

# PROSE FICTION IN THE ENGLISH CLASSROOM:

## Perceptions of IB students

Bachelor's Thesis

Saara Teppo

University of Jyväskylä  
Department of Languages  
English

16 December 2013

## JYVÄSKYLÄN YLIOPISTO

Tiedekunta - Faculty Humanistinen tiedekunta	Laitos - Department Kielten laitos
Tekijä - Author Saara Teppo	
Työn nimi - Title PROSE FICTION IN THE ENGLISH CLASSROOM: Perceptions of IB students	
Oppiaine - Subject englanti	Työn laji - Level Kandidaatintutkielma
Aika - Month and year joulukuu 2013	Sivumäärä - Number of pages 21 + 1 liite
<p>Tiivistelmä - Abstract</p> <p>Kirjallisuuden opiskelun merkitystä kielenoppimisessa on tutkittu laajalti, ja se on todettu tärkeäksi ja toimivaksi menetelmäksi. Opiskelijoiden omat näkemykset asiasta saattavat myös vaikuttaa oppimistuloksiin, mutta ne ovat aikaisemmassa tutkimuksessa jääneet huomiotta.</p> <p>Tutkielman tarkoituksena on selvittää, pitävätkö oppilaat kirjallisuuden opiskelua hyvänä tapana oppia englannin kieltä. Tutkimus kohdentuu kansainvälisen IB-tutkinnon opiskelijoihin, koska siinä vieraan kielen laajan tason (higher level) opetussuunnitelmaan kuuluu oleellisena osana kirjallisuusanalyysi. Tutkielmassa kartoitetaan laajan tason ja suppeamman tason (standard level) opiskelijoiden näkemyksiä kirjallisuuden käytöstä.</p> <p>Tutkimuksen aineisto kerättiin haastattelemalla kahta opiskelijaa heidän kaksivuotisen IB-tutkintonsa ensimmäisen opiskeluvuoden loppuvaiheessa. Avoin teemahaastattelu oli toimiva aineistonkeruumetodi, koska opiskelijat pääsivät vapaasti kertomaan mielipiteistään. Aineisto analysoitiin sisällönanalyysin keinoin.</p> <p>Tulosten mukaan kirjallisuus on hyödyllinen tapa oppia kieltä, mutta sen käsittelyn toimivuuteen oppitunneilla tulisi panostaa. Erityisen tärkeänä haastateltavat pitivät sitä, että opiskelijat itse pääsisivät vaikuttamaan siihen, millaista kirjallisuutta opiskellaan ja millä tavoilla. Pienen otoksen takia tulokset eivät ole yleistettävissä, mutta ne kuitenkin antavat syyn jatkotutkimukselle, jolloin aineisto voisi olla suurempi. Erityisesti opetusmenetelmien ja opettajan merkitys sekä kirjavalinnat ovat asioita, joita tulisi tutkia enemmän. Tällöin tuloksia voisi hyödyntää myös käytännön opetustyössä.</p>	
Asiasanat - Keywords prose fiction, perceptions, interview, content analysis, teaching material	
Säilytyspaikka - Depository JYX	
Muita tietoja - Additional information	

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>1 INTRODUCTION.....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>2 LANGUAGE LEARNING AND THE IB DIPLOMA PROGRAMME</b>	<b>4</b>
2.1 Introducing the concepts and defining the terms .....	4
2.2 Language learning and language competence.....	5
2.3 Learning languages through literature .....	7
<b>3 THE PRESENT STUDY.....</b>	<b>8</b>
3.1 The research questions .....	8
3.2 Data .....	8
3.3 Methods of analysis .....	9
<b>4 RESULTS AND ANALYSIS .....</b>	<b>10</b>
4.1 Students' perceptions on the quantity of literary studies .....	10
4.2 The ways of studying literature.....	11
4.3 The effectiveness of studying literature .....	13
4.3.1 Language learning and language competence .....	13
4.3.2 Language learning and culture .....	16
4.4 Affective variables .....	17
<b>5 CONCLUSIONS.....</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY .....</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>APPENDIX: THE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS .....</b>	<b>22</b>

## 1 INTRODUCTION

The importance of literature in language learning is widely acknowledged by researchers and students. Consequently, various school programmes have included the study of literature in their language syllabi. In the IB Diploma Programme, which is a programme for preparing students aged 16-19 for academic studies, literature is an essential part of the language syllabus. Several theorists, such as Sinko (2001), Simpson (1997) and Scholes (1985), recognise the importance of literature in language learning, from the viewpoints of both language competence and cultural knowledge. However, previous research has concentrated on the effectiveness of literary studies in language learning, whereas students' own perceptions on the use of literature as a way of learning languages have not been as widely studied. Consequently, the present thesis will take students' viewpoint into consideration.

From a teacher's point of view, it is rather important to acknowledge students' opinions on the teaching and learning methods used in the classroom. A student who finds language lessons meaningful, effective and inspiring is likely to be more motivated to learn the language than a student who is not interested in the subject. When students' motivation increases, they might also progress faster in their own language learning processes. Both understanding the theories concerning literature in language learning and acknowledging students' perceptions might help the teacher to plan successful courses and, consequently, feel motivated and enjoy his or her work. For this reason, the purpose of the present study is to provide information that teachers can use in the process of planning courses.

Firstly, I will give background information concerning the context of the present study and describe some theories concerning language learning and literature. Secondly, I will present the major findings from the data collected and analyse it by using the method of data-based content analysis, and thus, approach the research questions. Finally, I will draw conclusions.

## 2 LANGUAGE LEARNING AND THE IB DIPLOMA PROGRAMME

In this section I will introduce the concepts and define the terms relevant to the present study. These include *the International Baccalaureate Organisation (IBO)*, *IB Diploma Programme*, *Language B Course* and *prose fiction*. Moreover, I will discuss language learning in general, the role of literature in language learning and teaching, and literature in the context of the IB Diploma Programme. The theories concerning language learning, language competence and literature are relevant in the present study as they form the framework for collecting and analysing the data.

### 2.1 Introducing the concepts and defining the terms

*International Baccalaureate (IB)* is a non-profit educational foundation originating in Geneva and founded in 1968. It offers several education programmes all over the world for various age groups, of which one is the *IB Diploma Programme*, designed to prepare students aged 16-19 for academic studies (International Baccalaureate Organisation 2013). The final exams at the end of the two-year programme are held only in three languages: English, French and Spanish (International Baccalaureate Organisation 2013). As English is often the most familiar foreign language for Finnish pupils, it is widely used in IB schools as well, not only in exams but also during the lessons.

One of the six subject groups in the curriculum is *language acquisition*, which includes courses on several foreign languages. In Finland, the major foreign language course is English. The subject group is further divided into level courses, of which *Language B Course* is for learners who have some previous experience of studying the language. (International Baccalaureate Organisation 2013.) According to the Language B Subject Outline (2011: 4), two major aims in the course are to raise students' intercultural understanding and help them acquire the language. The students can choose the depth of study depending on their own interests: the

extensive higher level course (HL) includes 240 hours of studying and the standard level course (SL) 150 hours (International Baccalaureate Organisation 2013). The assessment objectives of the HL course are otherwise identical with the SL course, the only difference being that HL students study two works of literature in addition to the other themes in the curriculum. The aim is to “understand and use works of literature written in the target language of study” (Language B Subject Outline 2011: 3). In the present study I refer to this as *the study of literature* and I use the term *prose fiction* to refer to the works of literature studied in the course.

## 2.2 Language learning and language competence

In this section, some theories concerning language learning and teaching will be introduced. Firstly, Krashen (1982: 10) distinguishes between language learning and language acquisition. Acquisition is a subconscious process in which there is no focus on linguistic form. Learning, in contrast, is a conscious process and it emphasises focusing on form. According to Johnson (2008: 81), mastering a language is a combination of both learning and acquisition. He distinguishes between “knowing about” and “knowing how to”, which means that the learner not only knows about the structure of the language but is also able to use it. This can be taken into account in teaching by combining form-focused instruction, such as grammar rules, with informal and message-focused instruction that emphasises communication and actual language use (Johnson 2008: 107-110). What is more, Krashen (1982: 21), in his Input Hypothesis, suggests that comprehensibility is equally important in language learning, in other words, the language used with the learner has to be slightly more advanced than his or her present level. This would ensure constant progress from level  $i$  to level  $i+1$ . These themes are also included in Language B Subject Outline (2011: 4), as the focus of the course is indeed on “learning of language through meaning”, in other words, productive and receptive skills, communication and interaction.

Secondly, language learning is also dependent on the learner himself or herself. Swain (1995: 126) formulated the hypothesis on output, which emphasises the

positive challenges of using the language: producing output is not only good practice but also more challenging for the learner. In addition, Schmidt and Frota (1986: 311) argue that it is important that the learner not only consciously comprehends the input but also understands that there still is more to learn. In addition, Johnson (2008: 112-134) presents learner differences, such as intelligence, motivation, aptitude and attitude as important factors in the language learning process. Simpson (1997: xi) has expressed a similar view by emphasising the importance of giving students an active role in the classroom and listening to them when making decisions concerning the lessons. This can be done by including students in the teaching, encouraging them to use their own imagination and advising them to create ideas and information by themselves. Consequently, not only learner differences are in a significant role in language learning, but also the teacher's willingness to activate the students is equally important.

The goal in language learning is to be able to master the language, which can be called language competence. According to Johnson (2008: 17-39), language competence can be divided into three categories: 1) Systemic competence, in other words, how language works as a system. Examples include sounds, grammar, lexis, spelling and punctuation; 2) Sociolinguistic competence, which means rules of use: norms, cultural differences, and rules of discourse, i.e., joining together rules, cohesion, coherence; 3) Strategic competence, which includes communication strategies such risk-taking, paraphrasing and mime. Scholes (1985: 21-23) provides a further viewpoint which accounts for the mastery of written language: textual competence. It includes three dimensions: reading, interpretation and criticism, which means that the reader can understand both what is actually written and what might have been the purpose of the writer. The reader will also critically evaluate the text. As a result, reading is a multi-faceted skill and has to be regarded as an important aspect in language competence. These aspects are also taken into account in the Language B Subject Outline (2011: 5-6) as it emphasises both receptive and productive, written and oral skills.

## 2.3 Learning languages through literature

Literature has been recognised as an important element in language learning. Sinko (2001: 8-9) indicates that reading is useful as it helps students to develop their thinking and imagination and provides a way to learn more expressive and accurate language. What is more, Simpson (1997: x-xi) suggests that the study of language and literature cannot be separated from each other. When students study and start paying attention to what kinds of linguistic choices authors have made and what their purposes might have been, they will become more aware of the language. Moreover, using the language in practical activities concerning literature engages the students, which will help increase their textual awareness (Simpson 1997: x-xi). Another viewpoint on the importance of literature is that literature mirrors the world in which it is written and also pictures the author's viewpoint on life: "Texts are places where power and weakness become visible and discussable, where learning and ignorance manifest themselves, where the structures that enable and constrain our thoughts and actions become palpable" (Scholes 1985: xi).

Learning about culture is considered important in the IB programme. In the Language B Subject Outline (2001: 2) one aim of the course is to "to encourage, through the study of texts and through social interaction, an awareness and appreciation of the different perspectives of people from other cultures". The significance of literature in the study of culture has been researched by Häggblom (2006: 240), who found out that primary school children were able to read and discuss literary texts and, simultaneously, learn about culture. This could be applied to older students as well, especially as their discussion can be more thorough, due to their experience both on the language and life. Sinko (2001: 8-9) has expressed a similar view by suggesting that literature broadens the student's view on language, life and cultures, and, for this reason, helps the student to learn to understand different people and their views. Consequently, literature can be a useful tool for learning about cultures.



### **3 THE PRESENT STUDY**

In this section, I will present the background of the present study and the process itself. Firstly, I will introduce the research questions. Secondly, I will describe the data collection method, along with the empirical setting of the study. Finally, I will present the method of analysis.

#### **3.1 The research questions**

The purpose of the present study is to investigate the perceptions that IB students have about using prose fiction as teaching material in the English classroom. The study is qualitative and the viewpoint to approach the topic is to compare the perceptions of two students, of which one is from the SL group and the other from the HL group. The objective is to analyse the students' ideas on how they learn English when reading and studying literature. The research questions are as follows:

1. What types of perceptions do the HL student and the SL student have about using prose fiction as teaching material in English classroom?
2. Do the perceptions of the students differ? If so, how?

#### **3.2 Data**

As this study is a qualitative one, the objective was to investigate the students' perceptions thoroughly. According to Dufva (2011: 132), an interview is a suitable method when the subject's personal views are in the focus of the study. A semi-structured interview (i.e., a theme interview) ensures the possibility of free-flowing discussion (Dufva 2011: 133). This type of interview was chosen so that the situation would be as comfortable as possible for the students. According to the wish of the students themselves, the interview was conducted in Finnish, which also contributed to achieving a relaxed atmosphere. It was also a pair interview so that the students could get support and opposition from each other. Additionally, as Bachelor's theses are rather small-scale, only two interviewees could be included in the study. A pilot interview was done with a person who had earlier studied in the IB programme and,

therefore, was suitable for piloting, but it was not used in the analysis as the setting was different.

In order to research the significance of literature in language learning, I interviewed two students from an IB school in Eastern Finland. At the time of collecting the data, in May 2013, both students had studied English as Language B in the IB Diploma Programme for one year. Moreover, as literature studies are required only in the HL syllabus, one SL student and one HL student were chosen to be interviewed. This ensured the possibility to compare their perceptions, and the possible differences will be taken into consideration in the analysis. However, the main focus of the present study is on how language skills develop when studying literature, not on the preparation for the final exam.

### **3.3 Methods of analysis**

In order to further understand the topic, the content of the interview was analysed by using the method of data-based content analysis. This concept is defined by Tuomi and Sarajärvi (2009: 108-113) as a way of analysing documents with the aim of getting a concise picture of the topic studied. They provide a simple procedure for the analysis: transcription and categorising the data into themes that are relevant to the research question of the study (Tuomi and Sarajärvi 2009: 92-93). The three-staged process of categorising goes as follows: reducing the data, clustering into subclasses and abstracting into themes. In this way the data can be organised to have a conceptual view of the topic studied. (Tuomi and Sarajärvi 2009: 108-113).

Consequently, the interviews were analysed from the viewpoint of what the students said, not how they said it, as that would fall into the category of discourse analysis. The purpose in the present study was, after all, to find out what the students themselves think about the subject and compare their perceptions.

This method suits the present study well as the interview was a theme interview and it led to a logical way of organising the data into themes. Moreover, as the point was to examine the students' personal opinions and feelings concerning prose fiction as a way of learning English, this will be the viewpoint for analysis. When the views of

the students concerning a specific theme differ, both views are presented and compared to each other. Sometimes one of the students agreed with the other by nodding, for example, and in those cases their mutual view is presented and exemplified by a quotation by one of the students.

## 4 RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

In this section the perceptions of the interviewed students on studying literature in the IB English classroom will be presented. The section has been divided into themes according to the areas of interest in the study: students' perceptions on the quantity of the literary studies, the ways of studying literature, the effectiveness of studying, and affective variables. The SL student will be called Kaisa, and the HL student Asko, and their perceptions on the themes will be presented, analysed and compared. The words in square brackets [ ] have been added afterwards for clarity.

### 4.1 Students' perceptions on the quantity of literary studies

Even though the Language B group has been divided into two levels, SL and HL, all students are integrated into the same group. At the time of the interviews, both groups had studied two works of literature together, and the HL group had studied one additional book. Literary studies take 2-3 hours out of 3 hours of English classes per week, so literature really is in the focus in IB English lessons. Kaisa, who studies in the SL group, thought that studying literature analysis is not very important to her as it is not required in the final exams of the SL students. However, when the topic was discussed from the viewpoint of language learning, both students seemed to agree with each other that the quantity was sufficient, but they hoped to have some alteration in the choice of the works, mostly due to the peculiarity of the works, and the old-fashioned language. This is illustrated in the following examples:

#### Example 1

Interviewer: Onko [kirjallisuutta] teijän mielestä sopivasti, määrällisesti?

Kaisa: Ihan sopivasti mutta puuduttaa.

Asko: Määrällisesti kyllä mutta laadullisesti ehkä ei...

--

A: Musta hieno juttu että on klassikoita, mutta sitten on ollu vähän semmosia, erittäin erikoisia kirjoja.

---

K: Niissä on vanhahtava kieli.

*Interviewer: Do you think there's a right amount of it [literature]?*

*K: Quite the right amount but it's mind-numbing.*

*A: Quantitatively yes but qualitatively no...*

--

*A: I think it's a great thing that we read classics, but there are also some books that are very odd.*

---

*K: The language in them is old-fashioned.*

The students agreed with each other about the language being old-fashioned, and for that reason, they thought some of the works were quite difficult to grasp. In addition, the students felt that the works had not been studied thoroughly enough to give them sufficient knowledge on them. From this it could be deduced that the students would enjoy reading more and benefit from it if they had the chance to participate in choosing the books. What is more, the viewpoint of gender was brought up in the interview as one student is male and the other female. Some works, such as Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*, were thought to interest females more than males, and, for this reason, it was not regarded as a great option in the IB programme. Consequently, contemplating the book choices more carefully and studying them more thoroughly in the classroom would improve the efficiency of the English lessons.

## 4.2 The ways of studying literature

The ways of studying literature in the English classroom were not considered to be very useful by either of the interviewed students. Their opinion was that the methods of studying the books had been too detailed as the focus had not been on the books as a whole but on the events happening in the stories. This is illustrated in the following example:

### Example 2

Kaisa: Eli me käyään kappale kappaleelta sitä niinku juonen kannalta, eikä niinkää symboleitten tai konseptin tai minkään muun kautta.

--

Asko: [Meidän pitäisi] niinku omaksua se koko kirja, se kokonaisuus pitäis käyä, kaikki symboliikat, henkilöt, että se opiskelija oikeesti ymmärtää ne kaikki pointit. Ku kirjaa ei kirjojeta noin vaan, on tarkotus, pitää ymmärtää kaikki jutut mitä kirjailija haluaa laittaa.

*Kaisa: So we go through it, chapter by chapter, like from the perspective of the plot, not really from the perspective of symbols, concept or anything else.*

--

*Asko: [We should] acquire the whole book, go through the whole entity, all symbolism, characters, so that the student really understands all the points. Because a book is not written just like that, there's a reason, one has to understand all the things the author wants to put in the book.*

Consequently, both Kaisa and Asko thought that knowing the plot is not enough but a deeper understanding of the books would be useful for learning. They also felt that they had to take major responsibility for their learning, as adequate means for analysing literature were not practised in the English lessons.

The students had practical examples on how they would like the study of literature to be different. Firstly, they preferred reading the book independently. Secondly, they would have liked to work in small groups and discuss the book, for example, from the viewpoint of themes, relationships between characters and symbolism, for example. This would ensure a thorough analysis of the book. Thirdly, the students regarded interactive oral practices in small groups as useful. This would support the learning of sociolinguistic and strategic skills, defined by Johnson (2008: 17-39). The students also considered shared knowledge important, which shows how they value fellow students' opinions and want to learn collectively, from each other. The goal of having students participate in the decision making in the classroom, which was acknowledged by Simpson (1997: xi), had, thus, not been perfectly met. This might have been the reason that caused the students to be less motivated. As a result, both Asko and Kaisa agreed that it would be better to study the works of literature in a more varying and concise way, from the perspective of critically analysing them.

Both students seemed to think that the English lessons have not provided sufficient knowledge for analysing literature. However, they felt that their Finnish lessons, which include literature studies in their mother tongue, have been more useful in giving tools for analysing literature:

### Example 3

Asko: Eli teosta pitää käyä läpi analysoivasti mikä näkyy tosi hienosti täällä IB-äidinkielessä. Otetaan tosi hyvin teemat esille, aiheet, symboliikka, kielikuvat...

*Asko: So you have to go through the work of literature through analysis which happens really well here in IB Finnish. The themes are brought up really well, topics, symbolism, figures of speech...*

Both Asko and Kaisa thought that most of the skills and knowledge needed in analysing literature had been learned in the Finnish lessons. They felt they had to apply it to English lessons by themselves since they are not given enough tools to study literature in English. Consequently, it seems that in order to be able to study literature more thoroughly, the students would like to have more detailed teaching about literary analysis in English.

## 4.3 The effectiveness of studying literature

### 4.3.1 Language learning and language competence

Both of the interviewees seemed to think that prose fiction is useful in language learning as it covers so many areas of language learning. They agreed with each other that literature studies help with both written and spoken skills such as vocabulary, sentence structures and fluency, for example, as illustrated in the following example:

### Example 4

Asko: Mutta kirjallisuus opettaa kirjottamisen taidon, ymmärtää vaikeita sanoja, opettaa puhumaan oikeita lauserakenteita mikä auttaa omissa mielenpiteiden sanomisen... Helps expressing your ideas.

--

Kaisa: Kyllähän se tulee lukeminen tulee sujuvammaks mitä enemmän lukee englanninkielisiä tekstejä/kirjallisuutta.

*Asko: But literature teaches you how to write, understand difficult words, teaches you to use correct sentence forms which helps you say your opinions.. Helps expressing your ideas.*

--

*Kaisa: Surely reading becomes more fluent the more you read texts or literature in English.*

A similar view was presented by Johnson (2008: 39), who suggested that strategic competence is a good skill to master but it is better to learn the language so well that it would seldom be necessary. The interviewees considered reading and studying

literature to be useful for learning about the structures of the language. Moreover, Asko suggests that through reading, one learns vocabulary so that paraphrasing becomes unnecessary:

#### Example 5

Asko: ...ku sä opit ne ihan oikeet sanat sieltä niin sun ei tarvii ruveta kiertämään sun sanomisia. Elikkä jos sä haluat puhua englantia niin monesti jos et osaa jotain sanaa niin sä lähet kiertämään mut ku sä luet kirjoja niin sä opit niitä sanoja, saat sanottua asiat suoraan.

*Asko: ...when you learn the correct words from there, you don't have to express yourself in a roundabout way. So if you want to speak English, often if you don't know a word you go around it and paraphrase, but when you read books you learn those words, are able to say directly the things you want to say.*

This aspect of knowing the language as a system was defined as systemic competence by Johnson (2008: 17-39) and it includes understanding the language and its structures, in other words, being able to read and write correctly. Even though the reader might not be able to isolate the rules behind the text, he or she will start to notice similarities and is able to form correct sentences.

Studying literature through discussion and group work supports sociolinguistic and strategic competencies as well, as defined by Johnson (2008: 17-39). In other words, language skills are not separate from each other. This was proposed by the students as well:

#### Example 6

Interviewer: Koetteko että siitä on nimenomaan hyötyä kirjalliselle vai suulliselle taidolle?

Kaisa: Ehkä enemmän suulliselle. Tottakai kirjalliselle siinä vaiheessa ku sä luet sen kirjan mut suulliselle siinä vaiheessa ku opettaja sanoo että jutelkaapas kaverin kanssa tästä näin, että ne jotka puhuu siellä englantia niin varmasti kehittyi siellä suullisesti...

*Interviewer: Do you feel it's useful for written skills, oral skills, or not really for either of them?*

*Kaisa: Maybe more for oral skills. Of course for written skills when you read the book, but for oral when the teacher asks you to talk with a partner about this. So those who speak surely progress orally...*

Consequently, the students seemed to agree that literature helps with developing several areas in language competence. They also had the idea that language competence is a big entity of intertwined components, and thus, they considered the actual reading process more important than discussing literature in the classroom. Kaisa, for example, thought that reading literature is a way to learn the language as a whole and not really a way for learning individual details. A reason for this is that

one does not focus on every word or structure in the book but concentrates on the whole book or story. Consequently, the reader gets a big picture of the book and simultaneously learns the language without having to focus on the structural aspects. This idea can also be found in Krashen's (1982: 10) theory on language acquisition in which, learning happens subconsciously (see above in section 2.2.1).

Accordingly, both of the students value reading prose fiction as it not only aids in language learning but also gives means to read and analyse different kinds of texts from a critical perspective, which is defined as textual competence by Scholes (1985: 21-23). This is illustrated in the following example, in which Kaisa describes how literature studies have changed the way she analyses movies:

#### Example 7

Kaisa: Kirjallisuuden opiskelusta on ihan älyttömästi hyötyä. Mä en ainakaan pysty enää kattomaan elokuvia ilman että analysoi symboliikkaa ja tematiikkaa tai motiiveja.  
 Kaisa: *Studying literature is very beneficial. At least I can't watch movies anymore without analysing symbolism, thematics or motives.*

Consequently, the students regarded literature useful not only for learning about literature itself but also for learning to critically evaluate other texts, such as movies or poems. Literature studies, thus, teach students critical thinking and evaluation skills regarding literature, movies and other texts as well. What is more, the students said that they like reading in their leisure time as well, which might contribute to their language development, as literature studies do not happen only in the school context.

Moreover, in order to achieve good language competence, proper evaluation and feedback are needed for the learning. Both students said they would like to have more detailed feedback on their written assignments, to help in their process of language learning. This is illustrated in the following example:

#### Example 8

Kaisa: Mut ne [kirjalliset tehtävät] oli kyllä ihan kehittäviä koska niissä kerranki piti miettiä mut sit niistä ei saanu oikein palautetta eikä asioita oltu käyty.  
 Asko: Mut se oli tosiaanki plussaa et se oli.  
 Interviewer: Kaipaisitteko semmosta enemmän?



Asko: Siis mä kaipaän palautetta siitä. Koska mä voin tehdä vaikka kymmentuhatta semmosta mut jos mä en opi niistä yhtään mitään --- Niin sit mua vähä harmitti, et vois kiitos sanoo et mikä kriteeri meni väärin --- ei yhtään mitään havaintoo siitä että mikä mulla menee väärin...

*Kaisa: But they [written assignments] were useful because for once we had to think carefully but then we didn't really get any feedback and we hadn't studied those things.*

*Asko: But it really is good that we had that.*

*Interviewer: Would you like to have more of that?*

*Asko: I would like to have feedback. I can do ten thousand of those assignments but if I don't learn anything from them --- I was a bit irritated, they could, like, actually say which criterion was not met --- I've got no idea what goes wrong in my assignments...*

Here the students emphasise the role of the teacher. They thought written assignments were useful, but sufficient feedback is also essential for learning. By noticing that they have made mistakes, the students realise they still had more to learn. This view is presented also by Schmidt and Frota (1986: 311), who emphasised the importance of realising the existence of knowledge the learner does not yet possess. Krashen's (1982: 21) idea of  $i+1$  becomes visible in the students' perceptions as well. If there are mistakes in the text they have written, they have made an attempt to master the language that is slightly above their present level. In order for learning to happen, students need to realise what still needs to be learnt, receive proper feedback on their assignments and get support for learning. Consequently, students can proceed to the next level in their language competence.

### 4.3.2 Language learning and culture

Culture is an important aspect in the IB Language B syllabus, and it is studied through both literature studies and reading authentic texts concerning culture. As Sinko (2001: 8-9) proposes, reading literature widens one's view on the world and, thus, helps one understand different people and their views. On one hand, this can be seen in the opinions of the students as well as they said that they had studied cultural issues in the English classes. On the other hand, they thought that the English lessons had not provided a thorough view on various different cultures, as illustrated in the following example:

#### Example 9

*Kaisa: Kyl me käyään niitä tekstejä, me käytiin jotain englannin kielen leviämistä niin niitten tekstien kautta. Et käsitellään aina joko Jenkkiä tai Amerikkaa tai Intiaa tai Australiaa. Ei kovin laajaa kuvaa kyllä.*

Asko: Meillä oli niinku oraalit myöski HL:llä, että tämmösiä propagandasta sodan aikaan ja sit oli oraaleita eri TV-showsta et jonkun verran tullee esille sitä mut ei paljoo.

--

Asko: Enemmän kirjallisuus opettaa niinku omaa englantia parantaa, ei sinänsä niinku maantuntemusta...

*Kaisa: We do go through those texts, we studied how English language has spread through those texts. So we study either Northern America, America, India or Australia. Not a thorough view though.*

*Asko: We had oral assignments for HL as well, about propaganda during the war and then orals about different TV shows, so some things come up but not a lot.*

--

*Asko: Literature teaches you English, makes your own English better, not really knowledge about countries.*

The students agreed with each other that even though they had studied cultural issues through literary texts, the lessons had not provided a thorough picture concerning culture. Asko also thought that literature studies were more useful for language learning than for learning about culture. In his opinion, the literary works studied provide only a limited picture on different cultures as most books are about the life of wealthy people. Moreover, the students thought that their knowledge on English-speaking countries' cultures is already good so they did not consider the cultural aspect very important. However, they had studied cultural issues in the classroom and, thus, it is possible that learning has happened subconsciously, and part of their knowledge on culture has indeed become from the English lessons. All in all, the students agreed with each other that English lessons include cultural studies, but that studying literature gives only a limited picture about cultural aspects as literary works are often fictional and present a biased picture of the people of the specific culture.

#### **4.4 Affective variables**

Reading and studying literature was considered to be interesting and it was a very important aspect in the lives of the interviewees. Literature was valued not only for language learning or studying for the final exams but also for learning for life, especially by the HL student.

### Example 10

Asko: Mutta loppujen lopuks opiskellaan ihan itseemme varten eikä kokeita varten. --- Kirjallisuutta pitää käsitellä, se on erittäin tärkeitä. Se kehittää tosi paljon, kehittää kieltä, mieltä, kaikkee.

*Asko: But in the end we're studying for ourselves and not for the exams. --- One has to study literature, it's very important. It develops you a lot, it develops language, mind, everything.*

Literature was seen as a big entity that helps one gain several skills, not only language learning but also critical thinking, for example. However, as said above, the students found the ways of studying literature in the English classroom uninspiring, as illustrated in the following example:

### Example 11

Kaisa: Ja se että opettaja ei myöskään kerro mitään, vaan se on niin että jutelkaa kaverin kanssa. Ja se et jos kumpikaan ei oo luku kirjaa kumpaakaan ei kiinnosta niin tuleeko siinä juteltua että mikä tämän kirjan teema on tai mitä tämä symboloi tässä...

*Kaisa: And that the teacher does not tell us anything but it's like, talk to your partner. And if neither of the students has read the book and neither is interested, do they really talk about what the theme is in this book and what does this symbolise here...*

On one hand, the students might have found the lessons inconvenient due to their lack of interest in the specific book that was under discussion, and, on the other hand, due to the teaching methods used in the classroom. Moreover, the students questioned the teacher's expertise on the subject, as the information they had received in the classroom was readily available online as well. Accordingly, it is possible that the students enjoy reading and find it useful but feel that studying and discussing prose fiction in the classroom is rather inconvenient. If the students, together with the teacher, had the possibility to decide which books to read and affect the form of activities in the classroom, they would probably be more motivated to study literature and, thus, also learn the various skills concerning language competence more thoroughly. Consequently, there is room for improvement in both teaching methods and choosing the works of literature.

## 5 CONCLUSIONS

In this section I will draw conclusions concerning the research questions and the data collected and analysed in the present study. I will also discuss the results in the light of previous studies on the same topic. Finally, I will suggest improvements for the present study and recommendations for future research.

The research questions of the present study were as follows: 1) What types of perceptions do the HL student and the SL student have about using prose fiction as teaching material in English classroom? 2) Do the perceptions of the students differ? If so, how?

The purpose of the study was to discover the IB students' views on the use of literature as a way of learning English. Even though in most schools the syllabus is provided by the state or IBO, for example, the teacher may often plan the activities in the lessons according to his or her own wishes. Consequently, the results of the present study could be useful for English teachers. If it were known what students regard as useful in learning about literature and learning languages, it could be easier to plan the course, teaching materials and teaching methods. Consequently, the students might become more motivated as they find the lessons interesting and inspiring and, possibly, also feel that they have contributed to the contents of the courses.

The major ideas presented in the present study concerned the teaching methods and the choice of books in the programme. The students had similar views concerning literature, the only major difference being the fact that the SL student regarded literature studies as slightly less important as literary analysis is not required in the SL final exam. However, from the perspective of language learning, both students considered literature to be a useful tool for both learning the language and learning about the world. The students felt that literature should be studied more thoroughly from the perspective of literary analysis in order to get the best benefit. Providing sufficient tools for analysing literature and giving support and feedback to the students were also major aspects that were found essential for learning. Moreover, if

books are chosen carefully and according to the students' interests, they might become more interested and not only read the book because it is compulsory. Consequently, democratic decisions concerning teaching methods, classroom activities and book choices would be a positive improvement.

The previous studies and theories on language learning presented in section 2 support the view that using literature can be beneficial for teaching and learning a foreign language. Reading comprehension, vocabulary learning, oral skills in discussion and written skills when writing essays are examples of the skills that studying literature can improve. In this process both conscious and subconscious learning methods are used. As Johnson (2008: 81) states, it is important to both know about the language and know how to use the language. If done properly and according to the wishes of the students, the study of literature can be efficient. Moreover, literature provides a great amount of input to the learner which contains examples of grammar, vocabulary and cultural aspects. These all aid in developing language competence, as defined by Johnson (2008: 17-39), which includes systemic competence, sociolinguistic competence and strategic competence. The interviewees also presented the view that was formulated by Sinko (2001: 8-9) about actual language skills becoming better through reading literature, as the vocabulary expands and expressions become more accurate. A similar view was expressed by Simpson (1997: x-xi), who pointed out that the awareness of the foreign language is enhanced through literature studies.

There are some aspects that need to be taken into account when assessing the quality of the present study. Firstly, a bachelor's study is quite limited in scope so the thesis has to be very concise. For this reason, the number of interviewees could not be more than two and, consequently, the present study only provides a superficial view on the topic. This is why more research is needed, with more interviewees and focus on the various themes concerning the use of literature in language learning. Secondly, as the data collection method was an interview, there might have been several topics that were left untouched and some questions that would have needed clarification, such as asking whether the teacher ever asked for advice or feedback from the

students. A reason for the deficiencies in the data is that I felt slightly nervous when interviewing. Consequently, it would be useful to have several interviewers or researchers conducting the study. All in all, repeating a study of this kind in collaboration with several researchers and with more interviewees would ensure both objectivity and gaining true results.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Dufva, H. (2011). *Ei kysyvä tieltä eksy: kuinka tutkia kielten oppimista ja opettamista haastattelun avulla*. In P. Kalaja, R. Alanen and H. Dufva (eds.) (2011). *Kieltä tutkimassa – tutkielman laatijan opas*. Helsinki: Finn Lectura, 131-145.
- Hägglom, C. (2006). *Young EFL-pupils reading multicultural children's fiction : an ethnographic case study in a Swedish language primary school in Finland*. Åbo: Åbo Akademi University.
- International Baccalaureate Organisation. <http://www.ibo.org>. (19 August 2013).
- Johnson, K. (2008). *An Introduction to Foreign Language Learning and Teaching*. Harlow: Pearson Education Limited.
- Krashen, S. (1982). *Principles and Practice in Second Language Acquisition*. Oxford: Pergamon.
- Language B subject outline (2011). International Baccalaureate Organization [online]. [http://www.ibo.org/diploma/assessment/subjectoutlines/documents/d\\_2\\_ablan\\_gui-out\\_1102\\_1\\_e.pdf](http://www.ibo.org/diploma/assessment/subjectoutlines/documents/d_2_ablan_gui-out_1102_1_e.pdf). (14 April, 2013).
- Schmidt, R. W. and Frota, S. N. (1986). Developing basic conversational ability in a second language: a case study of an adult learner of Portuguese. In R. Day (ed.), *Talking to Learn: Conversation in Second Language Acquisition*. Rowley: Newbury House, 237-326.
- Scholes, R. (1985). *Textual power: literary theory and the teaching of English*. New Haven, Conn: Yale University Press.
- Simpson, P. (1997). *Language through Literature: An Introduction*. London: Routledge.
- Sinko, P. (2001). *Mutta kuka on Aleksis Kivi?* In Häppölä, S. and T. Peltonen (eds.) (2001). *Kuutamokeikka ja muita teitä tekstien kiehtovaan maailmaan*. Helsinki: Äidinkielen opettajain liitto, 7-18.
- Swain, M. (1995). 'Three Functions of Output in second language learning'. In Cook, G. and Seidlhofer, B. (eds.) (1995). *Principle & practice in applied linguistics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 125-44.
- Tuomi, J. and A. Sarajarvi (2009). *Laadullinen tutkimus ja sisällönanalyysi* (5., revised edition). Helsinki: Tammi.

## APPENDIX: THE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1) Opiskellaanko IB-lukion englannintunneilla kirjallisuutta?

Miten paljon suhteessa muuhun opiskeluun, esimerkiksi kielioppiin tms.?

Onko kirjallisuuden opiskelua sopivasti?

2) Millaisia teoksia? Onko teokset valittu hyvin vai haluaisitteko muuttaa jotain?

3) Millä tavoilla teoksia käsitellään?

Ovatko nämä tavat hyödyllisiä/toimivia/kiinnostavia vai haluaisitteko muuttaa jotain?

4) Onko kirjallisuuden opiskelusta mielestänne hyötyä tai haittaa? Tuntuuko, että kieltä oppii hyvin kirjallisuutta lukemalla ja käsittelemällä vai olisiko joku muu tapa parempi?

5) Mitä olette oppineet ja mistä kielitaidon kehityksen huomaa?

6) Oppiiko kirjallisuutta lukemalla asioita kohdekulttuurista?

7) Onko kirjallisuuden käyttö opetuksessa mielenkiintoista/mukavaa/ hauskaa vai olisiko jotain, mitä haluaisitte muuttaa? Miksi?

8) Luetteko kirjallisuutta vapaa-ajalla? Onko kirjallisuudenopetus koulussa (tai joku muu asia) kannustanut lukemaan myös vapaa-ajalla?