino implies that she is not interested in learning English or does not think she is very good at it.

Aino mentions songs twice, which is an interesting fact she gives out in terms of personal strengths and qualities. She also says that the book and the exercises are the most boring things in English classes, yet she has drawn herself learning English from the book. If she thinks that the book is the only tool in English learning, it is not a surprise she would dislike it. Furthermore, if Aino would be able to learn the language through music, the feelings towards learning could be different.

The course book seems to be the usual tool in the process of studying English and by drawing it and the serious face, may indicate feelings of unease and disappointment. If Aino feels that she would learn better by speaking, but learning is mostly done by doing the exercises, the learning experience will most likely have a negative outcome.

## VILMA

In the picture, Vilma has drawn a TV, herself at school and on her own bed watching something from her phone. She has a smile on her face in the picture. Also Vilma has been able to consider multiple surroundings where she might have learned English. Benson and Reinders (2011) state that the students exposed to both "in-class learning" and "out-of-class learning" may have reinforced results in the overall learning outcome.

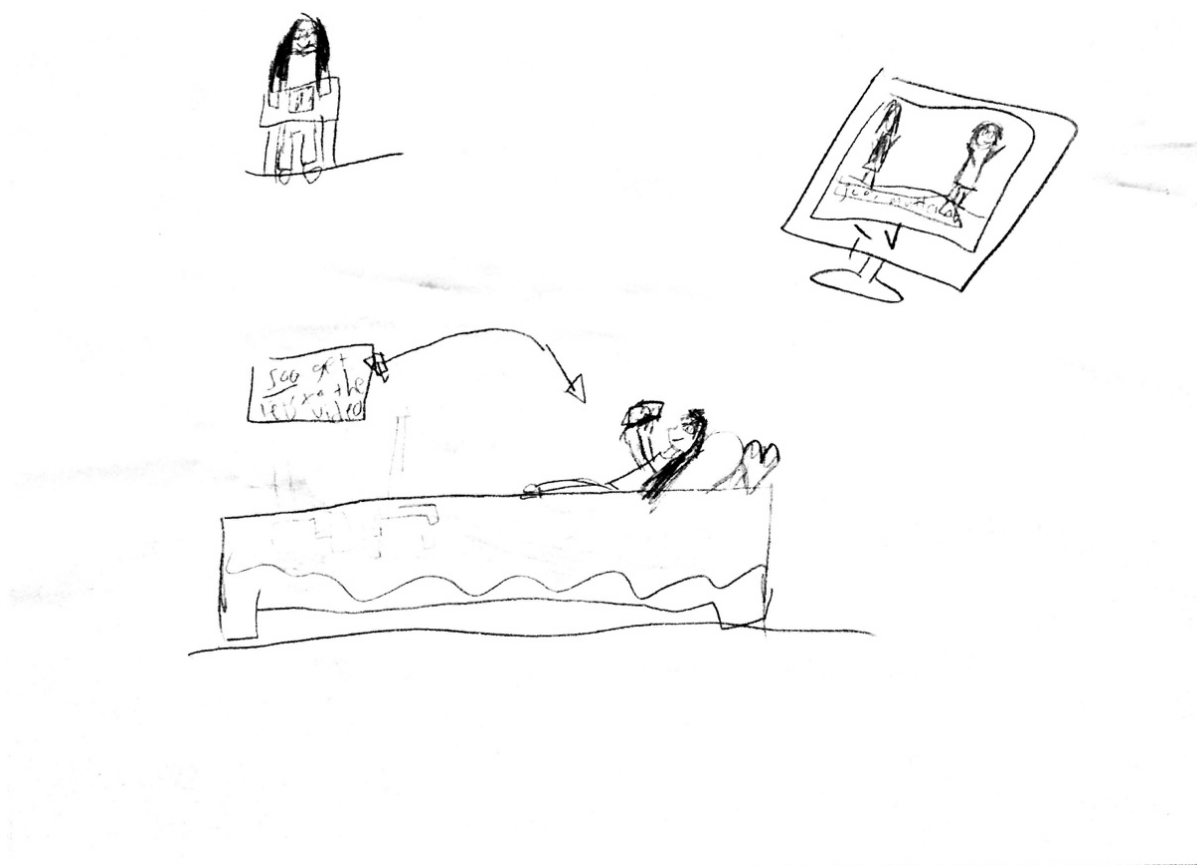


Figure 4. Vilma's drawing.

As earlier discussed, informal EFL learning happens quite frequently in Finland. According to Sjöholm (2004), English can be learned outside the classroom, as media and digitalization brings the language closer to our everyday life. Students can find videos, pictures and articles related to their topics of interest in English by opening their phones.

The following extract from Vilma's interview indicates that she is quite aware of how she learns English. Her answers refer to an advanced understanding of learning and language, as well as an interest towards the different elements of language.

(4)

V: Mä olin oppinu sitä kattomalla just videoita ja tässä mä niinku just katon tv:stä, katon just sellasta kanavaa että on englannin kielisenä ja sitte siinä näkyy suomen kieliset tekstitykset. Niin mä tajusin siitä sitten, et miten.

S: Okei, joo. Mikäs tossa enkun opiskelussa on kivaa?

V: No varmaan niinku se... ne sanan lausumiset.

S: Mites sit toi sun oma englannin kielen taito, miten sä kuvailisit sitä?

V: No mun mielestä se on aika hyvä. Osaan monta lausetta ja sanoja ja.

*V: I had learned it by watching videos and here I am watching TV, I'm watching a channel so it's in English and there are Finnish subtitles. So then I realized just how.*

*S: Okay yes. What is nice about learning English?*

*V: Well probably... Pronouncing words.*

*S: What about your own English – how would you describe it?*

*V: Well in my opinion I think it is quite good. I know many words and sentences and.*

During the interview, Vilma explains that she learns new words when she is watching TV and while hearing English she can follow the Finnish subtitles. In addition, she says she is interested in learning to pronounce the words. She seems enthusiastic about learning and thinks that her English skills are quite good. Benson & Reinders (2011:7) confirm that “learners who achieve high levels of proficiency often attribute their success to out-of-class learning”.

## AURORA

Aurora has drawn herself studying with a friend. Peer interaction in learning has been researched in the past. According to Ballinger and Sato (2016) argue that while speaking a foreign language with each other, students tend to give immediate feedback. Children learning a new language will most likely tell their peers whether or not they can understand their speech. Young students tend to correct the pronunciation, if they find someone making a mistake. If a student is able and ready to receive feedback, communicative learning can have positive results. Furthermore, the interaction has positive effects when students discuss the qualities and the rules in terms of e.g. grammar regarding the new language.

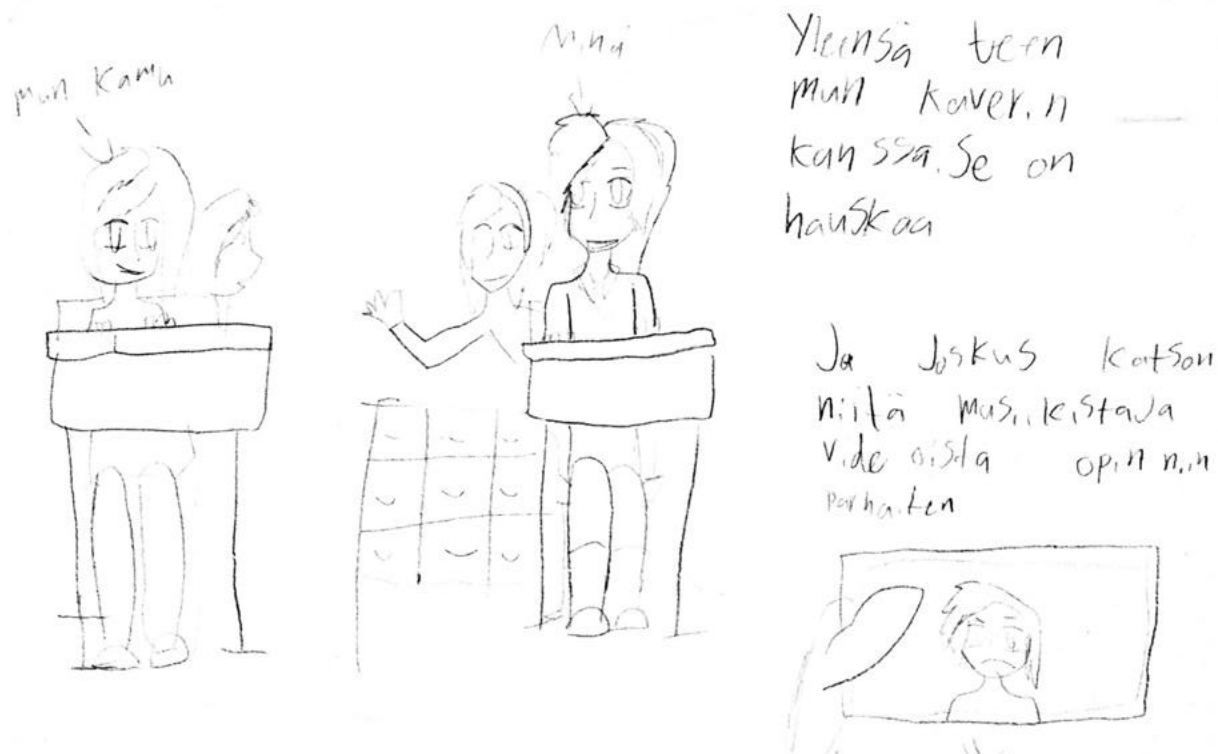


Figure 5. Aurora's drawing.

Aurora has written that she usually reads with her friend and it is fun. She also writes that she listens to music and watches videos, which is the best way for her to learn English. She has focused on the interactional learning and informal learning, which has discovered in other drawings as well.

(5)

A: Siinä on mä oon luokas tossa noin, mä yleensä opin parhaiten kavereiden kans... Tuo yks... Tuo kavერი niin se on hyvä englannissa niin. Ja sitte mä yleensä katon noita videoita, joissa puhutaan paljon englantia niin niistä sitten oon oppinu.

S: Niin joo. Miten sä tykkäät opiskella tai miten opit parhaiten?

A: No kattomalla noita videoita ja jos kuulee monta kertaa että miltä kuulostaa.

A: *There is me in the classroom, I usually learn with my best friends. One of them... That friend is good at English so. And then I usually watch videos where they speak English so I have learned from them.*

*S: Yes okay. How do you like to study or how do you learn the best?*

*A: Well by watching those videos and if I can hear many times that what it sounds like.*

Aurora mentions that she likes to study with her friend, because the friend is good at English. L2 learners feel comfortable communicating with another non-native learner when the interaction becomes a tool of learning (Ballinger & Sato, 2016). Furthermore, she thinks that watching videos is a good way to learn English. She understands that she learns new words when she hears them repetitively.

(6)

*A: Se on sitte helppoo ku sitä osaa.*

*A: It is easy when you know it.*

Aurora thinks that her English skills are okay and learning English does not seem unpleasant. In addition, she does not only tell that she likes to learn English with her friends, but mentions that she is allowed to interact with her friends in class.

OLLI

Olli draw himself sitting at his desk. His facial expression seems quite serious, but he has drawn a face with a smile on his shirt. There are some notes floating in the air. Olli's representation includes the school environment, but also reference to music. The interpretation of the picture would remain quite narrow without the interview. Olli has taken taken the time to draw a picture of himself learning English and has clearly understood the purpose of the task.





Figure 6. Olli's drawing.

(7)

S: Mikä tossa enkun opiskelussa on kivaa?

O: Sillon ku ei tarvii niinku tehdä kirjaa... tehtäviä.

S: Joo. Mikäs siinä on tylsää?

O: Kaikki kirjan tehtävät.

S: Miten sä kuvailisit sun omaa enkun taitoa?

O: Huono.

S: *What is nice about learning English?*

O: *When we don't need to do the book... the exercises.*

S: *Yeah. What is boring?*

O: *All the book exercises.*

S: *How would you describe your English?*

O: *Poor.*

Olli's interview implies that he has similar experiences than the previous students, but his view of himself as a learner is unclear. Olli has thought of himself learning English at school and doing the exercises from the book, yet he mentions that it is the most boring think in English classes. At the beginning of the interview he explains that the notes in the drawing refer to listening to the chapters from the text book, not music. Furthermore, he thinks that the opposite of boring would be not doing exercises from the book. Olli's answers reveal negative feelings towards the text and exercise book, but he has a hard time finding answers to the questions regarding the positive parts of studying and learning.

In addition, Olli thinks his skills are "poor". Olli does not seem to have an idea of how to make English classes enjoyable. He seem to consider that English classes require the book and therefore studying English is boring. This might reflect his view of himself as an English learner. If he finds the written assignments too challenging and the only way to study English in general, he is most likely to think that his English skills are not at a good level.

(8)

S: Osasitsä enkkua ennen kuin aloitit sen opiskelun?

O: Jotaki pari sanaa.

...

S: Joo, joo. Ne on kyllä. Mites tota, ootsä puhunut missään muualla englantia ku koulussa?

O: Joskus ku meillä oli au pari. Esim ku alussa se ei osannu nii jotain englanniks puhuttii.

S: Joo. Mistäs maasta se oli, muistatko?

O: Keniasta ja sitte Espanjasta.

S: *Did you know any English before you started it at school?*

O: *A couple of words.*

...

S: *Yes, yes. They are. What about... Have you spoken English anywhere else outside school?*

E: *When we had an au pair. Like at the beginning they didn't know so we were speaking English.*

S: *From which country, do you remember?*

O: *From Kenya and then from Spain.*

Olli has probably not discovered his strengths as a learner. Students may view themselves good at one thing and bad at another, which is a label that can be difficult to break. A student with excellent merits in sports or mathematics may think they can not succeed in

e.g. English, if they have not had the chance to utilize their personal assets (Korhonen, 2014). Olli has discovered the importance of knowing English outside the classroom. He has spoken English at home with non-native English speaking au pairs. Although, Olli says that English classes are *annoying*, he does refer to crosswords and listening to the text book chapters as the most enjoyable assignments. In addition, he learns new words if he hears them repetitively.

## MARIA

In Maria's drawing she has a calm and peaceful expression on her face. She has drawn musical notes, a TV, a tablet and a book. Compared to the previous responses to the task, similar themes are repeated in Maria's picture. Maria's drawing has elements that refer to both formal and informal learning (Sjöholm 2004), as tablets and books can be used at school and in studying e.g. grammar and also outside the school and the formal learning environment.

During the interview, Maria reflects her experiences in terms of negative and positive emotions. She is still unsure of her answers, but seems to have done valid observations of herself in different learning situations.



Figure 7. Maria's drawing.

(9)

M: No joskus se on rankkaa, mut sit kun oppii jonkun jutun niin sitte on sullein ylpee ittestään.

...

S: Hyvä. Mikä tossa enkun opiskelussa on kivaa?

M: No emmä oikee tiä hirveesti. No se kun huomaa, et on edistyny jossain jutussa.

*M: Well sometimes it tough, but when you learn something then yo u can be proud of yourself.*

...

S: Good. What is nice about studying English?

*M: Well I don't really know. Well when you notice that you have proceed in something.*

Maria's idea of her own learning experiences seems to be strongly connected to emotions. She thinks that developing her English skills is fun. Unlike most of the other informants, she does not pick one or two elements of language learning, but a deeper goal, which is

growing as an English speaker. On the other hand, elaborating specific examples of the “things” that might be difficult for her seems to be rather difficult to verbalize.

(10)

S: Mikäs siinä on sitten tylsää?

M: No kun ei osaa jotain juttua ja kun joku koittaa opettaa, mutta ei ymmärrä yhtään mitään.

...

S: Mitä kun kuulit, että vieras kieli alkaa, niin miltä se tuntui?

M: No mä eka pelkäsin sitä, että mä en ymmärrä yhtään mitään ja mä tuun olemaan huono siinä.

S: *Well what is boring?*

M: *When you don't know something and someone tries to teach you, but you don't understand anything.*

...

S: *How did you feel when you heard that you were about to start English at school?*

M: *At first I was afraid that I wouldn't understand anything and that I was going to be bad at it.*

Being afraid of not understanding or not learning something new can be harmful. A safe learning environment allows students to discover and make mistakes (Hakkarainen et al. 2004). For some students the learning process can slow down if the time pressure is highlighted.

## PAULI

Pauli has not drawn a picture of himself, but rather a set of tools. In the picture, he has included a book, a notebook, a pencil and an eraser, which are on his desk. He has drawn two faces with sad expressions. Pauli tells interesting details about his previous English learning experiences. He has learned English outside the school environment, but he thinks that English is boring as a subject.

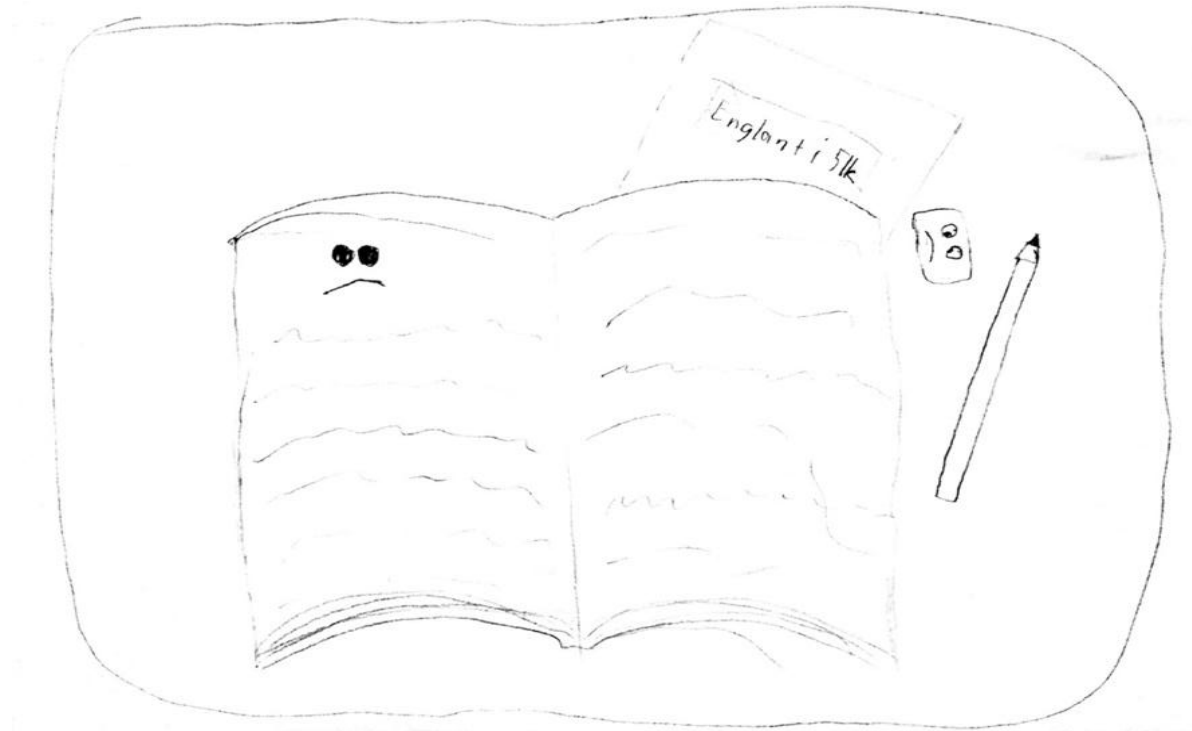


Figure 8. Pauli's drawing.

(11)

S: Mistä sä olit oppinu?

P: Öö.. Kotoo.. no siskolta tai sit peleistä tai jostain.

S: Joo. Miltäs toi opiskelu on susta tuntu täällä koulussa just?

P: Tylsää.

S: Tylsää. Okei. Mikä siinä on kaikista tylsintä?

P: Tunnit. Mä en vaan tykkää enkusta.

S: Joo. No nyt kun oot enkkaa opiskellut niin miten sä oot sitä opiskellu?

P: Kuuntelemalla.

S: *Where had you learned?*

P: *Öö... At home... Well from my sister or games or somewhere.*

S: *Yes. How does the studying feel like here at school?*

P: *Boring.*

S: *Boring. Okay. What is the most boring thing about it?*

P: *The lessons. I just don't like English.*

S: *Yeah. Well now that you have been studying English, so how have you studied?*

P: *By listening.*

Pauli's answers, both the drawing and interviewed, give a good example of why combining these methods was more beneficial than just relying on one of them. Pauli has drawn himself learning English. He has thought this includes a book, some writing tools and has decided to add a sad face to the picture. By looking at the drawing, some conclusions could have been that do not differ from the conclusions based on the interview. The sad face could indicate that Pauli does not like learning English, he has not learned English or he does not like the way he has been learning it.

Pauli confirms that he does not English as a subject. According to his answers to my questions, studying the book is boring. Moreover, he answers that he has learned English from his sister and from games. Pauli seems to think that studying English at school is boring, but using his English skills in informal situations do not seem unpleasant. Using English when playing games might be useful.

When a class of students are expected to learn in the same way, negative feelings can be expected to raise. Although, supporting each student in terms of learning is a challenge that realistically can not be fulfilled on a daily basis, different personalities and talents have preferences that require different kind of assistance in reach the full potential. Furthermore, maximizing the learning outcome for an individual student demands more than the ideal language lesson at school.

## KASPER

Kasper has drawn himself standing next to a vehicle. He has spread his arms and has a smile on his face. Kasper's interpretation of him learning English has lead to a unique outcome. English learning and a car as a combination surpass the expectations, which further support the benefits of combining the two methods of gathering information.

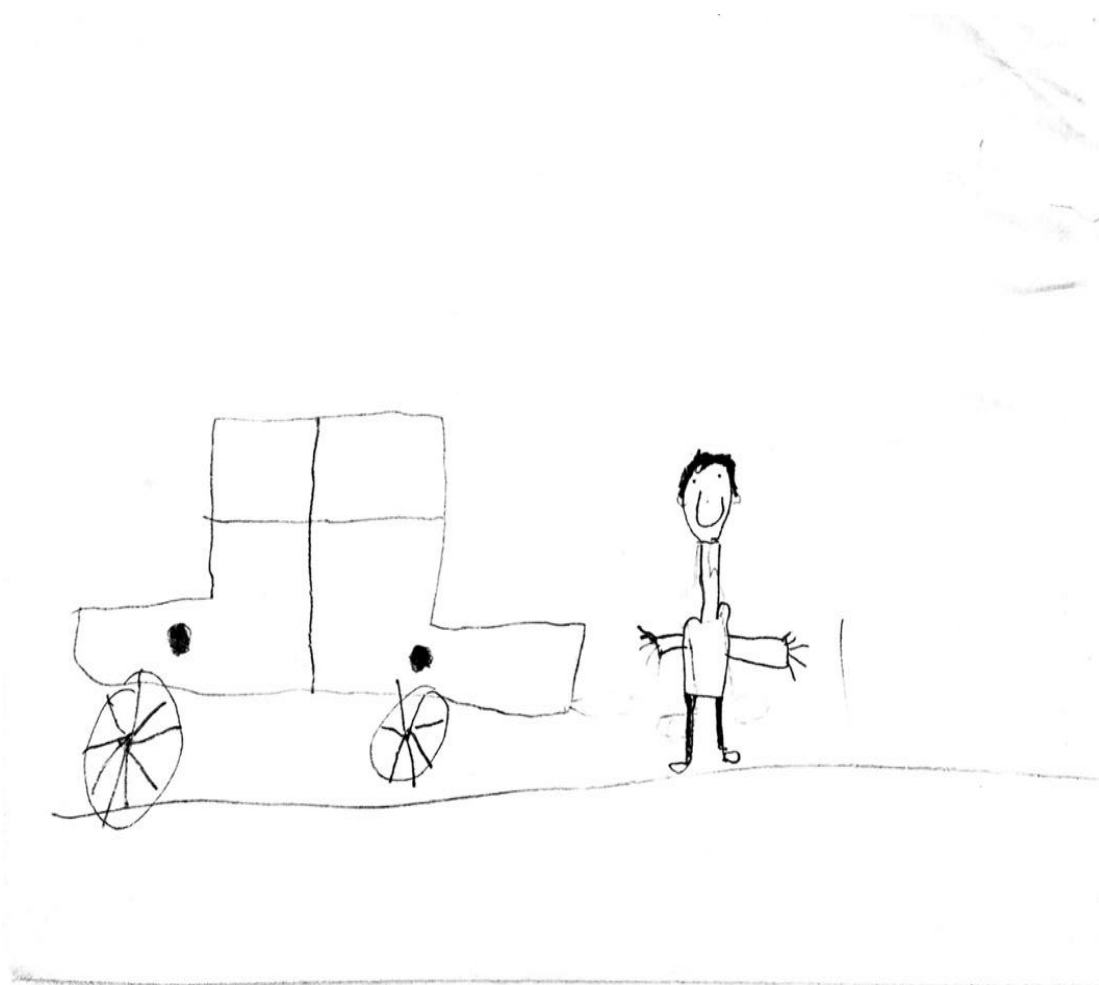


Figure 9. Kasper's drawing.

Kasper explains that he decided to draw a car, because he is allowed to drive a vehicle on the field and he has learned English while driving and listening to music at the same time. He thinks that listening might be the most beneficial way for him to learn.

(10)

...

S: Miten sä oot sitä kautta sit oppinut tota...

K: Vaikka sit musiikilla tai jollai.

...

S: Onks sit jotain semmosta... et tulee että nyt mä opin kunnolla?

K: Varmaa joku kuuntelu.

S: Okay. How have you learned then...

K: With music or something.



...

*S: Is there something then... Like you would feel that now I am really learning?*

*K: Probably listening.*

At first Kasper's explanation on why he has chosen to draw a car to illustrate himself learning English seem quite hesitant. His description may have turned out uncertain, because he has not fully understood the task I gave or he interpreted my questions as negative feedback on his creation. On the other hand, his drawing and answers during the interview support each other, as he repetitively refers to his listening skills. For students, listening while doing something may give the best results.

(11)

*S: Et osannu, et nyt se on ollu uus. Miltä se on tuntunut toi enkun opiskelu tuolla koulussa?*

*K: Ihan hauskalta.*

*S: Mikä siinä on kaikista kivointa?*

*K: Emmä nyt oikee tiä...*

*S: You didn't know, so now it's been new. How has it felt like to learn English at school?*

*K: Pretty nice.*

*S: What has been the nicest thing about it?*

*K: I don't really know.*

Kasper participated in in the research and seemed to have a rather positive attitude towards learning English. During the interview he explains that he has learned English while driving a car and he thinks that learning English is fun. On the other hand, he is not able to justify his ideas. When interviewing children, it is important to remember the level of development of the informant (Ruusuvoori 2010). The way children present their own view of the topic, may not be the expected result. Moreover, interview as a method may be challenging for some people if they find expressing their opinions difficult.

## JUSSI

Jussi has drawn himself in four different situations. In the first picture he is riding a bike and yelling "Angle!". In the second picture he is at school. He has also drawn himself playing the computer game *Clash Royal* and going fishing.

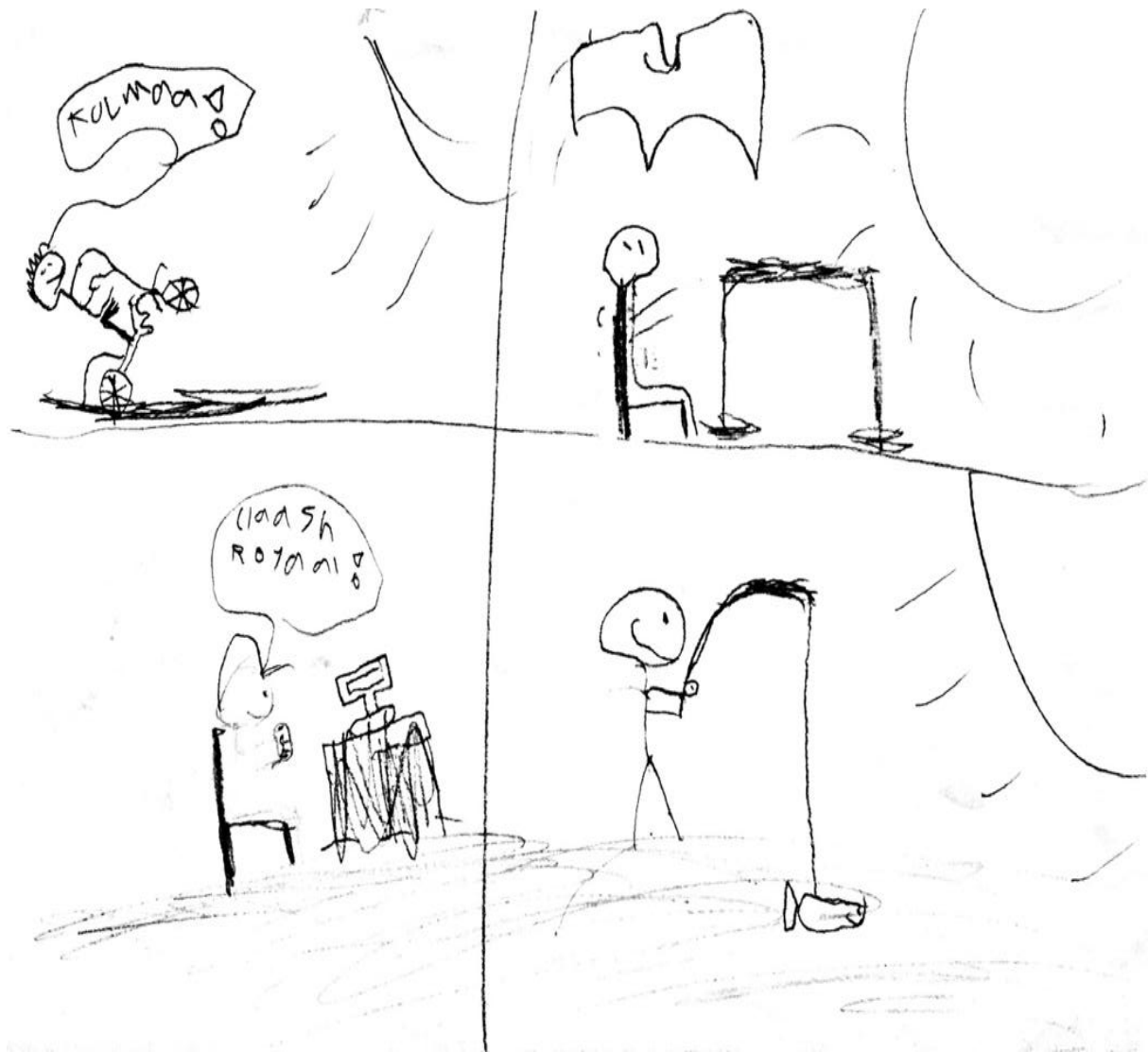


Figure 10. Jussi's drawing.

These pictures represent learning while being active. It could be that Jussi is capable of learning through movement and physical activity that is not necessarily related to the learning item, e.g. English language. The experience is similar to Kasper's (see Figure 8). For some students it is easier to learn while the body has something to do, as the memory activates as well. This is why Jussi might find himself practicing his English on a fishing trip as he describes during the interview.

(12)

J: No mitä mä nyt pelaan jotain englannin kielisiä pelejä ja sitte opiskelen englantia ja käyn kalalla ja nii.

S: Miten sä oot siellä kalastamassa oppinut sitä?

J: No emminä tiä... Jos välillä miettii niitä sanoja siellä.

S: Okei. Osasitsä enkkua jo ennen ku alotit sen koulussa?

J: No osasin mää sitä nyt vähä, mitä tuolla on jossain tuolla kolmosella tai tuolla mitä niitä nyt m.. niitä päiviä.. monday, tuesday.. niitä.

*J: Well what I play some English speaking games and then study English and go fishing and yeah.*

*S: How have you learned while fishing?*

*J: Well I don't know. If sometimes thinking about those words, there.*

*S: Okay. Did you know any English before starting it in school?*

*J: Well yes a little as some days are on the third and there what there is now... the weekdays... Monday, Tuesday... Those.*

Whether or not Jussi has responded to the original task is unclear. He has given the effort and drawn himself in four situations and during the interview he explains that they represent learning situations. In addition, his attitude towards both the opportunity to participate in this study as well as towards learning English are positive.

(13)

...

S: Mikä siinä on.. Minkä takia se on hyvältä tuntunut?

J: No se on ihan semi tärkeä kieli ja jos lähtee jonnekki ulkomaille ja nii..

S: Mainitsit näitä nii ootsä puhunu muuallaki ku koulussa tota enkkua?

J: Joo, ainaki ku olin tuolla Kreikassa nii puhuin siellä vähän.

*S: What is about it... Why has it felt good?*

*J: Well it is a semi important language and if going abroad and yeah...*

*S: You mentioned that you have spoken English outside school, too?*

*J: Yeah, at least when I was in Greece then there I spoke a little.*

Jussi argues that English is an important language to learn if you wish to travel abroad and communicate with foreign people. He has spoken English on a holiday in Greece. Jussi is taking advantage of his formally learned language skills in informal situations and further developing them. As previously discussed, communication in learning seems to be one the key factors that make positive learning experiences.

## AKSELI

The students have implied the way they think they have learned English. A number of different learning environments, tools and ways have been drawn. Some of the students have drawn a picture of themselves learning in way one and some of them have included different elements in the drawings. Akseli had drawn a picture of a book, which shows that he has studied English at school. During the interview he reflects the other possibilities to learn English in every day life. Akseli has drawn a text book called *Wow Busy book 5 English* and a pencil. He has not drawn a picture of himself or any references to the emotions. By looking at the picture, it would be safe to say that Akseli has learned English at school. *The Busy Book 5* could be a text book or an exercise book.

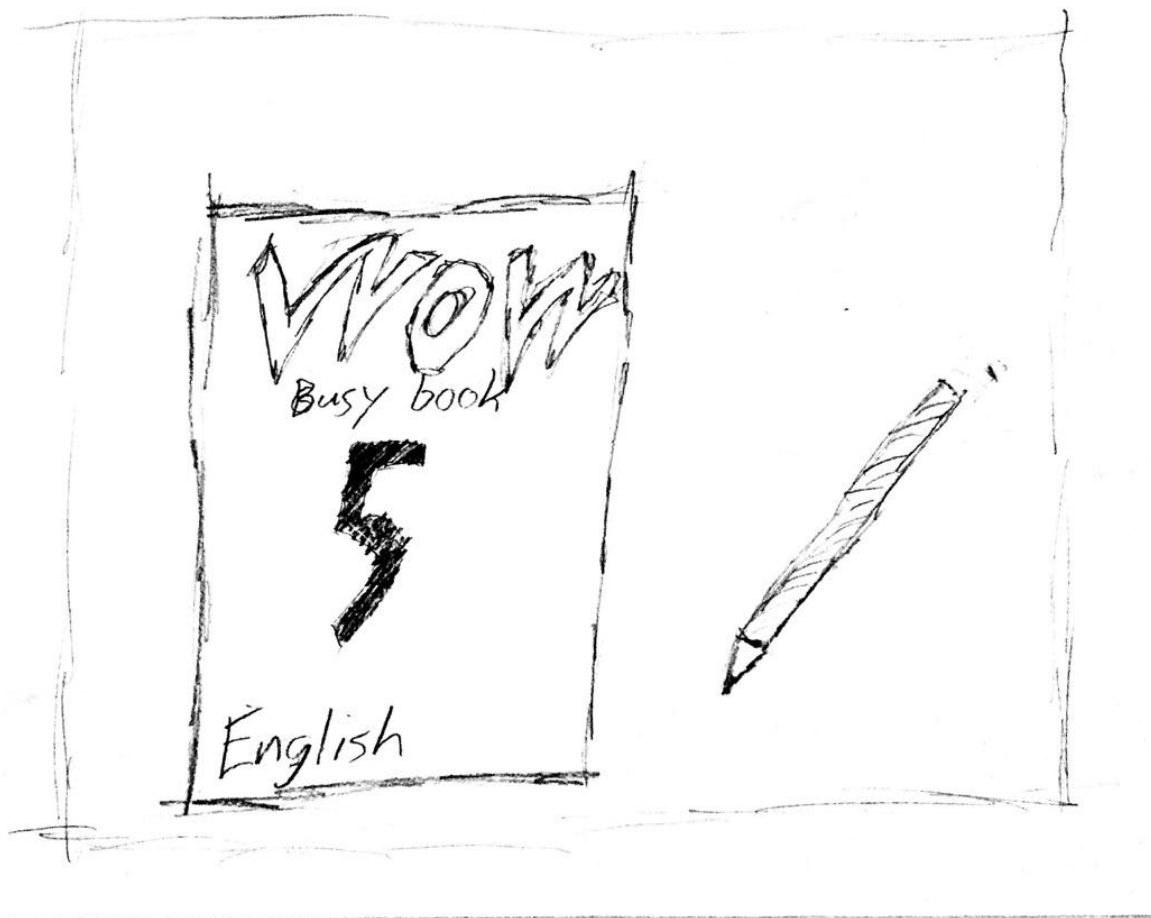


Figure 11. Akseli's drawing.

The picture itself does not offer detailed information regarding Akseli's attitude towards learning English, but he provides interesting information during the interview in terms of different learning environments and emotions.

(14)

A: Oon mä videoista ja kaikista tämmösistä englannin kielisistä peleistä oon oppinu englantia kanssa.

S: Okei. Miltä tuo enkun opiskelu on tuntunu sun mielestä?

A: On se aika helppoo ja mukavaa.

*A: I have from videos and all these kind of English speaking games I have learned English from as well.*

*S: Okay. How has studying English felt like?*

*A: It is quite easy and fun.*

Akseli states that investigating the language is fun and he believes that traveling is easier when he can communicate in English. English is Akseli's favorite subject in school and in the following example he provides reasons why:

(15)

S: Mikä siinä enkun opiskelussa on kivointa?

A: No tutkii sitä kieltä ja ulkomailla pärjää kun osaa puhua.

S: Okei. Ja sä oot puhunut englantia muuallakin ku koulussa?

A: Oon puhunu. Netissä keskustellu ja sitte oon ulkomailla jonku verran.

S: Miten sä kuvailisit sun omaa englannin kielen taitoa?

A: Ihan hyvä, että.. pystyy.. pystyy sillä kommunikoimaan muitten kanssa.

*S: What is the nicest thing about studying English?*

*A: Well investigating the language and getting along abroad when you can speak it.*

*S: Okay. You have spoken outside school?*

*A: I have. Spoken online and then abroad a little bit.*

*S: How would you describe your English?*

*A: It's pretty good... that... that is able to communicate with others.*

As the majority of the previous informants, Akseli points out the importance of communication. He has learned English through videos, games and by chatting online with non-Finnish speaking players. He thinks that English is easy and fun. He has understood that English has a role in the everyday life outside the classroom. Akseli is able to apply

his skills in informal situations as well as to work on his existing skills. In addition, he has possibly learned to appreciate his own skills and the opportunity to learn the language once he has realized the benefits of knowing another language.

(24)

A: Nii tai no parhaiten. Oon mä videoista ja kaikista tämmösistä englannin kielisistä peleistä oon oppinu englantia kanssa.

A: Well the best. I have learned from videos and all these kind of games in English I have learned English from as well.

During the interview Akseli seems to remember other situations that have offered possibilities to learn and use English in practise. Many of the students describing English studying at school as *boring*, seem to use the language while playing and finding information online.

## VILI

Vili wanted to take part in my study. He did not draw anything and I asked him if he had any questions about the assignment. He told me he understood what he had to do and would explain it later. He came to the interview with a completely blank page.

(16)

V: Joo, tää kuvaa englannin opiskelun mielenkiintoisuutta.

...

S: Miltäs se on täällä koulussa toi enkun...

V: Tylsältä!

S: Mikä siinä on erityisen tylsää?

V: Kaikki.

V: *Yes, this describes the interestingness of studying English.*

...

S: *How has it felt to study English here...*

V: *Boring!*

S: *What especially is boring?*

V: *Everything.*

It seems that Vili wanted to make a point by showing me the empty page. He explains that he does not have anything good to say about English as a school subject. Although, he answers all of the questions and the answers support each other, it was challenging to get valid information about his attitude towards English and the possible emotions he has experienced.

Vili claims that he does not like studying English and that everything about it feels boring. In addition, he thinks that he has not studied for the tests in any way, although he has received decent grades. During the interview Vili claims that English is not his favorite subject, but his test results have been fine, because he has guessed the answers. Also, according to him, he only plays games in Finnish.

(17)

S: Käytätsä sitä muualla ku koulussa?

V: En.

S: *Do you use English outside school?*

V: *No.*

Vili is the only informant, out of the eleven informants, that did not complete the drawing task. Although, he expressed his interest in participating in both parts of the data collection, he did not draw anything and his answers to the interview questions are quite limited. Based on the interview he does not seem motivated to study English at school or in other environments.

(18)

S: Okei. No mites kun sun pitää kokeet saada tehtyä niin miten sä oot opiskellu niihin?

V: En mitenkää!

S: Okei. Onko kokeet menny miten?

V: Ihan ok.

S: Okei. No sit viimeinen kysymys eli miten sä kuvailisit sun omaa enkun kielen taitoa?

V: Tällä paperilla.

S: *Okay. Well what about handling tests, how have studied for those?*

V: *I haven't!*

S: *Okay. How have the tests gone?*

V: *Okay.*

S: *Okay. Well then the last question, how would you describe your English?*

*V: With this paper.*

It is unclear whether or not Vili could describe his language skills at all, or if he is not sure what to say at all. According to Ruusuvuori and Tiittula (2009) the questions should be designed for the target group. The questions could be too direct in nature and some children could find it more comfortable to tell about their experiences by giving examples of e.g. nice or uncomfortable situations, rather than explaining what they feel or think about the issue. On the other hand, if the child views the interviewer as a superior to them, the answers may not be truthful. The child might think that the interviewer is expecting certain type of answers or is testing the child.

#### **4.2. Emotions in learning**

Both positive and negative emotions are presented in the drawings and discussed during the interviews. In most cases, each student has presented the general attitude towards studying and learning English clearly in the drawing, but in most cases the interview revealed information that could not have been interpreted from the picture. All of the students were asked *how they feel about studying English*. The division between the answers between girls and boys is not significant.

Table 3. Informants divided based on their attitude towards English in school.

	Good, fun, nice	Neutral	Boring, annoying, not fun
Girls	2	2	1
Boys	3	0	3

Some of the answers were not able to classify in the categories of positive and negative answers. Although, Vilma's drawing is one of the most descriptive pictures, she seems to have considered her qualities as a student and a language learner and she enjoys watching TV shows in English at home, her reaction to studying is neutral.



(19)

S: Okei, joo, se on kyllä hyvä. Tulee toistoa paljon. Miltäs täällä koulussa toi enkun opiskelu on tuntunu?

V: Mmh. Normaalilta.

S: *Okay, yes, that is good. A lot of repetition. How has it felt to study English here at school?*

V: *Mmh. Normal.*

Some of the students with a positive attitude towards English also described the variety of emotions. Aurora's feelings come across in the following passage. She seems to refer to the temporary fatigue due to the overall workload. Also Maria claims that studying is English is *tough*, but she feels *proud* after accomplishing something new in class. These emotions seem to be connected to ambition, if the student has high personal goals and experiences lack of resources (Linnenbrik & Pintrich 2002).

(20)

S: Okei, vähän osasit. No miltä se on tuntunut toi enkun opiskelu?

A: Se on ihan kivaa, mutta joskus kun ei jaksais millään.

S: *Okay, you knew a little. Well how has it felt to study English?*

A: *It is quite nice, but sometimes just don't feel I can manage.*

Eight out of the eleven students described both negative and positive emotions in relation to learning English. Two of the remaining three students founds positive elements when I specifically ask them what they thought is the most likeable way or tool to learn. One of the students did not find anything positive to say during the interview. All of the students describe negative emotions, such as disappointment, frustration, irritation and boredom. Students that describe learning English as "boring" or "annoying" claim that they do not like English as a subject at school. For instance, Pauli claims that English classes are not his favorite and describe them as *boring*. He was asked what would make them more pleasant, but he answered that he does not like English and was unable to consider the factors that could result in positive learning experiences.

(21)

S: Mitä toivoisit niihin lisää?

P: En tiiä. Mä en vaan tykkää enkusta.

S: *What would you hope that was added to them?*

P: *I don't know. I just don't like English.*

Furthermore, the students with similar answers also thought that their language skills were not good. Students who have not found the positive effects from learning a foreign language or have not experienced challenges and success, may feel that they are not good at learning (Hakkarainen et al. 2004). In addition, it is possible that children who have been forced to the traditional way of learning English from the textbook think that other methods do not exist (Korhonen 2014).

Eight out of eleven students described positive emotions during the interviews. Some of them had included elements referring to positive emotions in their drawing, but some of them had focused on the physical tools and devices and instruments they have used to learn English, which will be discussed later in the chapter. Although, three students seemed to struggle to find anything good to comment on, two of them found some elements that they favor. Olli had drawn a picture of himself sitting at his desk with some musical notes flowing in the air. He was asked how studying English at school has felt:

(22)

S: Okei, sehän on hyvä alku. Miltä toi enkun opiskelu on tuntunut täällä koulussa?

O: Ärsyttävältä.

S: Minkä takia?

O: No kun se on rasittavaa.

S: Tuntuuks se vaikeelta?

O: Joo.

S: *Okay, that's a good start. How was studying English felt like?*

O: *Annoying.*

S: *Why's that?*

O: *Because it is irritating.*

S: *Does it feel hard?*

O: *Yes.*

On the other hand, Olli answers that listening to the language is a good way for him to learn:

(23)

O: Varmaan se kuuntelu tai... emmää tiiä.

O: *Probably listening or... I don't know.*

Although, English does not seem to be his favorite subject, he participates in the conversation and willing to discuss the topic. Similarly to the majority of the informations, Olli has been able to discuss and learn English at home.

## 5 CONCLUSION

Learning and emotions were discussed during the interview. Also emotions in the pictures were interpreted. Alanen et al. (2013) claim that visual narratives in qualitative research offer both the informant and the researcher the opportunity to examine the individuality. Although, the students were asked to draw pictures of themselves learning English and emotions or feelings were not mentioned, many of the students included features that were connected to a certain emotion. The present study suggests that combining visual data and interviews in research provide more descriptive results than one method used alone. According to Dörnyei & Ryan (2009), motivation, emotions and learning results are connected. In the present study, the students who expressed positive emotions towards English learning also considered having good language skills. On the other hand, some of the students that seemed to have an ambitious approach towards studying also seemed to expect and demand a great deal of success from themselves.

As expected, English is a natural part of the informants' daily lives. The students hear English on TV and from the games they play, but only some of them included these components in their drawings. Leppänen et al. (2008) refer to English as the third domestic language in Finland. All of these students have heard English all their lives and a few of them mention that knew some words before they started learning English at school.

This study concentrated on young students as English language learners, and more specifically their own views of themselves and the emotions connected to learning English. The preferences and personal qualities as learners were discussed. All of the children were of the same age and were in the third year of studying English at school. The aim of the study was to reach an understanding of the different emotions and preferences in learning, as well as to gain information about the motive and self image and to examine how they could affect the learning experiences.

A range of feelings were discussed with the students. All of the students described their personal feelings, and some of them were feelings that would be generally considered positive, such as excitement, pleasure and satisfaction. All of them had experienced feelings that would be generally considered negative, such as disappointment and irritation.

The range in negative feelings had different reasons that the informants described. The present study suggests that the individual qualities should be considered in teaching.

Some of the aspects of the present study could be further researched. The matter of identity and learning could be taken into consideration. In addition, negative and positive feedback in connection with identity and learning could be aspects of future research. Emotions as a part of the learning process should not be forgotten, as they have a major impact.

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Saatekirje

4.5.2017

Hei,

Olen englannin kielen opiskelija Jyväskylän yliopistosta. Teen Pro gradu –tutkielmaa, jossa haluan selvittää viidesluokkalaisten käsityksiä itsestään englannin oppijoina sekä heidän mieltymyksiään ja tunteitaan englannin oppimiseen liittyen. Tutkimuksen aineisto kerätään 22.5.2017.

Tehtävänä on piirtää piirustus, jonka jälkeen esitän muutaman kysymyksen oppilaalle piirustukseen liittyen. Tehtävän ohjeistus esitetään suomeksi.

Tutkimuksen tarkoituksena ei ole arvioida tai testata lapsen osaamista. Kaikenlaiset vastaukset ovat arvokkaita ja tärkeä osa tutkimuksen tuloksia.

Pyydän huoltajan suostumusta alaikäisen lapsen osallistuessa tutkimukseen. Lomakkeesta on kaksi kappaletta, joista toisen voitte ottaa itsellenne ja toisen oppilas palauttaa **19.5.2017 mennessä**.

Lämmin kiitos vastauksistanne etukäteen.

Yhteistyöterveisin,

Saana Näreaho  
Jyväskylän yliopisto  
Kieli- ja viestintätieteiden laitos

**TUTKIMUSSUOSTUMUS JA**

## TUTKIMUSMATERIAALIN KÄYTTÖLUPA

Tutkimuksen toteuttaja: Saana Näreaho (Jyväskylän yliopisto, Kieli- ja viestintätieteiden laitos)

Tutkimuksen tavoitteena on tarkastella viidesluokkalaisten käsityksiä itsestään kielenoppijoina visuaalisen aineiston avulla. Tätä varten kerätään lasten piirustuksia ja yksilöhaastattelut. Aineistoa käytetään englannin kielen maisterintutkielmassa. Tutkimuksesta voi antaa lisätietoa myös työn ohjaaja Hannele Dufva.

Tutkimukseen osallistuvat anonymisoidaan: osallistujista ei käytetä missään vaiheessa heidän oikeita nimiään eikä anneta tietoa, josta voisi päätellä osallistujien henkilöllisyyden. Tutkimusaineistoa säilytetään lukituissa tiloissa, joihin vain tutkijalla on pääsy. Aineisto hävitetään tutkimuksen päätyttyä.

**Annan luvan sille, että huollettavani osallistuu tutkimukseen.**

Annan luvan käyttää materiaalia (piirustus ja haastattelu)

tutkimus- ja opetustarkoitukseen (maisteriseminaarin esitykset)

julkaisutarkoitukseen (maisterintutkielma, mahdolliset muut julkaisut)

**Aineistoa saa käyttää** tutkimuksen toteuttaja.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Paikka ja aika

\_\_\_\_\_  
Huollettavan nimi

\_\_\_\_\_  
Tutkimusluvan antajan allekirjoitus ja nimen selvennys

\_\_\_\_\_  
Tätä lupa-asiakirjaa on tehty kaksi kappaletta, toinen luvan antajalle, toinen tutkimuksen tekijälle.