

DIFFERENTIATING THE MORE PROFICIENT
STUDENTS:

Upper secondary school teachers' and students' perceptions of
upward differentiation in A-syllabus English lessons

Master's Thesis

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Tiivistelmä – Abstract <p>Ylöspäin eriyttäminen tarkoittaa keskivertoa parempien oppilaiden kehitystä tukevia opetusmenetelmiä. Eriyttämistä on viime vuosikymmeninä tutkittu lähtökohtaisesti opettajien sekä alaspäin eriyttämisen eli heikompien oppilaiden tukemisen näkökulmasta. On kuitenkin ensiarvoisen tärkeää tunnustaa myös keskivertoa parempien oppilaiden eriyttävän tuen tarve, sillä turhautumisesta ja tylsistymisestä johtuvat lieveilmiöt ovat samanlaiset oppilaiden taitotasosta riippumatta. On tärkeää saada kuuluviin myös opetuksen ja eriyttämisen kohteiden, oppilaiden, mielipiteet ja näkemykset, sillä niistä voi olla hyötyä ylöspäin eriyttämistä suunnitteleville opettajille. Eriyttäminen on tänä päivänä tärkeää juuri englannin opetuksessa, koska englannin kielen asema suomalaisessa yhteiskunnassa on erityisen merkittävä ja tasoerot englannin opetusryhmissä voivat olla huomattavia.</p> <p>Tämän Pro gradu- tutkielman tarkoituksena oli selvittää, millaista ylöspäin eriyttämistä lukion pitkän englannin kursseilla tarjotaan, mikä on englanninopettajien näkemys ylöspäin eriyttämisestä, ja miten keskivertoa paremmat englannin kielen oppilaat haluaisivat heitä opetettavan. Tutkimus toteutettiin henkilökohtaisten teemahaastattelujen muodossa, mihin osallistui yhteensä neljä englanninopettajaa sekä neljä keskivertoa parempaa englannin oppilasta (N=8) kahdesta eri lukiosta Suomessa. Aineisto kerättiin keväällä 2019 molempien lukioiden paikkakunnilla.</p> <p>Tulokset osoittivat, että englanninopettajat pitivät ylöspäin eriyttämistä tärkeänä, mutta eivät halua, että siihen panostetaan heikompien oppilaiden kustannuksella. Lisäksi opettajat toivoivat enemmän työkaluja ylöspäin eriyttämiseen sekä asiantuntevaa ja ajankohtaista täydennyskoulutusta. Suurimpana esteenä tai rajoittavana tekijänä ylöspäin eriyttämiselle opettajat kokivat resurssien, kuten ajan, puutteen sekä liian suuret ryhmäkoot. Keskivertoa paremmat oppilaat puolestaan olivat melko tyytyväisiä saamaansa englannin opetukseen, mutta kokivat, että opetusmetodeja voisi modernisoida ja peräänkuuluttivat suullisten harjoitusten sekä keskustelu- ja ryhmätehtävien lisäämistä englannin tunneille. Lisäksi he toivoivat monipuolisuutta ylöspäin eriyttämisen metodeihin englannin kursseilla. Osa oppilaista myös toivoi tasokursseja lukion pitkän englannin tarjontaan, sillä taitotasot kurssien sisällä ovat merkittävät.</p> <p>Jatkotutkimuksissa tulisi huomioida niin englanninopettajien kuin oppilaiden toiveet ja toteuttaa esimerkiksi materiaalipaketti ylöspäin eriyttämisestä lukion pitkän englannin kursseille. Tulevaisuudessa olisi tarpeen myös tutkia sitä, miten ylöspäin eriyttäminen vaikuttaa keskivertoa parempien oppilaiden kehitykseen, oppimistuloksiin ja esimerkiksi kouluviihtyvyyteen. Tämän tutkimuksen tulosten pohjalta olisi mahdollista myös tehdä kansallista vertailua eri oppilaitosten välillä ja tarkastella ylöspäin eriyttämisen keinoja ja niiden vaikutusta oppilaiden kielen kehitykseen eri oppiasteilla.</p>	
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1 INTRODUCTION

According to the Constitution of Finland, the national languages of Finland are Finnish and Swedish (Finlex 1999). The status of the national languages is secured by law but there is a language that has gained ground significantly in different spheres, both public and private, in Finland. This language has expanded so rapidly that people have become worried that it might even endanger the significance of the national languages (Hiilamo and Paakkanen 2018). Moreover, it is said that in Nordic countries the language is no more considered as a foreign language but instead as a second language or possibly even as a third national language (Taavitsainen and Pahta 2003: 4). This language is English.

The dominating status of English as a foreign language is seen in different areas in the Finnish society and the educational environment makes no exception. However, even though the competence of English has increased among youth, it has brought new issues such as considerable differences in ability levels. In addition, the constantly growing classroom sizes challenge the teachers and can disturb learning. Consequently, the teachers need new methods that serve the pupils' needs. The issue is, however, that often the main focus is directed towards the weaker students.

Differentiation is not only topical but important because it can have a notable impact on learning (see for example Tomlinson 2014; Roiha and Polso 2018). The classroom consists of heterogenic learners and, therefore, the teaching should not be totally homogenic. In today's Finland, the classrooms tend to follow the inclusive guidelines which means that the classroom consists of very different kinds of learners. We, as teachers, must understand that different learners need differentiated instruction.

The present study focuses on differentiation of the more proficient students of English, i.e the students who are above average in the subject. In the present study, I have decided to use the term *upward differentiation* when discussing the differentiation of the more proficient students. I chose to use the term *upward* because it is a direct translation of a set phrase in Finnish called *ylöspäin eriyttäminen* (*upward differentiation*). The Finnish language distinguishes the dimensions of differentiation as upward = *ylöspäin eriyttäminen* and downward = *alaspäin*

eriyttäminen. Upward differentiation, thus, focuses on the students with stronger proficiency whereas downward focuses on the students with weaker skills.

Upward differentiation is less studied and differentiation, generally, is studied from the teacher's point of view and on compulsory school level. Accordingly, there is a clear gap in the research field which the present study intends to fill in by studying the upper secondary school English lessons. It can be argued that teachers tend to emphasize more focus on the less proficient students and give differentiated tasks to them. The aim is, of course, that the weaker students would not fail. Often, however, the advanced students can be forgotten because they probably already know what is being taught or they do not have to put much effort in learning. The problem, however, is that if the teachers do not focus on these students as well, there is a danger that the students begin lacking in motivation, attitude and learning results. Hence, with upward differentiation, the teachers could ensure that also the more proficient students stay motivated and get exercises that improve their language proficiency.

To understand the needs of the more proficient students in English it is not enough that only the English teachers' point of view towards upward differentiation is studied. Therefore, the present study also gives voice to the more proficient students. When planning differentiated instruction for the students with stronger proficiency, one should always consult the students as well because they are the best judges of their needs and interests. Thus, the present study aims to not only analyze the upward differentiation given by English teachers in upper secondary schools but also to examine the more proficient students' perceptions of the A-syllabus English lessons. The use of qualitative content analysis and interviews as a data collection method made it possible to discuss with the participants more profoundly and, thus, elaborate on the findings.

The aim of the present study is to provide knowledge and suggestions for the English teachers on upward differentiation methods. What is more, it finds out how the more proficient students experience the English education at upper secondary school level and how, if at all, they would like to modify it. Firstly, in chapter 2, the current situation with English language in the Finnish society is discussed from a theoretical point of view. Secondly, in chapter 3, differentiation as a method is presented with a special focus on upward differentiation. Thirdly, chapter 4 introduces the methodology, the research questions and the aims of the study. Fourthly, chapter 5 provides an analysis of the findings with a reflective discussion that elaborates on the findings

and answers to the research questions. Finally, in chapter 6, the findings of how the English teachers differentiate upward in A-syllabus English lessons at upper secondary school and how the more proficient students experience the English lessons are discussed. Additionally, the possible implications of the findings and suggestions for further studies are presented in the chapter.

2 ENGLISH AS A LINGUA FRANCA IN FINLAND

The history of the English language in Finland is relatively short but even more impressive. After the 1950's there was a strong atmosphere that Finland wanted to be part of the western world and western influences arrived in Finland (Leppänen 2007: 150). A few decades later, because of the global spread of foreign popular culture, American television series and movies began entertaining the Finnish audience. These foreign influences were heard on the radio as well (Taavitsainen and Pahta 2003: 5). The youth was especially influenced by this foreign language and the cultural shower that it offered. It must be noted that today's younger generations are rather proficient users of English and generally include it in their intercommunication (Ranta 2010: 159).

Taavitsainen and Pahta (2003: 5) point out that one powerful factor that greatly assisted the spread of English in Finland was that the television shows and cinemas had Finnish subtitles instead of dubbing the language in Finnish. This way, people could hear the original language and the pronunciation and see the translations on the screen. What is more, different news clips and interviews tend not to have any voice-overs in Finnish but rather have the original soundtrack with Finnish subtitles (Ranta 2010: 159). Consequently, the presence of English is strong also for those who do not need it at work or education, because they are exposed to English no matter what (Pahta 2004: 36).

Not only has this assisted the Finnish people in learning the language use but it has also helped in acquiring the pronunciation. The videogames and e-sports, that are popular among youth, work as a tool for enhancing language learning. E-sports is a rapidly expanding field of sports and according to Oxford English Dictionary (2019) is defined as "a multiplayer electronic or video game competition organized as a spectator sport, typically involving professional contestants and watched by viewers online". As a result of the video game and e-sports scene,

many native Finnish people consider themselves more competent in English than for example in the second national language, Swedish (Ranta 2010: 159). Consequently, English has become an elemental part of everyday lives of the people who do not even need it for global communication (Taavitsainen and Pahta 2003: 5).

Today, English has a strong role in different fields in Finland. The most visible are the fields of business, media and education and it is argued that English is generally considered as the dominant language of interaction rather than a foreign language (Leppänen and Nikula 2007: 343). The rest of this chapter focuses on some key examples of the dominance of English in different areas such as business and media. In section 2.1 I will concentrate on the educational field and discuss the role of English in upper secondary schools in Finland.

In the field of business, the role of English has become important as a consequence of globalization and because of the need for a common language, a *lingua franca* among international corporations. As a result of ICT (information and communication technology), people do not necessarily need to travel to have international meetings but can hold teleconferences and other electronic meetings. This is possible if there is a common language that everyone understands and can produce.

Taavitsainen and Pahta (2003: 7) note that not only has English become the global “business language” but it has also become the internal language of the global companies that have Finnish branches. The situation is similar with, for example, Nordic companies. This is curious, because especially among Nordic companies the *lingua franca* might as well, in theory, be Swedish. English is also needed as a business language in metropolises such as Helsinki, where tourists bring the essential need for a *lingua franca*. It is also worth mentioning that in the field of business and because of globalization, some large Finnish companies have even gone so far that they have changed the company names to English so that the international communication would become easier to reach (Taavitsainen and Pahta 2003: 7).

Media has always been a powerful influencer and the case of English makes no exception. As discussed before, the English-language television programs, movies and music have already affected many Finnish generations and the popularity of the language is not decreasing. International cultural impacts are strong in open cultures and there is a group of people that is

and always has been especially exposed to the English influences – the youth (Taavitsainen and Pahta 2008: 29).

Taavitsainen and Pahta (2008: 36) find that nowadays, even in the Finnish popular culture programs, linguistic features of English are used more often than not. Ratia and Suhr (2004: 140) point out that popular culture has one *lingua franca* and that language is English. They continue by stating that even though Finland has its own, national popular culture scene, the need for English popular culture has not decreased but will rather continue growing. The universal popular culture is not the only one but definitely the most influential (Ratia and Suhr 2004: 140).

What is more, the dominating role of English can be seen for example in the Finnish job advertisements where, increasingly, the whole language of the advertisement is English. This, of course, indicates that the applicant must be proficient in English, because already the application should be in the foreign language. Around other advertisements, English is also widely used in either some ‘‘hybrid’’ forms of Finnish and English or entirely in English (Taavitsainen and Pahta 2008: 34-36). In the music industry, the spread of English is encouraged by the fact that often Finnish pop and rock music performers choose English as their performing language (Pahta 2004: 37). Therefore, it can be said that media has a central role in the spread of English to Finnish people’s everyday lives (Leppänen and Nikula 2007: 367).

It must be noted that the reason for the increasing role of English in Finland is not because there are so many people living in the country who speak English as their first language. In fact, the proportion of the people whose mother tongue is English and who live in Finland is less than 0.2 per cent (Taavitsainen and Pahta 2008: 28). One of the reasons, however, is that Finns have generally appreciated foreign language skills and, at least, have been enthusiastic about learning new languages. In my opinion, it can be argued that one reason for the spread of English was that in the 1970’s the new comprehensive school model made it possible and obligatory to study foreign languages and, often, the chosen foreign language was English (Birkstedt 2004: 245-246).

The language bias towards English has always been rather positive compared to other foreign languages. In addition, most Finns acknowledge English as the most crucial language besides

Finnish (Taavitsainen and Pahta 2003: 5-6). Already in 1995, it was surveyed that 66 per cent of Finns had at least some competence in English, and in 2006 this number was already 82 per cent. Thus, in ten years, the competence had increased almost 20 percentage points (Tilastokeskus 2008). Correspondingly, it can be stated that English is the most accepted foreign language in Finland and the popularity of English in the education field is not decreasing, as will be discussed in the following sub-section.

To sum up, in today's Finland, English has stabilized its role in being, if not the third national language, then at least the most studied and used foreign language. In fields such as business, media and education, the proficiency in English is not anymore an asset but rather a prerequisite or like Taavitsainen and Pahta (2003: 10) put it "Knowledge of English is considered a skill, like the ability to read". English in Finland, is a modern kind of second language that, on one hand, is being used for global communication but on the other hand is being "globalized" i.e. modified into local and domestic communication (Taavitsainen and Pahta 2008: 37). Therefore, it is not far-fetched to say that Finland is becoming bilingual not in the sense of Finnish and Swedish but, instead, Finnish and English.

2.1 The role of English in the Finnish education system

The role of the English language in the Finnish school system has not always been as superior as it is today. The comprehensive school system that was introduced in the 1970's affected greatly the learning of English language. Suddenly, a considerable part of a generation began to learn English as a first foreign language in the third grade (Taavitsainen and Pahta 2008: 31). After thirty years, in 2004, almost every student finishing their comprehensive school had taken English either as a first foreign language or second foreign language. A similar result was shown with optional, upper secondary school students (Taavitsainen and Pahta 2008: 31). Thus, it can be argued that the current situation with English reflects the globalized world and Finland's status in it (Birkstedt 2004: 242).

The compulsory school education in Finland is nine years long and it includes primary school (grades 1-6) and upper comprehensive school (grades 7-9). During those years, students are required to study at least one foreign language and the second national language. In third grade, at the age of nine, most students begin their foreign language learning (A-syllabus). Often, English is chosen as the first foreign language (Taavitsainen and Pahta 2003: 6). The starting

point of foreign language learning is, however, changing soon in Finland. The government has recently informed that as of January 2020, students choose their first foreign language already in the first grade (Opetus- ja kulttuuriministeriö 2018). In addition, students may start with an optional foreign language in fourth grade, but it is possible to postpone it until the first year of secondary school (Taavitsainen and Pahta 2003: 6).

The upper secondary school in Finland is not compulsory but it is a selective school for students who wish to seek for example higher level education such as an academic degree. Every upper secondary school in Finland follows the guidelines of the national curricula. The teachers are required to have a master's degree in their subject (Ranta 2010: 160). Students usually begin their studies at the age of 16 and after three years end their studies with a national examination called the Matriculation Examination. The Matriculation Examination is generally emphasized during the years in upper secondary school because it has a great value when the students apply for academic education (Ranta 2010: 160).

Even in upper secondary school, however, there is an opportunity for students to begin with a new foreign language or languages (Taavitsainen and Pahta 2003: 6). At the end of the upper secondary school, in the Matriculation Examination, students can take an exam in foreign language/s they have studied (Ylioppilastutkinto 2018). Despite the fact that English is not a mandatory subject in Matriculation Examination, most students attend it (Ranta 2010: 160).

The other foreign languages have experienced a true collapse in the Matriculation Examinations (Vanninen 2017). The transition has been quite radical in 60 years, because in 1956 German was the most popular foreign language and approximately 52 per cent took part in the examination (Birkstedt 2004: 244-245). Today, English is undeniably the most popular foreign language in the examinations and most students take part in it. There has been a minor decrease in the number of the participants but it is only because of the smaller age groups. In fact, it seems that the Finnish youth does not value any other languages as strongly, because they do not consider them as useful as English in future (Vanninen 2017).

There are also options such as CLIL-learning and IB-schools, where either most or the whole education is in English (Leppänen and Nikula 2007: 339). CLIL-learning means *Content Integrated Language Learning* where students are taught mostly in English cross subject borders (Introducing English 2019). IB-program (*International Baccalaureate Diploma*

Programme) is an international matriculation examination that is possible to accomplish in over 140 countries (IB suomeksi 2019). IB-degree gives a general eligibility to apply to academic level studies in Finland and in other countries. In IB-level the education is conducted in English and in Finland it is possible to accomplish IB-studies in 16 schools (IB suomeksi 2019).

When it comes to the educational field in Finland, the dominance of English is visible. Not only does English dominate the foreign language choices in compulsory and upper secondary school, but it is also rapidly becoming the main educational language at the university level (Hiilamo and Paakkanen 2018). Besides, the Minister of Education has advocated this by saying that the reason for the spread of English in the educational sector is that English is the language of science and international communication. Accordingly, Finland is becoming more international and the demand for education in English, for example, in the upper secondary school level, is increasing (Hiilamo and Paakkanen 2018). Wächter and Maiworm (2002: 17) continue pointing out that Finland offers a respectively wide selection of higher education degrees in English compared for example to other non-English European countries.

It can be said that English is here to stay. Taavitsainen and Pahta (2008: 31) consider that today, English is one of the corner stones in the Finnish basic education and argue “The higher the educational level, the more important English becomes.” Therefore, it should be noted that since the status of the language has changed from a typical foreign language to “a near-universal basic skill”, it demands some adjustments in teaching as well (Taavitsainen and Pahta 2008: 27). However, before making the adjustments it should be studied how the dominating status of English in the society shows in the students’ English skills, which is also the first research question in the present study.

Moreover, differentiation, both upward and downward, could bring some relevant suggestions and modifications and, thus, enhance the learning of the language and prepare the students for the real-life language needs. To conclude, the present study will also focus on this relevant topic and in the following section, I will describe the national educational demands of English in upper secondary schools.

2.2 A-syllabus English in the Finnish National Core Curriculum

The National Core Curriculum for upper secondary school education (2015: 117), henceforth NCC, lists several targets for the A-syllabus English language education. The targets include students' development as a language user and agent in the culturally diverse, global communities. The students ought to understand the significance of English as a world's *lingua franca*. In addition, Finland's National Board of Education has recently published a demonstration version of the upcoming National Core Curriculum (Lukion opetussuunnitelman perusteet 2019) and it is worth mentioning that the targets seem quite similar compared to the NCC of 2015 but the focus is on postgraduate studies on academic level. The courses are named as "modules" and each course is valued by credits, exactly like in the academic studies (NCC 2019: 149-150).

According to the targets, the students should be able to assess their own language skills and their capability in English for future academic education or working life needs after having completed the courses. The targets, therefore, are quite comprehensive but reachable. In my opinion, the NCC highlights the role of English in the global interaction and prepares the students for future language usage. The NCC (2015: 252) follows the European language standards, which facilitates students own assessment of their skills when they apply, for example, to international education or career.

As mentioned before, English as a subject is not compulsory in the upper secondary school or any school levels in Finland but most students study it as an advanced, foreign language i.e. A-syllabus language. According to the curriculum, A-syllabus English has six compulsory courses and two advanced courses which students can take if they wish. In order to be able to take the English language examination in the Matriculation Examination, students must participate in at least the six mandatory courses (NCC 2015: 117). I will briefly explain the course contents to make it visible how thorough the courses are and how the students will have an encompassing set of English language use skills.

The mandatory courses (1-6) deal with different angles on language mastery. Courses 1-2 deal with strengthening students' studying and ability skills as well as co-operation with others via different interaction exercises (NCC 2015: 117). Course 3 focuses on different text types and cultural issues and courses 4-6 emphasize the English language as a valuable tool for acquiring information from different sources and sharing information to others (NCC 2015: 118). It is

mentioned in the curriculum, however, that there is space in all of the courses, for dealing with topical issues or tasks that go beyond strict subject boundaries. It must be noted that the courses include different themes such as environment, technology and culture, which is important, because these are the fields where English language is important. Moreover, all of the courses include oral and written communication and interaction with other people (NCC 2015: 117-118). The demonstration version of NCC 2019 follows these course descriptions closely (NCC 2019: 149).

There are altogether two advanced courses in the NCC (2015: 118-119). Courses 7 and 8 deepen the language knowledge and prepare the students to use it for different purposes. The students practise their textual interpretation and also rehearse grammatical issues if needed. Even though, these courses are voluntary, they are seen as important if the students attend the English test in the Matriculation Examination. Course 8 focuses especially on oral communication and includes several exercises where students can brush up their oral skills, build dialogues and practise interaction (NCC 2015: 119).

To conclude, A-syllabus English in the Finnish upper secondary schools prepares the students not only for the Matriculation Examination but also to actual academic or working life. The emphasis on the academic studies is even more visible in the new demo version of NCC (2019). The course descriptions, at least in the A-syllabus section have not changed much but one explanation might be that the NCC 2015 has received positive or neutral feedback and alterations have not been demanded by the public.

The NCC has collected the course themes and issues from topical phenomena which can work as a motivating factor for students as well as teachers. Even though the NCC does not specifically mention differentiation in the A-syllabus English section, the course topics give space and freedom for the teachers to insert their own material in the classes that support the themes. Thus, the teachers can use the space given also in the curriculum to differentiate upwards for example with different news articles or videos.

2.3 Learning and using English outside the educational environment in Finland

It has been stated that English is the language of the young people. The youth is easily acquainted with English language via different channels such as television, film, music and

Internet. Often, Finnish students are already familiar with English even before they begin to learn it at school. The youth uses English on everyday basis either alone or in hybrid forms of Finnish and English (Leppänen 2007: 150). Thus, it can be said that extra-curricular contexts can have a crucial role in language learning. In the lives of the youth, English works as a connecting factor with the wider world.

Learning and using a language in free time develops language skills greatly because the use is not compulsory, which can affect positively language learner's motivation (Lai et al. 2015). Generally, when learners use language for example with their friends and family, they do not need to stress about the correctness or proper pronunciation because they are not being evaluated. This probably enhances the language learning process and has an effect on positive attitudes towards the language as well as language lessons at school. The usage of English outside classroom can show in students' positive attitude towards English. In addition, the students can acquire special vocabulary via different channels they use in their free time (Hyytiä 2008). Therefore, to support the language learners' motivation and interest towards the language, teachers should encourage the learners to use language outside the classroom and apply different kinds of activities to language classroom or home work that could enhance this.

Research has shown that learning a language outside classroom can result very positively in language learning achievements (Lai et al. 2015: 278-279). One explanation might be that language classes tend to focus on formal language learning such as grammar and correctness in language use. Lai et al. (2015: 300) support this argument by stating:

When class instruction was dominated by form-focused instruction, the variety of meaning-focused out-of-class learning activities and the diversity of technology use in serving different language learning needs significantly predicted English class grades, confidence in learning English, and enjoyment in learning English (Lai et al. 2015: 300).

In the Finnish context, however, this issue might not be that prominent. Typically, English language lessons in Finland today focus on several areas of language learning and use and aid the meaning-focused learning with digital appliances, software and games. Moreover, the students' active use of English in their free time can support the meaning-focused learning at school.

In fact, Hyytiä (2008) studied in her Master's thesis the usage of English in Finnish 4th and 6th graders' free time. It was a qualitative case study that tried to investigate how many and what

kinds of English contacts primary school children have in their free time. The data consisted of 61 students from one primary school in Western Finland. Hyytiä (2008: 37- 43) noticed that the children had various contacts in English such as music, videogames, television, talking with friends and Internet. What is more, Hyytiä's study (2008: 43) revealed that in their free time, the children thought that they learn the best from listening to music in English and the video games they played. This could be because the video games are usually in English and often the players have counterparts from different countries and they need a common language for interaction. However, in the free time the actual usage of English was less frequent than for example being exposed to the language via music or television (Hyytiä 2008: 63).

Learning and using language outside the school context can definitely have positive results. Most importantly, as Birkstedt (2004: 247) concludes the considerable part of learning English, in today's Finland, happens outside the classroom because students are surrounded by English via different appliances such as internet, television and computer games. In addition, compared to previous generations, the youth travels around the globe and communicates in English. Therefore, it is essential that the teaching of English notifies this shift and encourages all kinds of learners to develop their language skills. Accordingly, the following chapter will focus on differentiation which is a method of instruction for a broad range of learners and acknowledges the fact that different learners have different needs.

3 DIFFERENTIATION

The Constitution of Finland states that the Government must secure an equal right for everyone to get educated as well as supported according to one's capabilities and special needs. It also mentions that the freedom of science, arts and education is secured by the law (Finlex 1999). Thus, already the Constitution acknowledges differentiation, because differentiation or differentiated instruction is a way of teaching that takes into attention students' individualism and their different needs (Roiha and Polso 2018: 9, 17).

Tirri and Kuusisto (2013: 86) mention that Finland as well as other Northern countries have always valued the children with special educational needs and learning disabilities in education. However, before the 1970's, suggestions of the special education for the more able students would have seemed elitist and contradictory to the general focus on equality in the

societies. The attitudes are slowly changing but even today, in my opinion, differentiation is mostly directed towards the less proficient students, who struggle with completing the mandatory demands. The educational reform of 1970's made it possible for every student to learn at least two foreign languages, one of them being the second national language. However, in foreign language learning and in mathematics, an ability grouping system was used until 1985 (Penttilä 2012).

In 1970's, the curricula system began to change and great alterations were seen in all educational levels in Finland. A centralized curriculum, that was common to all schools in Finland, was introduced and teachers had to teach a group of heterogenous learners of 25 to 30 pupils for nine years. This change forced the teachers to invent differentiated means for their instruction, which, obviously, was not an easy task (Tirri and Kuusisto 2013: 86). In the 1980's, however, Finland began to decentralize education and continued it in the 1990's. Similarly as in other European countries, the educational system made room for the new, deregulated one and old curricula were redesigned (Tirri and Kuusisto 2013: 87). Because of decentralization, the decision-making concerning education was transferred from the government to municipalities but the government remained in charge of the general guidelines for education (Tirri and Kuusisto 2013: 87).

The emphasis on individualism allowed the schools to create more specified curricula and, in addition, it allowed the teaching to become more focused on individual needs, i.e. more differentiated (Tirri and Kuusisto 2013: 87). Siekkinen and Saastamoinen (2010: 47) argue, however, that the shift towards school-specified curricula affected negatively the learning outcomes of the students in the 1990's and the equal status of schools in Finland was jeopardized. There was a concern that this new type of education would harm the students' legal rights to equality in education (Siekkinen and Saastamoinen 2010: 47).

As a result, a modified version of the decentralized system was introduced in the early years of the 21st century (Tirri and Kuusisto 2013: 87). Today, the special education of the more proficient students is not mentioned in the legislation but because of the alterations in the 1980's and the shift towards more individualized education, it has been noticed that the proficient students as well need to have possibilities for differentiated instruction (Tirri and Kuusisto 2013: 91).

Differentiation focuses on students' ability to learn and enhances the experiences of success. It can be regarded as a supporting tool to teaching. It corresponds to the challenge of difference and individualism and is generally referred to when talking about well-done teaching (Roiha and Polso 2018: 15). Tomlinson (2014: 4) adds that in differentiated instruction the teachers modify their teaching methods precedingly to maximize each learners' learning possibilities and notice the individual needs of every student. Thus, differentiation is student-centered and aims at supporting not only the weaker but also the stronger students.

Roiha and Polso (2018: 11) point out that people often perceive differentiation as remedial instruction but it is worth mentioning that teachers can differentiate their instruction in both ways. They add that downward differentiation focuses on weaker learners but upward differentiation is generally used to above average students who need higher level challenges in their educational development. Laine (2010: 2) argues that generally differentiation is regarded as a functional tool that takes into account the students with the need for special support, the weaker students in this sense. It must be understood, however, that the better the teachers understand the multilateral meaning of differentiation, the more versatile means will they use in their differentiated instruction (Roiha and Polso 2018: 16).

Tomlinson (2014: 20) lists several factors that differentiated instruction should base on. These factors include students' *readiness, interest* and *learning profiles*. She also mentions that differentiation should be put into practice in different dimensions that are *content, process, product* and *affect/environment* (see Figure 1.). In other words, depending on students' subjective abilities and curiosities teachers should adjust their curricular teaching methods and the learning surroundings.

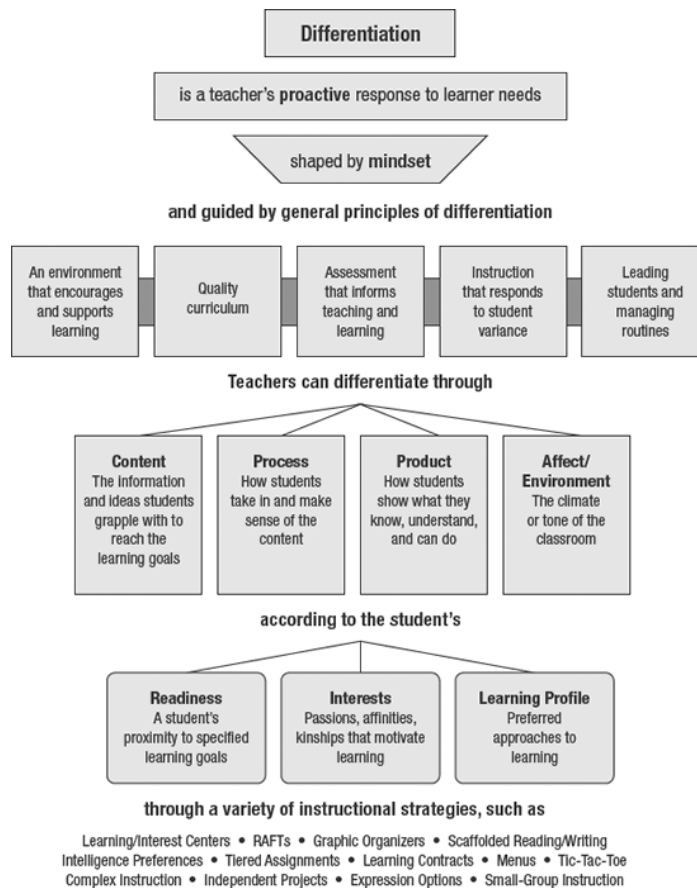


Figure 1. Tomlinson's (2014: 20) Differentiation of instruction.

According to Tomlinson (2014: 18), *content* can be described as the object of learning but it can also mean different materials or mechanisms that are used to reach the learning goals (see Figure 1.). *Process* is the way of teaching, for example activities and tasks that are used in classroom for students to understand and acquire the content. *Product* can be the result of successful teaching, because products are “the vehicles through which students demonstrate and extend what they have learned” (Tomlinson 2014: 18). These three factors can be defined as *curricular elements* (Tomlinson 2014: 19) . In my opinion, content works as the input of teaching whereas product can be defined as the output.

However, teachers cannot differentiate properly without knowing students' abilities such as readiness, interests and learning profiles (see Figure 1.). Readiness is the student's starting point to a certain issue or topic and is strongly dependent on previous knowledge and skills (Tomlinson 2014: 18). It is a factor that the present study will especially focus on and, in chapter 3.2, I will discuss the impact of readiness on learning by consulting Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development. In my opinion, readiness is a key factor because it defines for

example the direction of differentiation and, moreover, the need for differentiated instruction, upward or downward.

Roiha and Polso (2018: 17) note that differentiation can also be understood as either “reactive” or “proactive” differentiation. In *reactive* differentiation the differentiated instruction can be seen as a reaction to learning difficulties or problems. They add that reactive differentiation is the most common way to differentiate as well as useful and important. However, differentiation is at its best when it is *proactive*. This means that teaching takes into account students’ individual needs from the starting point and teachers modify their teaching methods from the beginning. Proactive differentiation, however, requires the teachers to know their students and their capabilities properly (Roiha and Polso 2018: 17).

Even though there are many guides and books that are full of instructions on how to implement differentiation, it should be mentioned, that it is not an easy task (Tomlinson 2014: 13). Differentiation requires from the teacher time, resources and most importantly motivation. It does require proper understanding of the students’ abilities as well and this might become a problem in some cases. Differentiation is not, however, as difficult as teachers generally perceive it to be. Tomlinson (2014: 19) notes that not every issue or task in every single unit need to be differentiated. Moreover, teachers need not use all possible methods of differentiation every day. Teachers can develop their differentiation in baby steps and try different things and find the best ways by experimenting. Most importantly, teachers should remember that in differentiation students are the workers and teachers are mainly the guides who provide the materials and plan the schedule (Tomlinson 2014: 21).

To sum up, differentiation is ideal when teachers pay attention to their approach of teaching and understand the students’ individual needs. Moreover, differentiation is successful when teaching is reactive and proactive and, most importantly, it is student centered (Roiha and Polso 2018: 22). In differentiation, teachers do not try to standardize their instruction to a fit-for-all-model but are rather keen on learning new perspectives from their students (Tomlinson 2014: 4). In other words, differentiation focuses on *how* students learn and teachers teach rather than on *what* students learn and teacher teach (Tomlinson 2014: 78). In the following chapter I will give a brief overview of the different theories that have influenced differentiation as an instructional method. In section 3.3, I will continue describing the factors that are generally associated with differentiation and that often are included in the differentiated instruction.

3.1 Theoretical background to differentiation

Roiha and Polso (2018: 18) clarify that differentiation is not itself an educational theory but has gotten influences from many different theory trends. They add that the most central theories behind differentiation are *constructivism*, *motivation*, *theory of multiple intelligences* and *the zone of proximal development*. In this paragraph, I will give short descriptions of each theory but in section 3.2, I will focus solely on *the zone of proximal development*. I consider it to be the most applicable theory to support differentiation, because it acknowledges learner's readiness and, de facto, is the gap between the learner's "actual development level" and "potential development level" that can be easily achieved with little guidance (Roiha and Polso 2018: 19).

In *constructivism*, the student's activity and motivation are central factors in the learning process. It also values the learner's previous knowledge and experiences and holds the learner's interest and advance information as the basis for education (Roiha and Polso 2018: 18-19). Tarnopolsky (2012: 8-9) notes that the constructivist theory of learning can be seen as an opposite to the learning where the knowledge is transferred directly from the teacher to the student. Thus, constructivism highlights practical pedagogy and enhances students' activity, initiative, participation and, for example, interactive learning. Constructivism sees the student as an active processor of knowledge and supports the student's independent learning process, similarly as differentiation. Jaskari and Karvonen (2014: 16) suggest that besides constructivist views, the Finnish education system has begun to emphasize the socio-constructivist view which values social learning.

Roiha and Polso (2018: 19-20) argue that *motivation* is an important aspect of differentiation because the interest and enthusiasm towards the subject is highlighted. This is especially occurrent in upward differentiation. In differentiated instruction the topic is approached through the students' interest which enhances the learning results because they are achieved with students' involvement and commitment. Moreover, preoccupation tends to have positive influences on students' self-efficacy (Roiha and Polso 2018: 19-20).

In the 1980's Howard Gardner developed the Theory of Multiple Intelligences which includes different dimensions of intelligence such as logical-mathematic intelligence and linguistic intelligence (Roiha and Polso 2018: 20). Roiha and Polso (2018: 20) suggest that we all have some of these different intelligences but the amount varies and teachers should understand this

variation. They add that in education, teachers should notice the learners' different learning profiles because the core of differentiation lies in acknowledging students' individual needs. The theory, however, has gained a great deal of criticism because the division of different intelligences is not always clear and it is argued that the intelligence types include many different sub-categories that, among the main categories, can be adjusted by the environment (Calik and Birgili 2013: 7).

3.2 Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development

Vygotsky (1978) defines the Zone of Proximal Development (henceforth ZPD):

It is the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers.
(Vygotsky and Cole 1978: 86)

Vygotsky (1978: 87) divides the learner's development into two levels: the actual development level and the zone of proximal development. The actual development level tells what the learner knows or can do alone without any help from others. It can be seen, therefore, as the result of learning. The ZPD is not the outcome of learning but can be the part that foreshadows learning and the mental development of learners (Vygotsky and Cole 1978: 86-87). "What is in the zone of proximal development today will be the actual developmental level tomorrow" (Vygotsky and Cole 1978: 87). Thus, as Vygotsky (1978: 85) indicates, if a learner can get little help from for example the teacher, it can tell a lot more about their development-level than what they can do without assistance.

When an exercise is too easy, it minimizes the student's thinking and does not require problem-solving skills that would develop the student. This probably will not motivate the students but rather put him/ her into a relaxation mode which can show as boredom or tiredness (Tomlinson 2014: 34). When the task, however, is slightly challenging it refreshes the students thinking and involves some brain work. A slightly challenging task is close to their proximal development when they know enough of the topic but need to take a small risk in reaching the correct outcome (Tomlinson 2014: 34.) In this way, the students can reach new feelings of success and be motivated by the accomplishments. If the tasks are constantly too simple or the students feel that they can never master the task, there is a great danger that they will lose their interest and enthusiasm to learn (Tomlinson 2014: 34).

In ideal differentiated instruction, everyone should work on tasks that are close to their zone of proximal development (Roiha and Polso 2018: 19). Accordingly, this would maximize the students' potential development level in the subject (Vygotsky and Cole 1978: 87). What this means, is that the learning outcomes are reached to the fullest when students work with tasks that are close to their level but provide a moderate challenge (Tomlinson 2014: 33).

This is in accordance with Vygotsky (1978: 89- 90) who states that learning that is valuable precedes the development. In other words, the most important aspect of learning is that it generates the zone of proximal development. In my opinion, the teachers should, consequently, test the students' abilities with slight complications in the assignments. Thus, the students would not lose motivation but could challenge themselves to find out that they are more capable than their actual development level. This, however, demands that the teachers are aware of the students' skills (Roiha and Polso 2018: 19).

Every learners' ZPD is individual and age is not a determining factor in it. When using the learner's zone of proximal development as a basis for differentiation, the teachers need to be aware of their students' capabilities i.e. teachers need to know their students properly (Vygotsky and Cole 1978: 86). This, however, might bring up some problems at least in upper secondary level. In upper secondary school, the pace of teaching is fast, the courses are rather short and the participants of the courses tend to change every period. This leaves, thus, almost no time for the teachers to get acquainted with students and their abilities and to test the students' potential development level. Therefore, differentiated instruction could aid the learners in reaching the ZPD and, thus, enhance their language learning and development.

3.3 Characteristics of differentiation

There is no prototype of a perfectly working differentiated classroom but there are some properties that properly working differentiated classrooms have in common that include for example learning environment, knowledge about the learners and a well-formed curriculum. All of these properties share the same goal, which is the success of learners. Consequently, the properties together form the cornerstone of differentiation (Tomlinson 2014: 14-16). It must be noted that in differentiated classrooms these elements go hand-in-hand (Tomlinson 2014: 15).

Stradling and Saunders (1993, cited in Laine 2010: 3) list five opportunities for differentiation. Firstly, teachers can differentiate a task which means that students work with the same task but on a different difficulty level. Secondly, differentiation can focus on output in a way that all students are solving the same problem or doing the same task but because of the flexibility, one can do it on one's own ability level. Thirdly, teachers can focus differentiation on the learning process, where students are encouraged to use the learning methods that they have found helpful. Not everyone learns in the same way. Fourthly, the acceleration of learning can be adjusted so that the students can have their own speed when accomplishing the task. Laine (2010: 4) supports this argument by noting that in efficient differentiation the instruction pays attention to the students' individual propagation speed which gives the student a chance to take his/her time to accomplish the task. Finally, teachers can use dialogue as a way of differentiation because via interviewing the students, teachers can gain more understanding on the students' aptitudes and individual needs.

Laine (2010: 4) mentions that when it comes to differentiation, teachers may find it helpful to form small groups in a class based on students' readiness or interest. This way, teachers can respond easier to the different needs of the pupils than with, for example, whole class. It is important, as Laine (2010: 4) points out that teachers vary the focus of the groups and mix the students. What is more, it is always worthwhile to use variable material in these groups or in class. This means that teachers should plan the material in a way that it meets the students' needs.

It must be noted, however, that when observing the National Core Curricula for basic education 2014 (NCC 2014) and upper secondary school education (2015), differentiation focuses especially on basic education. There might be several reasons for this but, in my opinion, one relevant reason could be the teachers' familiarity with students which can be considered as the corner stone for differentiated instruction. In comprehensive school the teachers have better and deeper knowledge of the students because they teach the same classes for several years and get to know the students and their capabilities. In upper secondary school level, the group sizes are so large that it might not be possible to differentiate instruction and the impact of the Matriculation Examination is so strong that the main focus is directed towards them.

In upper secondary school, however, the students are sprinkled in different groups that will change every period per subject. Thus, teachers have little time to get acquainted with students

and when they do, the period ends and it is possible that the teachers will not teach the same students again. Therefore, I understand that upper secondary school teachers might not have time nor interest towards differentiation because the starting point already is somewhat different than in basic education. This might also be recognized by the National Board of Education and for that reason differentiation is not emphasized in the National Core Curriculum for upper secondary education.

3.4 Upward differentiation

Differentiation, upward or downward, begins with recognizing the need for it. In the case of upward differentiation, it is important for teachers to notice when the student over achieves in every assignment, is always ready before everyone else, seems to be bored in the lessons and gives signs of knowing the topics without even being taught. In these circumstances, it is relevant to consider upward differentiation (Roiha and Polso 2018: 31). In reality, however, teachers tend to focus on differentiation less than they would want to because of lack of time or resources (Roiha and Polso 2018: 31). This problem might be even more apparent with upward differentiation because teachers probably put even the slightest assets to the education of the weaker students.

Differentiation for the more able is about challenge: increasing knowledge, skills and understanding. This involves getting pupils to ask themselves the all important 'why' questions and solve problems. Differentiation is also about using time effectively: eliminating boredom, pushing back the boundaries of knowledge, capturing interest and practising language skills. Part of that process is the inculcation of study skills and, alongside that, to give a self-critical confidence and surefootedness to learning. (Kerry and Kerry 1997: 456).

Kerry and Kerry (1997: 439- 440) argue that differentiation is one of the commonest methods of teaching that takes care of the advanced students as well. They continue by pointing out how differentiation is flexible, because it can be used for students who belong to different learning levels, from lower ability to extremely high. Upward differentiation is differentiated instruction for above average students, who over achieve in the subject. It is, however, important to notice the need for upward differentiation because these students might as well become frustrated and this could result in different disturbances in behavior. Such benefits of upward differentiation will be discussed more in chapter 3.6.

It can be helpful for the more proficient students to sometimes skip a task that repeats issues that are already familiar to the student. Often when the students with stronger proficiency have

finished the mandatory tasks, teachers can provide more difficult tasks from upper levels or other materials that show the students that even though they master the language there is still a possibility for development. These are also known as “anchor activities” that students can work with on their own. Anchor activities can include also problem-solving assignments with a pair, educational computer assignments, games and independent reading (Knopper and Fertig, 2005 as quoted in Laine 2010: 4). What is more, teachers can offer alternative task forms such as open-ended questions or progressive reading materials (Tomlinson 2014: 19). Tomlinson (2014: 4) argues that when teachers differentiate their instruction, students, especially the advanced students, understand that success requires hard work and there is always a chance to develop one’s skills.

The heterogenous classrooms bring challenges to upward differentiation as well. Often, upward differentiation of advanced students means that they are supposed to do more exercises than other students. Teachers might also ask these students to work as co-teachers in the classroom and help other, less-proficient students. Sometimes, however, when the advanced students have finished with the tasks, teachers order them to sit quietly in their place (Tomlinson 2014: 38). The reason for this is that according to the day’s agenda, the advanced students have already reached the required goals and need not do more or can repeat the tasks (Tomlinson 2014: 39). Tomlinson (2014: 39) points out that it seems that curricula and instruction focus on the standard students and their needs. This, however, does not provide development possibilities for the advanced students and might even bring out problems in the classroom that upward differentiated instruction could diminish.

However, there seems to be a slow change towards noticing the more proficient students. The city of Loviisa in Finland has founded a project with the help of The Finnish National Board of Education (Vallinkoski 2019: 34). The project’s aim is to help teachers identify and support the more proficient students in the classroom. The developer and classroom teacher Anna Palasmaa argues that in equal education there should be support for the advanced students as well. When these students are taken into consideration, the studying might become more pleasant for them which can show in an improved learning environment (Vallinkoski 2019: 34). This argument is supported by Tomlinson (2014) and Roiha and Polso (2018). Even though the project is targeted at compulsory school level it can be a beginning of a more general trend and can start a snowball effect when it comes to upward differentiation. Differentiation enables the learning of advanced students in heterogenic classrooms because of flexible

routines and varied tasks that meet with the needs of diverse learners (Tomlinson 2014: 39). In the following section, I will give more detailed information of upward differentiation methods that can be used specifically in English lessons.

3.5 Upward differentiation in English lessons

Language learning can be divided in four areas to command. These are listening comprehension, reading comprehension, written communication and oral communication. Roiha and Polso (2018) have covered all of these areas in their book and suggested ways in which teachers could differentiate their instruction upward in English lessons.

In listening comprehension exercises, Roiha and Polso (2018: 224) suggest that teachers can use several upward differentiation methods. Teachers can modify the intensity level of their speech and try to use complicated sentences as well as easier sentences to make sure that the students, both advanced and students with weaker skills, understand them properly. Teachers should also repeat often and use many idioms and paraphrases in their speech. Consequently, students with stronger proficiency adopt new ways of expressing themselves. In listening comprehension tasks teachers can give more detailed and complex exercises for the more proficient students and, for example, encourage the students to answer in English and with complete sentences (Roiha and Polso 2018: 224).

In oral communication, teachers can demand more proficient students to use more complex sentence structures (Roiha and Polso 2018: 226-227). In addition, teachers can instruct students with stronger proficiency to talk with each other. Teachers can also join these groups and, thus, guide the discussion and the students. In Weckman's research (2017: 35) the participant teachers recommended using the textbook's oral exercises. They noted that written assignments are not the only method to differentiate but teachers should use several methods such as oral exercises when differentiating instruction.

In my opinion, if possible, it would be beneficiary to utilize native speakers of English such as exchange students in class discussions. In addition, asking cognitively difficult or ambitious questions is a generally approved method of upward differentiation. It challenges the advanced students to elaborate on the topic and notice that there might not always be easy answers to the matter (Kerry and Kerry 1997: 455).

Roiha and Polso (2018: 226-227) point out that when teaching reading comprehension, stronger students can be guided to read more difficult texts as well as instructed to read texts that interest the students. They add that if teachers want to use the same text for the whole class it can be divided so that stronger students who read and comprehend it quicker, can write summaries of text for weaker students or modify the text so that it will be easier to comprehend for the weaker students. In Weckman's study (2017: 31) the expert English teachers demanded more complex sentence structures from the advanced students. Thus, the advanced students can develop by getting out of their comfort zone.

In written communication, the more proficient students can prepare different projects and presentations according to their own interests and can be guided to use as complex and versatile language as possible (Roiha and Polso 2018: 230). Based on my experience, students with stronger proficiency enjoy it when they can for example watch the news in English and then write summaries of the current news. They might as well write blog texts in English of a given topic. Weckman points out (2017: 30-31) that using authentic materials is a common way to differentiate instruction by expert English teachers. As a result, the exercises are not only topical but motivational as well.

In other words, there are many ways to approach upward differentiation in English classes. If teachers want to differentiate upward only a little, they can, for example, give different homework for advanced students (Roiha and Polso 2018: 232-233). It is probably no use to give homework on the same topic that is already familiar to the student. Of course, repetition is important but sometimes it can hinder students' motivation.

For upward differentiation in English lessons, using extra-curricular material is always a good idea. With additional material that can be found from the Internet or can be books, magazines, blogs and vlogs, students can expand their linguistic knowledge and make connections to the real world. Weckman (2017: 34) found out in her study that some English teachers had coordinated a pen-pal arrangement with an English-speaking school. The arrangement was used for the whole class but often the advanced students were differentiated by this assignment after they had finished with the mandatory tasks.

In the era of digital technology, English teachers can use digital games and apps to promote the advanced students' linguistic skills. These task types are usually preferred by the students as well. Weckman (2017: 43) mentions that in her study, the younger English teachers used widely iPads and games for differentiation. Kerry and Kerry (1997: 454) add that using extra material helps teachers to broaden the topics for the more proficient students because it demands them to understand it and apply the knowledge to varied task types.

Roiha and Polso mention (2018: 232-233) that teachers can modify the exams as well. In some cases, it might be more improving for the student to compile a learning portfolio or do a video presentation, if the student has showed proper competence in the topics of the course. Portfolios and video presentations are widely used in working life as well and, thus, this kind of an upward differentiation will prepare the students for the future as well. Tomlinson (2014: 17) adds that in differentiated instruction, the assessment of students should not depend on the final exam grade but students should, instead, be assessed throughout the course in different areas. Thus, teachers will get a better understanding of the students' skills in different areas and the assessment, in my opinion, becomes more humane and focuses on the right issues. As she concludes it "assessment is today's means of understanding how to modify tomorrow's instruction"(Tomlinson 2014: 17).

It should be noted, however, what works for one might not work for everyone. Every student is an individual with individual needs. As Mousa and Mahdiye (2018: 36) conclude it "One must always bear in mind that each learner is an individual and individual differences will have an effect on the learning of English as a foreign language." Therefore, teachers should be encouraged to try different methods of upward differentiation in English classes. If teachers are worried about the resources such as time, they can begin with only slight alterations to their teaching, tasks or assessing.

The concrete examples of upward differentiation in English lessons are the most helpful for teachers and, thus, the present study seeks to find out the various methods that upper secondary school English teachers use in their instruction. Moreover, there seems to be gap in consulting the students and finding out their wishes for English lessons and, thus, the present study will map the upper secondary school English students' suggestions on the matter. In the following section, I will present factors that can challenge the active practice of upward differentiation

but also the positive sides of it that hopefully encourage teachers to try new methods in their instruction.

3.6 Benefits and challenges in upward differentiation

The benefits of differentiation in general are manifold. These include for example the prevention of learning difficulties, where modification of the learning environment has played the most important part. What is more, a flexible grouping system and individual assignments have increased both weaker and stronger students' learning results (Roiha and Polso 2018: 28-30).

When concentrating on the students with stronger proficiency, upward differentiation has many positive outcomes. Roiha and Polso (2018: 28-30) point out that it improves the stronger students' satisfaction with the school environment, which is important, because students with stronger proficiency can easily get frustrated in class when they have completed the assignments and potentially get bored with activities that repeat the topic as discussed in chapter 3.4. This can result in disruptive behavior. In differentiated instruction the student's individual needs are noticed and, in this sense, upward differentiation makes it possible for the teacher to confront the students individually.

In addition, upward differentiation can offer new experiences of success which are as important for the stronger learners as for the weaker learners (Roiha and Polso 2018: 28-30). Through upward differentiation teachers can give more challenging tasks and, thus, continue to develop the language skills of the learners. No language learner can ever master the language completely and, therefore, it is always possible to differentiate upward the instruction, if proper tools are found. Besides, upward differentiation seems to increase the sensibleness of teaching which affects positively learning results, when students learn in ways that seem reasonable and effective. For this reason, it is important for teachers to listen to their students' wishes and show that the students' opinions are valuable (Roiha and Polso 2018: 28-30).

In other words, in order to succeed in upward differentiation, one key component is to hear out the students themselves since they are usually the experts on knowing what challenges their language skills and, therefore, could develop them as well. What is more, it can be useful for the teacher to consult the parents, if possible, as well as colleagues when setting up the learning

goals and needs (Kerry and Kerry 1997: 454). In the present study, I give voice to the more proficient students of English in upper secondary school and reveal their views and wishes on English language education.

There are challenges as well when it comes to upward differentiation. In upper secondary school, probably the biggest challenge is the lack of familiarity with students as discussed previously. Another great challenge is that the more proficient students are not always willing to challenge their skills (Roiha and Polso 2018: 32). Sometimes these students actually are willing to underachieve and complete the exercises and tasks in the easiest way possible. This could have something to do with the lack of motivation because often the students do not even want more developing tasks. Instead, they do what they are told to do and after that they want to rest and, for example, play with their cellphones. In my opinion, it is crucial that teachers consult the students about their interests and modify the tasks according to students' wishes. Thus, the students' motivation could increase when the tasks handle for example real-life issues. The alterations might be small but the impact could be huge (Roiha and Polso 2018: 32).

Other challenges that teachers have pointed out when it comes to upward differentiation are most commonly lack of resources and, especially, lack of time (Roiha and Polso 2018: 36). One explanation might be that teachers think upward differentiation is difficult and they might believe that they need to reinvent the wheel every time they differentiate their instruction. Roiha and Polso (2018: 36) add that challenges include defunctional physical surroundings, too large group sizes and the studying material. At its worst, upward differentiation can distress teachers and feel excessively difficult (Roiha and Polso 2018).

In addition, weak expertise of differentiation methods and the heterogenic constituent of classes do not make it easier for the teachers. This might be the reason for the skepticism towards upward differentiation strategies from the teachers' side (Kerry and Kerry 1997: 454). Tirri and Kuusisto (2013: 92) share the same concern and note that there should be more focus on how to recognize and support the more proficient students with different differentiation methods already in the teacher education. Kerry and Kerry (1997: 453) propose that teachers implement the methods of differentiation but with careful attention and consideration. They observe as well that teachers do not always find differentiation methods to be the problem-solving outcome to learning issues and especially not with more proficient students.

What is more, Hertberg-Davis and Brighton (2006: 94, 99) found out that principals can have a pivotal influence on teachers' attitudes towards differentiation. They note that if the principal is enthusiastic about differentiation, it will have a positive impact on the teachers as well and can have significant results in the classroom. They also point out that the principal's support and knowledge of differentiation affected positively the teachers' success in differentiation. Thus, it would be important that the principals participated in the same in-service education as the teachers.

All in all, differentiation, when exploited properly, can be a well-functioning method that recognizes the individual needs of students, also the ones who have a stronger proficiency in a subject. In addition, it is said that differentiation decreases problems in behavior, because when the instruction is differentiated, the students are more committed to learning. Thus, differentiation makes it possible to everyone be engaged in an activity (Laine 2010: 2).

3.7 Studies on upward differentiation in Finland

In spite of being a topical and an important issue, not too many studies have been conducted on differentiation. What is more, this is especially the case with upward differentiation. In this chapter, I will provide an outline of previous studies that have been conducted in Finland concerning the topic. I have chosen Finnish studies because the present study focuses on upward differentiation practiced in the upper secondary schools in Finland. Thus, the studies discussed in this chapter can provide relevant input and baseline because they are based on the shared National Core Curriculum. It must be noted that most of the studies emphasize the teachers' perspectives towards differentiation but there are, at least, a few studies that take into account the students' perspectives, which will be discussed in chapter 3.7.2. The lack of studies including students' opinions, however, highlights the importance of studying them and in the present study the student point of view is appreciated and analyzed.

3.7.1 Teachers' perceptions of upward differentiation

Valta (2012) studied upward differentiation and skilled language learners in English lessons at primary school level in Finland in her Master's Thesis. In her study, she wanted to find out how the primary school English teachers determine a skilled student and how they differentiate their instruction for the skilled students, if at all. The data consisted of six English teachers

from Western and Eastern Finland and was analyzed by using the qualitative content analysis method.

Valta (2012: 76) found out that when differentiating upward, some elements were recurring in the teachers' instruction. The elements included the planning and acquisition of teaching material, the textbook material, grouping, spontaneous upward differentiation and assessment and feedback giving. It seems that these elements were the parts of teaching that could be individualized if needed and, thus, were generally modified for upward differentiation. Some teachers also used individual syllabuses but those were mainly directed for bilingual students. In addition, many teachers had acquired extra-tasks for students named as "anchor tasks" (Valta 2012: 76).

Valta (2012: 76) mentions, however, that the teachers' common opinion was that upward differentiation requires less planning than downward differentiation. They also pointed out that there are problems that hinder differentiation. Lack of resources such as time and also large class sizes were big concerns. The teachers mentioned that the students' negative attitudes and disturbing behavior did not enhance the differentiated instruction. It must be noted, however, that the teachers argued that upward differentiation is simpler than downward if the teacher can come up with sufficiently demanding tasks for the skilled student (Valta 2012: 77).

One relevant aspect that the teachers pointed out regarding upward differentiation was the lack of education on the topic in their university studies (Valta 2012: 77). The teachers searched help from books that provided more or less relevant information but they also consulted the special education teachers. However, they quickly noticed that the special education teachers' attention was given to the less proficient students (Valta 2012: 77). The most important support for the teachers in Valta's study (2012: 77) came from the language teacher colleagues.

In the Finnish context, we ought to think about this issue because in the inclusive classes the problem is becoming more visible. The inclusive classes consist of pupils from every ability level and, thus, the instruction must be, if not individualized, then at least modified in a way that it would serve the students' needs. The idea of mass education is that everyone can learn but if the weaker student is struggling with the material and the more proficient student is bored with the material, the outcome is not desirable. The teacher-education institutions in Finland should notice the need for the education on differentiation if inclusive classes continue to

flourish in the Finnish schools. The other option is ability-grouping classes which do not seem to be a good, not to mention equal, solution.

Karjula and Pisto (2019) surveyed classroom teachers thoughts about upward differentiation in the Finnish primary school education. The data included 41 classroom teachers from nine different municipalities in Finland. The survey was conducted by using an online questionnaire and was analyzed by using a qualitative content analysis method.

Karjula and Pisto's (2019: 29) study results echoed Valta's (2012) results. According to the teachers, the teacher-education had given only some readiness to differentiate instruction but the most important help came from work experience. Work experience had given important skills such as recognizing the need for differentiation and supporting the students who required differentiating methods. Again, there was clearly a demand for supplemental education regarding differentiation.

The classroom teachers characterized the students who needed upward differentiation based on their cognitive skills and working skills (Karjula and Pisto 2019: 22). The students with strong cognitive skills were seen as quick learners who easily reached the learning outcomes without too much effort. The students with advanced working skills were independent and needed not rely on teacher's guidance. The teachers described these students as motivated and they showed enthusiasm towards the target subject (Karjula and Pisto 2019: 22). Moreover, the students with the need for upward differentiation had strong social skills and were active group members.

The upward differentiation methods that the teachers mentioned were multiple but followed the methods discussed in Valta's study (2012). The methods that were most commonly used in instruction were the modification of task level and task size, the accelerated progress, grouping, social interaction and utilizing student's interests (Karjula and Pisto 2019: 23-24). The teachers also used other upward differentiation methods that included for example extra-tasks that were similar to Valta's (2012) anchor-tasks.

The upward differentiation methods that were used in classrooms seemed to have positive effects on the learning results (Karjula and Pisto 2019: 26). By differentiating the instruction upward, the students' learning had become more versatile and thoughtful. It also had a

strengthening effect on motivation and enhanced the students' persistence especially with difficult subjects. What is more, upward differentiation enhanced the students' self-esteem and prevented frustration and disruptive behavior (Karjula and Pisto 2019: 26).

The teachers had faced, however, challenges and concerns regarding upward differentiation (Karjula and Pisto 2019: 27). The most visible of these was the lack of resources (Karjula and Pisto 2019: 31). Lack of time, too many learners in groups and heterogenic classes did not help the execution of upward differentiation. Almost half of the target teachers mentioned that the weaker students and other behavior problems demand so much time and effort that, consequently, the advanced students are left without support and guidance (Karjula and Pisto 2019: 27). The teachers also pointed out that often the more proficient students are not motivated enough to complete more demanding tasks but prefer the easier ones. The teachers were also frustrated about the fact that the Finnish school system seems to support the weaker students at the expense of the advanced ones (Karjula and Pisto 2019: 27).

To conclude, the teachers' attitudes towards upward differentiation seemed positive and they found it less demanding and time-consuming than downward differentiation. In my opinion, it seems that upward differentiation is something that classroom teachers or subject teachers can focus on without delegating it to the special education teacher. The problems, however, are serious and clearly prevent the successful outcomes of upward differentiation.

It has to be noted that the studies discussed in this chapter focused on primary school level. This seems to be a recurring theme regarding differentiation and highlights the importance of the present study to fill the gap by targeting upper secondary school education. Differentiation is not restricted to one educational level but can, and must, be used in every level but based on the findings of the studies (Valta 2012; Karjula and Pisto 2019) the teachers need more education and diverse tools in applying it to instruction.

3.7.2 Students' perceptions of upward differentiation

When studying differentiation, it is relevant to consult the teachers, because they are the ones who put the methods of differentiation into practice but when studying the usefulness of differentiation it is important to call in the students' opinions as well. What is more, when interviewing the students, one can come up with new differentiation tools that no instruction

book can give, for it is the students who know best what interests them and what is the best way for them to learn.

Jaskari and Karvonen (2014) studied the education of gifted students based on the views of sixth graders and their teachers in primary schools. They wanted to find out how the teachers notice the gifted students in the classroom and how they modify their instruction according to the needs of the gifted students. In addition, Jaskari and Karvonen (2014) surveyed the students and investigated how the gifted students describe themselves as learners and how satisfied they are with the instruction they have received. The study was a qualitative one and they surveyed four teachers and four students in Central Finland. In this chapter, I will focus on the results that handled the students' perspectives in the study.

According to the gifted students in Jaskari and Karvonen's study (2014: 73), invigorating instruction includes enough assignments, challenges and encouraging study material. Lessons that were too easy to the gifted students were generally considered as boring and students experienced boredom daily. Often the gifted students mentioned that they wished that the degree of difficulty of the assignments was higher. Often, the material repeated the issues they were already familiar with (Jaskari and Karvonen 2014: 73).

The studying methods that the gifted students considered as most preferable were project work and teamwork (Jaskari and Karvonen 2014: 74). The students enjoyed project work because they had had the opportunity to search for the information and design the project as they wished. Teamwork gave the students a chance to brainstorm and discuss the issues together with other group members and also work independently. The students felt that in this way they remembered the issues better (Jaskari and Karvonen 2014: 74).

The researchers wanted to find out how the students experience the lessons and whether they find them challenging enough. The students mentioned that the home assignments were easy and they had them sufficiently. During lessons, if the students had finished with the required assignments they received extra tasks that often included exercises from the book, an extra handout from the teacher or reading a book that the students kept in their school desks. Sometimes the students could also continue with homework tasks if they finished early with the assignments (Jaskari and Karvonen 2014: 75).

However, because of the assignments and extra tasks that often repeated the already known issues, the gifted students experienced frustration during the lessons (Jaskari and Karvonen 2014: 76). It must be noted, that sometimes the students were frustrated because the assignments were too difficult for them. It seems that the teachers were struggling with the learners' ZPD (Vygotsky and Cole 1978, see chapter 3.2). The reasons for this could be many but one could be that the teachers lacked in familiarity with learners. Other reasons for frustration were for example too much repetition and other students disturbing the lesson (Jaskari and Karvonen 2014: 76).

In general, the students said that they enjoy the lessons because of certain factors that included for example friends, nice surroundings and interesting subjects (Jaskari and Karvonen 2014: 76). If the gifted students could alter some things at school, they would want more teamwork and the teaching could include more variation. They also suggested adding more functional learning to the curriculum and visiting for example research institutes (Jaskari and Karvonen 2014: 76). However, it seemed that the students were satisfied with the education they received because the alterations they mentioned were minor and mostly the students said that they learn well with the current methods (Jaskari and Karvonen 2014: 76-77).

Lahdenperä (2018) conducted a qualitative case study that investigated the differentiation of the gifted students and how the students perceive the instruction. She also studied the teachers' perceptions and their definitions of giftedness and upward differentiation. She interviewed five teachers and fifteen students in a small primary school in Southern Ostrobothnia, Finland (Lahdenperä 2018: 30). Again, I will focus on the students' opinions in this chapter.

In Lahdenperä's research (2018: 39) the students felt that the teacher had noticed them and was familiar with the students' skills and abilities. The most commonly used methods of differentiation were, according to the students, extra tasks and working as an "assistant teacher" (Lahdenperä 2014: 40). Similar to Jaskari and Karvonen's study (2014), the students noted that the teachers had failed in the evaluation of the degree of difficulty, because often the tasks were too easy to the gifted students. Over half of the target students argued that they would need and require more challenge to the education (Lahdenperä 2018: 41).

Thus, it seems that the methods of upward differentiation are used in the Finnish primary schools and that the students are quite satisfied with the instruction they receive at school.

However, one recurring factor in the results was that the students find the tasks too easy or in some cases, too difficult. To meet the students' wishes, the teachers should be aware of the learners' level and the zone of proximal development so that they could come up with tasks and exercises that would develop the students. What is more, variation in the task types is a method of upward differentiation that teachers should be encouraged to implement in their instruction. For this reason, the present study tries to answer the question on how the more proficient students of English would like to be instructed in the English lessons, because concrete suggestions from the students aid the teachers as well and it can be argued that upper secondary school students are mature enough to give relevant propositions on how they would modify the teaching of English.

In this chapter I discussed some key findings of studies that have been conducted on upward differentiation or similar topics according to the teachers and the students. In the following chapter (4), I will present the study I conducted and, later in chapter 5, will analyze the findings.

4 THE PRESENT STUDY

This chapter explains the methodological aspects of the study. I will firstly discuss the aims of the study and the research questions and argue why I chose them for the present study. Secondly, I will concentrate on the data and participants and explain why they were selected. I will also give detailed information about the data collection process. Finally, I will present the methods of analysis by discussing the use of a qualitative content analysis method when analyzing the data.

4.1 Aims and research questions

One of the aims of the present study is to find out what kinds of methods of upward differentiation are used in the Finnish upper secondary school A-syllabus English lessons. The aim of my study is to especially find out what kinds of methods of upward differentiation would the students with stronger proficiency in English want to use in their English classes. The present study examines the teachers' and the students' perceptions on upward differentiation and the factors that either hinder or help the practice of it.

The practical aims of my study are to help teachers understand that upward differentiation is as important as downward and, also, to give voice to the more proficient students and their wishes. Hopefully, the present study can bring some concrete examples from the students that the teachers could easily apply in their everyday teaching and notice that also the talented students need to be taken into consideration. In addition, teachers need to give differentiated tasks that would develop the talented students' language abilities. What is more, with the examples from the students, the present study shows that upward differentiation might not be that demanding or time consuming at all.

The research questions (RQ) for the study are the following:

RQ 1: How does the status of English in Finland show in the more proficient students' English language skills?

RQ 2: How do the upper secondary school English teachers differentiate upward in A-syllabus English courses?

RQ 2.1: What is their attitude towards upward differentiation?

RQ 2.2: What are the factors that assist or challenge upward differentiation?

RQ 3: How do the more proficient students experience English lessons at upper secondary school?

RQ 3.1: How do they understand the term *differentiation*?

RQ 3.2: How would they modify the teaching / the lessons?

The first research question focuses on the issues discussed in chapter 2. Before focusing on upward differentiation it is relevant to find out what the situation with English is at the upper secondary schools since the role of it in the society has changed and it has become to dominate the foreign language learning at schools. The second research question concentrates on upward differentiation from the teachers' perspective. It can provide concrete examples of upward differentiation in the English lessons but also it can make it visible how the teachers understand the term i.e. do they think that upward differentiation simply means more exercises. Moreover, it is relevant to find out what are the factors that can enhance or hinder differentiated instruction. Finally, the third research question examines the A-syllabus English lessons from the students' point of view and encourages them to think about the teaching and ways to modify it according to their needs. Thus, it might help the teachers' burdens and assist upward differentiation.

4.2 Data and methods

The present study is a qualitative study and as a data collection method I used semi-structured interviews. The data was gathered in Spring 2019. I interviewed two students and two teachers from an upper secondary school in Central Finland and two students and two teachers from an upper secondary school in Southern Finland. Altogether eight participants were interviewed for the present study. In the following sections, I will explain the data collection method, present the participants and the method of analysis.

4.2.1 Data collection

The data collection process began with applying the research permissions from a municipality in Southern Finland and from an education consortium in Central Finland. I had research permission-forms from the University of Jyväskylä that I asked the participants to sign. If the participant was underaged, 16- 17 years old in upper secondary school, the research permission was signed by the guardian or by the participant if it was allowed in the municipality's guidelines. The permission forms were destroyed after the research was completed. I also contacted the principals of the schools and had their permissions for the research. I contacted the teachers via e-mail with the e-mail addresses from the schools' public web pages and also through personal contacts.

I piloted the interview with one teacher and one upper secondary school student in February 2019. Schreier (2012: 147) argues that the pilot phase is frequently used when doing empirical research such as interviews, because it is not possible to know without testing if the research method works as it is supposed to. Thus, the pilot phase allows the researcher to make modifications and improvements. In addition, during this phase the interview questions are reviewed so that they are comprehensible and give relevant information about the topic (Dufva, 2011: 138). Based on the piloting interviews I made some specifying alterations to the interview questions and some themes were also added. The pilot phase was, thus, important because I could make some improvements before the actual data collection. Because of the alterations, however, I did not include the pilot participants in the data.

The target teachers and the students were interviewed in March-April 2019. The interviews took approximately 30-45 minutes and each participant was interviewed individually. The

interviews were conducted in Finnish and, thus, the participants felt comfortable and, probably, could discuss the matters more extensively than with English since Finnish was the native language of all the participants. The interviews were recorded to university's digital tape recorder and after the transcription process the recordings were deleted. The main focus in the interviews was for the students and teachers to discuss their experiences and thoughts about the English lessons and whether there were any upward differentiation methods used. In the following sections, I will briefly present the participants and discuss why I chose semi-structured interviews as the data collection method.

4.2.2 Participants

My data consisted of eight participants from two different upper secondary schools in Finland, one in Southern Finland and the other in Central Finland. Both of the schools were middle-sized upper secondary schools with a certain focus on specialized education such as sports. Moreover, both schools have several English teachers, so the students have a variety of choice. Since the schools were located in different parts of Finland, have a different kind of student constituent and different GPA's, I thought that the results could make a fair comparison even though the sample is small. In my opinion, individual teachers can have significant differences in their teaching methods and the students' opinions, preferences and knowledge can vary.

All of the teachers I interviewed were experienced and had been teaching English at the upper secondary school-level for several years. It has to be noted, however, that all of the participant teachers were female. What they had in common was that they either organized or helped organizing some specialized English courses or extra-curricular work that had a focus on English.

Since the focus of the present study was to investigate upward differentiation, I needed to emphasize the students' proficiency in English. More proficient students in the present study meant that the students had no other qualification demands but they were supposed to be above average students in English language. Thus, the definition *above average* in the present study was determined by the teachers but generally meant that the students' average grades in English were nine or ten. Therefore, I decided to consult the teachers in this case. After the teachers' recommendation, I contacted the possible students via e-mail. All of the students I contacted accepted my interview request. The students' genders were more equal than the teachers but it

was interesting that the students with stronger proficiency from the upper secondary school in Southern Finland were males but the students from the upper secondary school in Central Finland were females. This, however, could be just because of coincidence.

4.2.3 Semi-structured interviews

The benefit of interviews as a data collection method is that they are flexible and that it is possible to discuss with the participants and clarify issues, if needed (Tuomi and Sarajärvi 2018: 85). Besides, as Dufva (2011: 142) suggests, a well-formed and prepared interview is an excellent method to gather data. A semi-structured interview is a method that allows more freedom to the interviewer with his/her interview questions (Hirsjärvi and Hurme 2008: 47). For this topic, I chose semi-structured interviews because the participants could better explain their thoughts and opinions and elaborate on the subject. For the present study, interview was the best method because the study focuses on personal experiences and opinions. What is more, I could involve some additive questions in the interview that allowed the participants to think deeper and produce some relevant information for the study.

One form of semi-structured interviews is a theme-based interview which was used in the present study. In this type of an interview, flexibility is the key. Semi-structured interviews include a body of questions or themes but leave space for the interviewer to add some specifying questions or to make context-based solutions (Hirsjärvi and Hurme 2008: 103). Kvale (2007: 56-57) supports this view by noting that the interview outline will guide the interviewer with possible questions so that the topics will be handled. The outline of the interview questions can be found in the appendices of the present study (see Appendix 1.). The outline is divided into themes and under the themes I have come up with the questions and sub-questions. Thus, the outline gave a structure to the interviews but because of the themes, the interviews were not bounded by the questions in the outline.

One of the disadvantages in semi-structured interviews is the fact that the data includes greatly irrelevant material that needs to be eliminated (Hirsjärvi and Hurme 2008: 36). Hirsjärvi and Hurme (2008: 48) state, however, that the most relevant feature in semi-structured interviews is that they are based on certain themes that support the dialogue, which thus, gives more voice to the interviewees. The thematic approach aims at producing subjective information and knowledge from the participants by working as the *what*-component (Kvale 2007: 56-57).

Hirsijärvi and Hurme (2008: 136) emphasize that the researcher should be aware of the analysis method already during the data collection period. Often, they continue (2008: 136), the analysis process begins at the interviews. This seems to be true, because when interviewing the participants and having a dialogue with them, I carefully listened to the discussions and began to create themes for the analysis phase. What is more, the semi-structured interview gave me a possibility to ask additional questions. The analysis continued during the transcribing process and, thus, it was easier to notice certain themes and other issues that stood out from the data. In the following section, I will discuss the qualitative content analysis method and explain why it was the most applicable method for the present study.

4.2.4 Method of analysis: Qualitative content analysis

The data was transcribed after the collection process. Dufva (2011: 139) notes that when transcribing, it is necessary to document what is said or expressed and not to correct it to make it for example more literary. Ruusuvaori and Nikander (2017) add that the exactness of the transcript is defined by the research questions and the analysis method. Thus, when the focus is on the content of the speech, it is unnecessary to transcribe sighs, pauses or volume. Because of the focus on content, the transcriptions needed not be very detailed i.e. they did not include irrelevant factors such as intonations. The transcripts, however, included expressions of joy such as laughter because it emphasized the participant's opinions or thoughts about certain issues. If there were long pauses, those were also included in the transcripts. The total length of the recordings was approximately 268 minutes. Already, during the transcription process, I listened carefully to the discussions and listed some themes that could be analyzed later on.

There were altogether 67 pages of transcribed data. When the transcription process ended, I read the transcripts thoroughly a few times to get acquainted with the material. After having read them, I began to observe some recurring themes, at first, based on the themes in the body of interview questions. I used a colour-coding method to categorize the themes and expressions. I organized the findings into themes or main categories. While examining the themes, however, I found some new recurring topics that I divided into sub-sections. Finally, after a thorough observation and thought process, I ended up with five themes based on the data. The data were divided under these main themes that were deepened in different sub-categories.

I analyzed the data by using a *qualitative content analysis* method. Qualitative research attempts to interpret and understand the participants' perspectives and find meaning (Glesne and Peshkin 1992, as quoted in Hirsijärvi and Hurme 2008: 22). Moreover, the qualitative research method emphasizes the participants' observations and opens a possibility to view factors that may have influenced them in the past (Hirsijärvi and Hurme 2008: 27). In qualitative analysis, the data that is being analyzed is generally non-quantitative and includes written material such as transcribed interview excerpts (Saldaña 2011: 3).

Saldaña (2011: 4) argues that qualitative analysis has many goals and one of them is that it can display new observations of individual and social complexity. He continues by stating that qualitative analysis includes several genres such as *ethnography*, *grounded theory*, *phenomenology and case study*. She notes that phenomenology is, nowadays, "a research approach that focuses on concepts, events, or the lived experiences of humans" (Saldaña 2011: 8). Case study refers to an approach that concentrates on one singular person, group or event (Saldaña 2011: 8). Therefore, in my opinion, the present study could be a mixture of both approaches because it focuses on one event, *upward differentiation*, but tries to observe and answer how the participants have experienced the practice of it.

However, after a careful consideration, the qualitative approach that is the most applicable to this research is *content analysis*. Content analysis is a comprehensive method that examines for example texts and audio-visuals and analyzes their sometimes hidden or sub-textual meanings (Saldaña 2011: 10). According to Schreier's (2012: 3) checklist on when to use qualitative content analysis (henceforth QCA), it should be considered as an option when one has a lot of data that demands interpretation from the researcher. In addition, if the data has been collected by the researcher himself/herself for example by interviewing participants, qualitative content analysis is a considerable alternative. Thus, qualitative content analysis is the method for the present study because the data requires analyzing and interpreting and it has been collected with interviews.

Schreier (2012: 5) summarizes that "QCA is systematic, flexible, and it reduces data." QCA being *systematic* means that when analyzing the data, one must "translate" the information based on the themes that interest the researcher or answer to the research questions (Schreier 2012: 5). Thus, by analyzing the data one has to examine parts that fit in the coding frame i.e

the themes that one has invented beforehand based on research questions, the interview questions and the themes that stand out when processing the data (Schreier 2012: 5-6). Besides systematic, QCA is also *flexible*. Flexibility of the method shows in that the data requires one to modify the coding frame and themes decided beforehand. Thus, the coding frame becomes not only reliable but also valid, because the coding frame is valid when the themes illustrate the research questions and in order to achieve this one must adjust the coding frame (Schreier 2012: 7). What is more, what distinguishes QCA from other qualitative analysis methods is that it *reduces* data (Schreier 2012: 7). When using QCA, the analysis concentrates on certain features in the data and leaves out the less relevant information. Besides, the themes or the coding categories are less concrete than the information in data and when analyzing it, the specific information is classified under more abstract categories (Schreier 2012: 7-9).

Tuomi and Sarajärvi (2018: 104) support Schreier's (2012) views by noting that qualitative research should follow certain guidelines. These guidelines include, firstly, decision making on the issues that interest in the data. Secondly, one should go through the data and mark the issues that are relevant to the research and leave out all the remaining, irrelevant information. Thirdly, the data should be classified, categorized and thematized. Finally, a summary should be written.

In the present study, the analysis process followed data-driven content analysis guidelines. In data-driven analysis, the analysis factors are chosen from the data based on the purpose of the study and not fixed beforehand (Tuomi and Sarajärvi 2018: 108). Miles and Huberman (1994, as quoted in Tuomi and Sarajärvi 2018: 122-123) distinguished the progress of data-driven content analysis. After having listened to the recordings and transcribed the data, the analysis process should begin with reducing the unnecessary information. One can for example highlight or underline certain expressions or words that are related to research questions or the themes. When the data has been reduced, the highlighted findings should be grouped accordingly. The groups can also be divided into sub-groups. Finally, based on the selected data, new theoretical concepts can be invented and used as empirical categories in the research. Thus, answers to the research problem are reached (Tuomi and Sarajärvi 2018: 122-125).

5 UPWARD DIFFERENTIATION IN ENGLISH LESSONS

This chapter focuses on the themes and sub-themes that stood out from the data when analyzing the content of the interviews. The purpose of the main themes is to answer to the research questions mentioned in chapter 4.1. For the present study, I interviewed both teachers and students and, therefore, this chapter is divided into sections that handle the teachers' perceptions (5.1-5.3) and the students' perceptions (5.4-5.5). Both of these categories include several sub-sections that were invented based on the issues that emerged from the data. The purpose of the sub-sections is to give a detailed explanation of the perceptions between the two target groups. In section 5.3, I will analyze the geographical differences in school-specific programs and courses that the teachers discussed and, in addition, present what kinds of special programs the schools had in common.

5.1 Teachers' perceptions of upper secondary school students and English

As mentioned before (see chapter 4.2.2), altogether four teachers were interviewed for the present study. All of the teachers were A-syllabus English teachers in their schools and were experienced teachers of English. In the excerpts I have marked the teachers anonymously by using a code *teacher* with a number indicating the person. I have translated the excerpts into English by keeping the focus on the meaning and not on the literal translation. Teachers 1 and 2 come from an upper secondary school in Southern Finland and teachers 3 and 4 come from Central Finland.

This chapter focuses on the teachers' views on English language in the Finnish society in general and to the aspects of familiarity with students according to the teachers. Thus, it gives an answer to the first research question *How does the status of English in Finland show in the more proficient students' English language skills?* (see chapter 4.1). Before discussing the actual use of upward differentiation, it seems relevant to find out if the status of English in Finland show in the students' language skills according to the teachers and to discuss whether the teachers feel that they know their students and their skills enough to differentiate upward their instruction.

5.1.1 The status of English in the society and its relation to the language skills

When interviewing the teachers about the status of English in Finland and the visibility of it in the students' language skills, the answers were similar. The teachers acknowledged the fact that since, today, English is everywhere in the Finnish society, as discussed in chapter 2, it is no wonder that students have acquired the language in their everyday use. The impact of English showed positively especially in the more proficient students' language skills. In addition, the students who aim at academic degree studies acknowledge the fact that their own proficiency level might not be enough. This can be seen in examples 1 and 2.

(1) Näkyy, se [englannin aseman muutos] näkyy hyvin selvästi, että et on niinku opiskelijat, jotka on aivan loistavalla tasolla siinä, et he imasee sen, koska he on siinä niinku, se netti on avannu ihan eri tavalla sen maailman vielä sitten niinkun kaiken suhteen, että, et tota, se tulee niinku monille pojille pelaamisen kautta, tietysti tytöillekin, mut sitten ylipäätänsä se kulttuuri, missä he elää niin se on hyvin paljon niinku englanninkielistä kulttuuria ja sen, minkä huomaa, et he niinku mielellään hakee tietoakin sillä tavalla, et he hakee sieltä niistä lähteistä, et he ei etsi enää sitä suomalaista jotakin Wikipediaa vaikka tai mitä nyt sitten artikkeleita etsii tai muuta, et he käyttää niitä englanninkielisiä ihan luontevasti ja sujuvasti. (Teacher 3)

Yes, it is seen very clearly, because the students who are very proficient in it, they absorb it, because the Internet has opened the world to them in a completely different way and many boys acquire it through video games, of course girls as well but overall the culture, where they live is surrounded by English language and, it can be noticed that they search for information from the English sources not from Finnish Wikipedia for example or whatever articles they are looking for. They use the English ones naturally. (Teacher 3)

(2) Mutta sitten semmoset opiskelijat, jotka tähtää ulkomaille opiskelemaan niinku yliopisto-opintoihin tai jollain muulla kielellä tekemään tutkintoa niin heillä on sit kyllä sitä halua oppia. (Teacher 1).

But the students who aim at studying abroad, academic studies or completing a degree with some other foreign language, they are motivated to learn. (Teacher 1)

However, even though the teachers generally agreed that the vast expansion of English shows in the students' language skills and is seen in the classroom, the teachers were concerned of the division of the good language learners and the weaker ones as example 3 shows. Thus, it seems that the dominance of English in the society is, if not unevenly distributed, then at least unevenly acquired by the students.

(3) Näkyy. Mutta ei ehkä sillä toivotulla tavalla. Et ku, jos aattelis et lähtökohta on niinku tämmönen et maailma on englanninkielinen ja koulutus ja työ ja kaikki. Niin luulis, et se vaikuttaa niin, että kaikkien taito olis parempi. Mut se ei oo niin. (Teacher 1)

Yes, it can be seen. But not in the way that one hopes. If you think that the world is English and education and work and everything. Then you would think that it affects in such a way that everyone's language skills are better. But it does not work like that. (Teacher 1)

What is more, as can be seen from examples 4 and 5, the teachers pointed out that because of students being surrounded by English, they are more courageous in using it but it has also

narrowed their language skills or, at least, made them blind to properly estimate their language proficiency level. Moreover, because the students consider themselves as proficient in English according to their own standards when using social media, for example, the students seem to overestimate their language proficiency level at school.

(4) Tota, toki. Niinkun etenkin siinä, että ääntäminen on luonnollisempaa ja helpompaa niille [oppilaille]. Et se suun avaaminen ei niinku siinä mielessä oo niin vaikeeta. Ja sit niil on semmosta itseluottamusta, kun ne on päässyt niinku käyttämään sitä ja sit siinä onki englanninopettajana usein semmoses vähä ristiriitases tilanteessa, että kun aika moni yliarvioi sen taitonsa. Et ku ne on kuitenkin nuoria, jotka joutuu käyttämään sitä kieltä semmosis hyvin arkipäiväsis tilanteissa ja ne niistä selviää, sehän on hienoa, hyvä, ihanaa, et se rohkasee niitä. Mut sit niille tulee se käsitys, et hei mä osaan tätä, ei mun tartte. (Teacher 2)

Well, of course. Especially the pronunciation is more natural and easier to them [students]. The opening of the mouth is not as difficult as it was. And they have gained confidence because they have been able to use it and that is why the situation is sometimes contradictory for the English teacher because many students overestimate their skills. They are young and they use the language in very every day-like situations and they manage and that is good, wonderful that it encourages them. But then they get the impression that they can so they do not have to [learn]. (Teacher 2).

(5) Mut suurimmalle osalle se on rallienglanti et tää riittää, et ku joku maailmanmestaria tai olympiavoittajaa haastatellaan niin se riittää se taso siihen, et sanoo niinku nää meni *very good*. Sit niinku ei ees sitä. Just tänään oppilaitten kans puhuttiin, mikä tos mätti et toi *very good* ei oo niinku miten meni, et se oli niinku se *well*, aa mitä. Mut niinku joku oppilas sanokin, et "mut niinhän sanotaan". Et se on ehkä semmonen niinku mun mielestä iso asia nykyään. Kauheesti joutuu taistelee sitä asennetta vastaan, et se ei oo niinku vaan riittävä, et riittää. Et miten saa sen motivaation, et haluis enemmän. (Teacher 1)

But for most students, it is rally English that is enough. When some world champion or Olympic winner is being interviewed, the language skills are sufficient for saying this went very good. And not even that. Today, we discussed with students that what went wrong in saying that went very good, because it is not correct, the correct one is well. But just as one student pointed out "but people say so". And I think that is a big issue nowadays. One really has to fight against the attitude that enough is not enough. How could you motivate them to want more. (Teacher 1)

One teacher, however, argued that the status of English is mostly seen in the requirements and expectations of the educational institutes, tests and study materials. She noticed that the students' language proficiency level has not decreased but the demands of the society have increased as can be seen from example 6.

(6) Mmm, siis tottakai se [englannin aseman muutos yhteiskunnassa] näkyy, siinä se missä se näkyy kaikkein selvimmin on se, että vaatimustaso nousee koko ajan niinku ihan huimaa vauhtia. Et ku me monesti sanotaan, että et aina niinku tulee heikompaa ja heikompaa sakkia lukioon niin eihän se johdu siitä, että ne ois millään tavalla heikompia vaan niitten taitotasoa on oikeesti niinku todella kova, mut sitten taas me koko ajan nostetaan sit rimaa niinku myöskin koko ajan, että mun mielestä niinku se on niinku väärin sanottu, jos sanotaan, et ne on heikompia tänään, kun mitä ne oli vaikka kymmenen vuotta sitten, jos vertailtas. (Teacher 4)

Mmm, of course it is visible [the changing status of English in the society], it is most visible in that the requirement level is higher and higher. When we say that the students are weaker and weaker it is not correct because they are not, their proficiency level is actually really high but we are setting the bar higher all the time so I think it is not right to say that the

students are weaker than what they were for example ten years ago, if compared. (Teacher 4)

When discussing the interrelationship between the dominance of English and the students' subjective language skills, similar issues stood out from the teachers' answers. The teachers agreed that, mostly, the language skills have developed and the use of English has increased. However, the role of English seems to especially correlate to the students' oral skills such as pronunciation as examples 7 and 8 show.

(7) Ja samaten sitten myöskin mun mielestä suullisen kielitaidon kohentumisen huomaa ihan selvästi, se valmius käyttää kieltä on ihan toinen, kun se oli vaikka silloin joskus parikymmentä vuotta sitten. Et se on niin ympärillä ja niin tässä kaikessa meidän kulttuurissa mukana se englanti. (Teacher 3).

And also, the improvement of oral skills is visible, the readiness to use the language is totally different than it were say 20 years ago. We are surrounded by English language and it is everywhere in our culture. (Teacher 3)

(8) Se ääntäminen on oikeestaan ainut semmoinen, mistä sit saa kiinni sen, et nyt jotain muutakin tapahtuu, kun et vaan luetaan oppikirjoja kotona, ku sitä ei yleensä opi. (Teacher 4)

The pronunciation is the only part where you can notice that something else is happening with the language than reading school books because one cannot learn pronunciation from there. (Teacher 4)

The teachers argued that the interrelationship can also work in such a way that it separates the more proficient students and the weaker students (examples 9 and 10). The students are surrounded by all kinds of English and they need proficiency and language reading ability to be able to acquire the correct forms and the literal language from the jungle of English language. Thus, it becomes prominent to the teachers which students have the kind of filter when acquiring the language. Generally, these students are the ones who practise English in their free time and use it in various contexts such as books, video games and social media i.e. the more proficient students. It is, however, as important that English teachers encourage these students to practise and use it in their free time (Valta 2012: 77).

(9) No siin on aika paljon tää et sielt tulee niinku virheellisiä muotoja. Mut tää on niinku, se näkyy ehkä sillä tavalla, että semmoinen niinku suurin osa tästä populaatiosta täällä niin, joka on semmosta urheilijaporukkaa, toimii ehkä näin niinku ollaan nyt puhuttu. Sit täällä on pieni osa, jotka on niitä helmiä, jotka pystyy poimimaan sen oikeakielisen ja valitsee itse, et ne kuuntelee tietyantasosta englantia ja lukee tietyantasosta englantia. Ja se kyl aika pian tulee selväks näissä ryhmissä, et ketkä on siellä niitä, jotka harrastaa. Ja puhun kyllä ihan suoraan sanon siitä oppilaille, et ne lukee nää kurssikirjat niin se ei riitä, että ne pätjäis ylppäreissä. Et sitä täytyy harrastaa sitä kieltä. (Teacher 1)

Well, it's a lot that there are so many incorrect forms. But it is visible in a way that the biggest part of this population, who are athletes, do like we have discussed. Then there is a small part of the pearls, who can pick up the correct structure and chooses to listen to and read a

certain standard of English. And it becomes pretty clear that who are the ones that use English in their free time. And I say it straight to the students that it is not enough that they learn the course books to succeed in Matriculations. One must use the language. (Teacher 1)

(10) Sielt alkaa selkeesti erottua ihan erilaisia niinku erilaisia oppijoita, et semmoset pojat esimerkiks, jotka nyt pelaa paljon nii niitten kielitaito on ihan huima, se on se käytännön kielitaito. Sielt saattaa tulla hyvin niinku semmosta erilaista, monipuolista rakennettakin niiltä, mitä kirjoista ei opi. Ja sit se on tullu ihan siis niinku suoraan pelaamisen ja somen kautta ja sitten taas öö tai sit tavallaan niinku se, että kun maailma on muuttunut niin se on tehny tavallaan sen kuilun sinne niitten välille, mistä kautta ne on sen kielensä oppineet. Sit on tosi paljon ehkä enemmän tytöt sitä niinku telkkari, muoti öö some-linjaa tai sitten ne tekee ihan hullunlailla töitä siihen, että ne on sillä tasolla tällä hetkellä, kun millä ne on. Mut et niinku mä pystyn vertaamaan aika hyvin sitä nyt jollain tapaa tohon vaikka Keski-Euroopan tasoonkin ja mä tiedän siitä, että ne on todella taitavia sen enkun käytön suhteen. (Teacher 4)

The different learners stand out from the mass, for example, boys who play video games, their language skills are phenomenal, the practical language skills. They use very different, versatile structures that one does not learn from books. And that is a result of playing video games and social media and also because of the world has changed and it has built a chasm to the sources of learning. The girls learn it from fashion and social media and they work like crazy for being in a certain level in the language. But I can compare the students to the Central-European level and I know that they are very skilled in using English. (Teacher 4)

As the examples show, there is clearly a division in the upper secondary school English classrooms between the students who are exceptionally proficient in the language and the students who have not reached the proficiency level where they can, for example, eliminate the incorrect forms they hear or see and not include those forms into their language use and to have the ability to choose the sources they acquire English from.

What is more, one teacher was worried about the fact that the interrelationship works negatively because the students' reading skills and concentration have deteriorated as can be seen in example 11. Because the vocabulary in Finnish and in English has weakened, the students struggle with translation tasks because they cannot translate the entirety but rather they need to focus on word to word translation. This becomes a problem with languages such as English and Finnish that are far from each other in a structural and grammatical sense.

(11) Tää lyhytjänitteisyys ja se, et ei lueta, ei millään kielellä kauheesti. Ei suomeks eikä englanniks. Eli sanasto on mun mielest suorastaan supistunut. Ja kirjoitustaito on heikentynyt. Ja tota, mä oon palannu vähän enemmänkin siihen, että kappaleesta otteita suomennetaan, koska mä huomaan, et niillä rupee olee ihan mahdottomia vaikeuksia siinä, et ei saakaan kääntymään sitä, kun englanti ja suomi jotenki ne on rakenteellisesti niin kaukana toisistaan niin ne ei yhtäkkii, ne ei oikeesti osaakaan, et miten tää sanotaan suomeks vaan käännetään sana kerrallaan. Mut tota, varmasti se on hyvä ilmiö se rohkaistuminen, mutta tota se, et ei pitäis tyytyä niin suppeeseen, että kunnianhimoa pitäis herätellä siihen, tai siis eihän se kunnianhimo herää, jos et tarvii. Et pitäis osata muutakin. (Teacher 2)

This inability to concentrate and the fact that they do not read, in any language. Not in Finnish and not in English. So the vocabulary has decreased, in my opinion. And the writing skills have weakened. I have returned to translating paragraphs from the chapters because I have found out that the students struggle with translating the sentences because English and

Finnish are so far from each other in a structural sense. So suddenly the students cannot say how it is in Finnish but they translate it word by word. But of course, the encouragement phenomenon is good but one should not settle for less but rather the ambition should be awakened. But is not awakened if you do not need it. One should know more. (Teacher 2)

All in all, it seems that the status of English in the Finnish society has a positive impact on students' language skills and, mostly, correlates in a positive way to their courage to use English according to the teachers. However, there are some concerns that need to be taken seriously. One of the issues is that the students assess their language skills higher than they are when assessed by the teachers. The students need language literacy to be able to separate the incorrect forms they are encountered with in everyday English that they hear or see.

What is more, in my opinion it is crucial that the teachers emphasize the importance of vocabulary knowledge to the students and try to motivate the students to challenge their language skills and acknowledge the fact that one can always develop their language proficiency. The division of the advanced and weaker learners is alarming but differentiation as a method can diminish the gap because it focuses on both ends.

5.1.2 Familiarity with students: teachers' point of view

Before presenting the thoughts and use of upward differentiation by the teachers, it is important to discuss how the teachers perceive their familiarity with students. When it comes to differentiation in general, one of the most important characteristic, even a backbone of it, is that the teachers are familiar with their students (see chapter 3.4). Vygotsky (1978: 86) already acknowledged the importance of sufficient familiarity with students but also the fact that with large and constantly changing student groups it is challenging. However, without properly knowing the students' abilities and interests, it is impossible to differentiate instruction efficiently or even require any learning to happen as teacher 4 argues in example 12.

(12) Mun mielestä se [oppilaantuntemus] on tässä kaiken a ja o. Siis ylipäätään se, että mitään oppimista ei tapahdu merkityksettömässä ihmissuhteessa ja sit, ku se on merkityksellinen, oli se sitten opettajan-opiskelijan välinen, mikä tahansa se on se suhde niin siin pitää olla joku juttu ja ensimmäinen osa on se, et sä osaat sen nimen mahdollisimman nopeesti ja sit, ku sä opit tuntee sitä vähän paremmin, sä pystyt luomaan siihen semmosen tiesti luottamuksellisenkin suhteen, mut ylipäätään semmosen rennon, vapautuneen ilmapiirin, niin sit se oppiminen vasta lähteekin siitä niinku ihan oikeille urille. Oikeen vauhtiin. (Teacher 4)

I think that it [familiarity with students] is the key. No learning happens in a meaningless relationship and when it is meaningful, be it a relationship between a teacher and a student or anything else, there has to be a thing and the first thing is that you learn the name of the student and when you know him/her more, you can create a confidential relationship but at least a relaxed, liberated atmosphere and, consequently, the relationship is built. (Teacher 4)

When interviewing the teachers about the familiarity with students some areal differences emerged from the data. In Southern Finland, the teachers talked about the difficulty in getting to know the students because of the large group sizes and because sometimes the students attend only one course with the same teacher. However, they had invented methods in order to get acquainted with the students' abilities better already in the first class of the course as examples 13 and 14 show.

(13) Mä yleensä teen sillä tavalla, et mä alotan jollain sellasella tehtävällä jo sillon suunnittelutunnilla, että mä saan aika paljon selville asioita. Et joko mä kirjoitan, et se voi olla esimerkiksi abikurssilla mä yleensä teen niin, et mä laitan ekal tunnil kirjoittamaan mulle jonkun pikku jutun niinku esimerkiksi vaan et asettamaan itselleen tavoitteen niinku sen englannin kielen suhteen. -- Paitsi et mä saan siin tietää, et jos heil on jotain erityisiä toiveita, mä nään heti, et mikä se heidän tasonsa on täl hetkellä ja sitten osaan ohjata niinku siit eteenpäin. Alemmilla kursseilla niin mä usein teen sillä tavalla et varsinki ekaluokkalaisii, jotka yleensä kaikki on uusia, niin mä yleensä laitan ekal tunnilla sekä puhumaan että kirjoittamaan. (Teacher 1)

I usually begin the planning lesson with a certain task that gives me information about the students. Either I put them to write, for example in course 9, they can write their targets for the language learning.-- Not only do I get information about their wishes on the course, I also get information about their current language proficiency level and can guide them forward. In lower courses, especially with new students, I put them to write and speak in the first lesson. (Teacher 1)

(14) No kyllä siinä kurssin aikana, mutta siis siinä, kun alotetaan, niin vaikka mulla on hyvin usein siinä kurssin alussa joku pieni kirjoitustehtävä ja semmonen, et mä koitan niinku jollain lailla päästä kaikkia kuuntelemaan niin emmä silti niinku saa välttämät sitä käsitystä ja usein just niin päin, että mä luulen, että joku oppilas on paljon vahvempi kun se onkaan, että ne osaa pitää ne heikkoutensa sit pii..tai siis ne avun tarpeensa piilossa. Et kaikki on ihan juujuu, mä oon tarkistanu jo läksyn, vaikka sitten paljastuiski, että ei oo osannu ees tarkistaa sitä, et on ollu niin hakoteillä tai jotain. Mutta se on tän luokattoman lukion iso ongelma, että se et ne on niin arkoja toistensa suhteen ja se, et mä en niitä tunne. (Teacher 2)

Well, yes during the course, but normally in the beginning of the course, I have a small written assignment and I also try to listen to everybody but I cannot get the picture of their language skills. And often it works that way that I overestimate the student's skills because they hide their need of help. Everyone is like yes yes, I have checked the homework even though they have not had a clue how to. But the biggest problem of the non-class upper secondary school is that they are intimidated by each other and that I do not know them. (Teacher 2)

Accordingly, both teachers used similar methods in getting to know the students in the beginning of the course. In the case of upper secondary schools where clearly the group sizes and student variation within the courses distract the familiarity with students, this kind of an assignment can tell a great deal about the students' abilities in English language.

In Central Finland, the teachers discussed the changes in the educational institute that have improved the teachers' familiarity with students in the English courses. Two upper secondary schools were united and because of a large number of students, they have a system that each

student has a home class and home group and, thus, it is possible for the student to choose a path that has been customized for the home group as is revealed in examples 15 and 16. This system definitely enhances the familiarity with students.

(15) Opiskelijalla on tavallaan se kotiluokka ja se kotiryhmä, jonka tota puitteissa hänen on mahdollista valita samalta opettajalta sen oman ryhmänsä mukaan kaikki pakolliset kurssit. Et hänellä on se tietty niinkun oman ryhmän polku tehty sinne tota kurssitarjottimeen ja näin ollen sitten, kun enkussa on kuus pakollista kurssia niin hyvässä lykyssä mulla on se sama opiskelija sieltä ykköseltä kutoselle. Tai ainakin useamman kurssin peräkkäin.-- toivon, et se jatkuu sen takia, että kyllä mä sitten nään sen opiskelijan kehityksen ihan eri tavalla, jos mulla on useamman vuoden kokemus siitä, kun se että hän käy mulla vaan niinku yhden kurssin ajan, mikä on se noin kuus viikkoo. Ja mulla menee aikaa niinku tunnustella, että missä ehkä tarvii sitten sitä tukea tai että kuinka paljon vois sitte jo niinkun mennä omaa tahtia eteenpäin. (Teacher 3)

The student usually has a home class and a home group and, thus, she/he can choose the mandatory courses with the same teacher. So he/she has a certain path that he/she can follow and, therefore, when in English there are six mandatory courses, it is possible to have the same student from course 1 to course 6. Or at least for several courses. -- I hope that the system continues because I see the development better if I have several years of experience of the student than when I see him/her only for one course, which is approximately six weeks long. And I need time to find out the need for help and support or how much independent work the student can handle. (Teacher 3)

(16) Nyt toi tommonen polkusysteemi, mikä meillä itseasiassa on niin mahdollistaa sen, että suurin osa opiskelijoista on semmosii kenet mä tunnen ja tiedän ja itseasiassa nyt mulla on toistuvuutta paljon enemmän kun aikasemmin-- Niin kyl mä käytännössä jo sen ykköskurssin päätteeks niin aika hyvin tunnen ne ja tiedän, et kuka pärjää milläkin osa-alueella ja kuka tarvii mihinkäkin tsemppausta. (Teacher 4)

Now this path system, what we have actually makes it possible that I know many students and it allows to see them more often than before.-- So practically in the end of course 1 I know them pretty well and I know who can manage different parts of language and who needs more support. (Teacher 4)

The teachers acknowledged that the familiarity with students plays a big part in teaching and they would like to know their students better, if possible. However, there are issues that prevent it and the most prominent one is the large group sizes.

When asked about the more proficient students' willingness to make wishes about the contents of English lessons, every teacher agreed that the students do not present ideas or suggestions on the contents but rather go with the flow and are satisfied with the given tasks. This was contrary to what I expected of the answers because I thought that the more proficient students would be more eager to introduce their own thoughts. Common to all, however, was that in the beginning of the course, the teachers present a few ideas and the students or the majority of them gets to decide the tasks or the order of them.

5.2 Upward differentiation practiced by the teachers

This chapter will provide answers to the second research question *How do the upper secondary school English teacher differentiate upward in A-syllabus English courses?* With the help of additive research questions, the results have been categorized into four sub-sections that deal with the teachers thoughts and attitudes towards upward differentiation, the factors they find helpful or harmful, the role of digital appliances and software as well as the need for in-service education.

5.2.1 Thoughts on upward differentiation

When asked about the importance and necessity of upward differentiation the participants were unanimous. They acknowledged the fact that more often than not the supporting instruction focuses on the weaker students and upward differentiation means giving extra tasks as can be seen from example 17. Extra tasks often meant different handouts related to the topic but also old Matriculation Examination-booklets that the students could practice on (see example 18). These ‘‘anchor tasks’’ are a common method of differentiation and were also found in Valta’s study (2012: 76).

(17) Mun mielestä on [tarvetta]. Ja mun mielestä pitää olla. Ja niinku tavallaan se, että kaikki oppilaat on erilaisia ja tavallaan se, että jotta mä pystyn olemaan heille hyvä opettaja niin mun täytyy ottaa huomioon jokaisen heidän tarpeet.--Yleensä niinku se minimi, että mitä mä voin tehdä on se, että mä tarjoon lisätyötä vaikka monisteen, jos mulla sattuu olemaan valmiina, et jos haluat tätä harjotella lisää- tyypisesti niin ota tästä ja tää on vapaaehtosta materiaali, niinku tän tyypisesti ja joskus sitten ihan ehdotan, että sun kannattais haluta nyt tätä materiaalia, et mutta tota, kyllä mun mielestä pitää ottaa huomioon kaikkien oppilaitten erityiset tarpeet, on ne sitten mitä tahansa, et on se sitten ylöspäin eriyttämistä tai mitä tahansa muuta. (Teacher 1)

I think yes [there is need]. And I think there should be. All the students are different and for being a good teacher I would need to take into consideration everyone’s needs.-- Usually, the minimum I can do is that I offer extra-work such as a handout if I have it ready, it is voluntary material, like that, and sometimes I suggest that the student should want this material but all in all I think that every student’s special needs should be taken into consideration, whatever they are, upward or downward differentiation or something else. (Teacher 1)

(18) Mut en mä niinku esimerkiks materiaaleja hirveesti tarjoo, et ainut mitä aina välillä pystyy niinku heittää sinne jollekin tosi taitavalle, et jos se pyörittelee peukaloita ja turhautuu niin yo-vihkoja. Että tee tosta noin, toi ainaki tarjoo sit sulle haastetta ja tutustu. Sit, koska eihän se niinku huono asia oo, et sit etukäteen jo pääsevät kattoo niitä, et minkälaisia ne on siellä. (Teacher 4)

But I do not offer materials that much, sometimes I can give some Matriculation Examination-booklets for an advanced student if she/he is bored. They offer enough challenge. And it is not a bad thing that they get acquainted with the exercises in the booklets. (Teacher 4)

It must be noted that teacher 4 brought forth a crucial argument where she admitted that upward differentiation is necessary on an individual level but when considering the society the situation

can be different. Moreover, she argues that because Finland does not have ability grouping system in language classes, it has made the Finnish educational system successful and equal. She concludes that even though upward differentiation is useful, she would not take the resources away from the weaker students as example 19 shows.

(19) Se on siis yksilötasolla se on tärkeää, et ehkä niinku se, et minkä takia Suomen koulujärjestelmä menestyy noin hyvin niin johtuu just siitä, et meitä ei ole jaoteltu niihin hyviin ja huonoihin ja erittäin hyviin ja niin edelleen vaan et se mennään sit niinku sen keskiarvomassan mukana. Niin yhteiskunnallisesti mä en nää siinä mitään suurta semmosta niinku, et nyt me nostetaan Suomi nousuun sillä, että me buustataan ne, jotka on niinku tosi taitavia ja tosi lahjakkaita niin niitä jotenki niinku tai nostettas niitä jalustalle-- Ainahan se on jostain pois, jos johonkin satsataan enemmän niin sit se on jostain pois, et tällä hetkellä mä en esim meidän koulussa ottais sitä missään nimestä, missään nimessä niinku pois tosta noilta heikoilta. (Teacher 4)

It is important on an individual level but maybe the success of the Finnish school system is because the students have not been separated into the good and bads but that we follow middle road. So on a societal level I do not think that Finland succeeds if we boost those who are really skilled.-- It is always away from someone if more emphasis are put on others and at this moment, in our school, I would not take the focus away from the weaker ones. (Teacher 4)

In my opinion, this observation is not only important but honest as well. Especially with upper secondary schools, the goal is that everyone passes the courses and the Matriculation Examinations. Thus, it makes sense that teachers focus the resources to the students who are in danger of dropping out or failing the examinations. Therefore, it is understandable that the resources are mostly targeted at the weaker students but it seems that teachers tend to think that upward differentiation means a great deal of work even though it can be achieved with only slight alterations to the instruction as example 20 properly shows.

(20) Se mun ylöspäin eriyttäminen tarkoittaa monesti sitä, että et mä esimerkiksi öömm neuvon vähän enemmän, vaikka niinkun esseiden palautteessa, et se on hyvin semmonen niinku helppo tapa. Jos ne kirjottaa esseen, jossa vaikka tehtäs sit prosessikirjottamista, et jos kirjoittais vielä uusiksi niin se, minkälaisen palautteen mä annan niille ja mä yleensä annan niille hyvälle paljon kattavamman palautteen, kun niille heikommille ja sit se on toki ihan eri asia, mistä sitä palautetta annetaan, mut kyl mä niitä niinku taitavia kirjottajia yritän ehottomasti esimerkiksi siinä kirjoitustaidossa niin viedä tosi paljon eteenpäin, koska sitten puhutaan esimerkiksi sisällöstä ja sidosteisuudesta kaikesta semmosesta, mitä ei keskiverto-opiskelijalle, edes sille kasin opiskelijalle, juurikaan opeteta. Tai ehkä nyt seiskan opiskelijalle, että kasi nyt vielä joo. (Teacher 4)

My upward differentiation means that I give more advise for example when giving feedback for essays, it is an easy way. If they write an essay that includes process writing, I give different kind of feedback to weaker students than to the stronger students and the feedback focuses on different issues, of course. I try to advise the skilled writers concentrating on cohesion and stuff like that the average student does not need to learn. (Teacher 4)

Generally the teachers noted that they might give options to the students when deciding on the tasks or give the liberty to the more proficient student to go forward at their own speed. However, every teacher mentioned that they would like to differentiate their instruction upward more, if possible, because upward differentiation is as essential as downward. Other examples

that the teachers gave about their upward differentiation methods was using the more proficient students as assistant teachers (see example 21).

(21) Monesti mä pistän ne sitten auttaa vieruskaveria, et onks se sit ylöspäin eriyttämistä. Periaatteessa on, jos aatellaan, että jos oppiminen menee neljässä tasossa niin se ylin on se, et sä osaat opettaa jollekin toiselle. (Teacher 4)

Many times I put them help the person sitting next to them, that might be upward differentiation. It is, if you think that the learning happens in four levels and the highest level is that you can teach it to someone else. (Teacher 4)

It has been found (eg. Kerry and Kerry, 1997; Roiha and Polso, 2018) that differentiation decreases frustration and distracting behavior in the classroom because the students are involved with tasks or projects that challenge them and, thus, develop them. When the students find the exercises appropriately challenging, they tend to get motivated in accomplishing them and concentrate on the tasks. Thus, the exercises should belong to or be close to the students ZPD (see chapter 3.2). This was also noticed by teacher 3 in example 22, who according to her lesson plan gave differentiated tasks to the students and found out that the students' motivation level increased when accomplishing the tasks.

(22) Useamman kerran kurssin aikana tai saattaa olla joku viikkokin, et mä teen sillä tavalla, että mul on niinku tunnin alussa semmonen lesson plan ja he saa edetä parin kanssa tai sitten ryhmässä ja tekee niin pitkälle sitä aina sitten, kun ehtii. Siin on sitte eriyttäviä tehtäviä, et valitse tästä tai tästä ja niinku näin, mutta mutta tota ja se on, sillen he motivoituu, et sillä tavalla ei tuu sit sitä, että no mä oon tehny jo kaikki nyt mä saan vaan niinku (naurahtaa) saan vaan olla. (Teacher 3)

More than once during a course or sometimes during a week I have this lesson plan and they can proceed with a pair or in groups and do as many tasks as they can. There are differentiated tasks where the students can choose from and, thus, they are motivated because they have something to work on instead of saying I'm done. (Teacher 3)

In sum, it was positive to find out that every teacher in the present study differentiated their instruction upward at least in some level. Even though the most common method was using additive handouts and exercises, they mentioned also other differentiation methods such as feedback-giving techniques or assessment. It seems that when discussing differentiation, the connotation to extra work is deep. However, extra material is only one method of upward differentiation and one aspect of the present study is to present other methods as well that the teachers hopefully find helpful and, most importantly, easier. Teacher 2 proposes in example 23 that the best differentiation method is for the students to adapt proper learning methods.

(23) Mutta tota varmasti se paras eriyttämiskeino on ehkä se, että ne oppis hyvät opiskelutottumukset. Sillon tota ne oppis itseään hakemaan sitä itselleen sopivaa ja tota oppis sitä vastuuta, sitä vastuunottoa, et ketä varten ne opiskelijat opiskelee, et sit ku niin pitkälle päästään niin sit se rupee sujumaan se opiskelu. (Teacher 2)

But probably the best differentiation method would be the good learning habits. Then they would learn to search for the suitable material and learn to take responsibility for who for they are studying. Thus, the learning would improve. (Teacher 2)

Thus, the students would learn to challenge themselves and understand the target of learning. This might be the case at least on lower levels such as primary school where the subjective learning methods are practised and adapted. However, one can always develop their learning methods and assimilate new ones and, therefore, it is not far-fetched to consider learning methods as a way of differentiation.

5.2.2 The promotive and hindering factors of upward differentiation

In order to achieve successful upward differentiation, one must notice the factors that help upward differentiation but also the factors that disturb it. It has been studied that lack of resources such as time is the most crucial issue that results in negative attitudes towards upward differentiation at least in upper secondary school level.

When interviewing the teachers about the factors that would advance upward differentiation the teachers were pensive. Many had opinions of the disturbing factors but when discussing the assisting ones the teachers mostly talked about factors that potentially would help differentiated instruction. Almost all of the teachers mentioned time as a promoting factor (see example 24) but at the same time as a challenging factor. However, teacher 3 argued in example 25 that the most important issue related to differentiation is the familiarity with the students as discussed in chapter 5.1.2.

(24) Sitä edistäis varmaan aika. Että jotenki tuntuu, et kaikki niinku kurssimateriaalit, kirjat ja kaikki on niin täyteen ahdettu asioista, et tuntuu et poliittisten päätösten tekijät ja kirjojen tekijät ei ollenkaan tiedä sitä, mitä meidän totuus on tääl tunneilla. (Teacher 1)

Time would promote it. I feel that the course materials are so filled with stuff that the decision makers and authors do not have clue about the reality in classes. (Teacher 1)

(25) Kyllä se varmaan ihan ykkösjuttu on se opiskelijantuntemus. Että pitää niinkun, et on niinku herkkänä sille, että näkee sen opiskelijan ja tietenkin on tosi paljon helpompaa, jos tuntee hänet, koska sitten niinku osaa lukea häntä ja niinku huomaa, että totanoinniin missä mennään. (Teacher 3)

The number one thing is that one is familiar with the students. One must be sensitive about it and of course it is easier if you know him/ her because then you are able to read him/her and find out the situation with the student. (Teacher 3)

When talking about the hindering factors in upward differentiation three of four teachers agreed that too large group sizes is the most disallowing factor as can be seen in example 26. This result has been confirmed for example by Roiha and Polso (2018: 32).

(26) Varmaan ryhmäkoot, että ku suurin osa ryhmistä on kuitenkin yli kolkyt. Nyt mul oli viime jaksossa esimerkiks abeja 38. -- Se mikä tapahtuu täs tunnilla nii, jos sul on 36 [oppilasta] nii et sä siin hirveesti eriytä. (Teacher 1)

Probably the group sizes because most of the groups have over thirty students. In the last period I had 38 senior year students. -- If you have 36 students in a class you do not differentiate much. (Teacher 1)

Besides the large group sizes, teacher 3 pointed out in example 27 an interesting issue that in classes that have many students the learning differences can also vary a great deal. Consequently, it might be even impossible to find tasks or differentiated material that would satisfy the students and be close to their proximal development level (see chapter 3.2). In this sense, it is important that the group sizes remain reasonable. It is always more efficient to differentiate instruction for smaller number of students and, thus, the methods are more useful.

(27) Aa, isot ryhmäkoot ja ja tota sitten se, et osaamisen taso voi olla niin valtavan, siis ne heterogeeniset erot voi olla niin valtavat, niin erilaiset, että et sitten se, että löytyy löytyy niinkun kaikille tekemistä sillä tavalla, että jokaiselle tulee kuitenkin sellanen olo niille heikommillekin, että tätä voi oppia ja tästä on mahdollista selviytyä, koska se on must tosi tärkeetä, että että ei tuu sitä sellasta täydellistä lamaantumista, et jokaiselle tulee niitä niitä tota onnistumisen elämyksiä ja sellasia, et mä osasin tän ja mä opin tän. (Teacher 3)

The large group sizes and then the fact that the heterogenic differences between proficiency levels can be so diverse that finding suitable tasks for everyone so that the weaker students feel that they can survive can be challenging. I find it very important that everyone experiences the feelings of success. (Teacher 3)

In addition, both teachers 1 and 2 introduced yet another challenge when it comes to upward differentiation. The issue was that not always the more proficient students want to be noticed and treated differently than the classmates. In my opinion, this could have something to do with the advanced students losing face with their peers. The students are in critical age when they attend upper secondary school and it might not be considered as positive among peers when teachers notice that the student is more proficient. Thus, the teacher needs to be careful as example 28 demonstrates.

(28) Oppilas ei välttämättä halua, et minut huomataan tällaisessa asiassa. Nii, et se voi olla niinku loukkaus häntä kohtaan myöskin, et sit siin pitäs vähä olla semmosta niinku pelisilmää itsellä, et miten toimia.-- Ja hyvin sellast niinku, et varpaillaan pitää aina niinku vähän katella ja tunnustella maaperää. Et sen takia mä oon ite ottanu semmoset, et mä tässä niinku heiän kanssa oon, ku he on lähdössä ja vähän niinku sanon heipat ja juttelen niitä näitä, et siin tulee vähän semmonen, et on helppo, jos mä tarviin sen tilanteen, et toi oppilas mun pitää saada nii mä pystyn siit niinku muka puolihuolimattomasti, et ainiin kuule hei joo. (Teacher 1)

The students do not necessarily wish to be noticed in a matter like this. It can insult the student so it requires discretion from the teacher on how to act. -- And, often, the teacher must carefully view the situation. Therefore, when the class is finished I say bye to them and if I need the moment I might just casually talk to them. (Teacher 1)

Teacher 2 agrees with teacher 1 but points out that sometimes the problem is that the students do not want to differ from the mass and even though they have potential they still want to do

the tasks that do not need as much work as the differentiated ones. Also Roiha and Polso (2018: 32) found that more proficient students are not always motivated in developing or challenging their skills. Similar findings can be found in Karjula and Pisto's study (2019: 31). Moreover, as example 29 shows, not only are the teachers busy but the students as well. Thus, the students might not have time for the differentiated tasks even though the tasks would develop their individual skills.

(29) No ehkä toi, mitä tos jo sanoin, et ei välttämät halua poiketa joukosta. Eikä halua, jos on eritasosia tekstejä vaikka tai just jotain tehtäviä niin sit sä haluat tehdä sen jutun, mistä pääsee helpoimmalla, kun kaveritkin valitsee sen tai sillälailla, mutta tota ehkä eniten haittaa kuitenkin se, se tota, kun nää on niin kiireisiä. Että vaikka paukkuja ois niin ei sit ehkä ehdi panostamaan enempää. (Teacher 2)

Well maybe what I said previously that they do not want to separate from the mass. And if there are easier and more difficult tasks, they choose the easier because the friends choose it as well. But the most hindering factor is that the students are so busy. Even if they are proficient enough they do not have time for the effort. (Teacher 2)

To conclude, teachers are aware of the advancing factors when it comes to upward differentiation but the challenging factors are something they seem to face in their everyday work. Therefore, they perhaps discussed the promoting factors being a potential help to the issue. Generally, the teachers felt that in upper secondary schools the support is focused on the weaker students because they want the students to pass Matriculation Examinations which seems fair. However, the teachers mentioned that it also depends on the teacher how important she/he regards upward differentiation but the common opinion was that the too large class sizes offer the greatest challenge.

5.2.3 The role of digitalization in upward differentiation

It must be noted that in the era of digitalization, the digital world offers many devices, appliances and software that can be utilized in differentiated instruction. Often, students are motivated to use them, which can have an effect on their attitudes towards differentiated material. What is more, the digitalized world is full of tasks and exercises of all levels and, thus, it makes the differentiation easier for the teacher as well.

The interview question about the role and help of digitalization in upward differentiation divided the teachers. All of the teachers had positive opinions about digitalization and the possibilities it has brought to teaching because the material bank is huge. Thus, it has given more freedom to the students as well to choose the material that interests them and made the teaching easier for the teacher as examples 30 and 31 show.

(30) Mä muistan vielä 90-luvun alussa, jos mä halusin löytää autenttista materiaalia oppilaille, mun piti mennä Helsingin sinne päärautatieasemalle ja ostaa englanninkielinen sanomalehti ja sit kotona niinku tehdä siihen jotain tehtäviä ja sanastoa ja sit koulussa monistaa ja niin edelleen. Mut sit ku tuli netti nii sehän oli mieletön, aivan mieletön muutos opettajan työssä. Et kun autenttista materiaalia oli käsillä ja sitkun vielä tuli Youtubet ja nää et se kaikki oli käsillä siellä ja vielä se et se oli myös oppilaitten ulottuvilla et mun ei välttämättä tarte antaa, valita niille sitä materiaalia vaan sanoo, et etsikää minulle video, jossa esitellään joku harrastus teidän mielestänne kiinnostavasta yhdessä minuutissa tai kahdessa minuutissa tai niinku siihen oli rajattomasti tai sit jotain haastellisempia riippuen kurssista. (Teacher 2)

I remember in the nineties, if I wanted to find authentic material to the students, I had to go to the central railway station in Helsinki and buy an English newspaper and then, at home, create tasks and vocabulary based on the articles and the print them out at school. But when Internet came the change was phenomenal in teacher's work. The authentic material was reachable and then Youtube was created and students could use it and find videos so I did not need to give the material to them but rather could order them to find me a video with certain contents and give them more demanding tasks depending on the course. (Teacher 2)

(31) Tosi suuri mun mielestä. Me varmaan joka tunti käytetään niinkun, no, osalla saattaa olla e-kirja, mut siis käytetään nettiä, he käyttää sanastoapveja, ja tosiaan meil on se digitaalinen työkirja tuolla pedanetissä, jossa on sitten sitä videomatskua ja kaikkee muuta, että et kyl se niinku lähestulkoon joka oppitunti, koska se on myöskin sit niille, jotka on tosiaan nopeesti tekee niin tota mä en halua niinku pidätellä heitä, et pitää mennä tasatahtiin vaan he voi sit mennä niinku eteenpäin. (Teacher 3)

Very great in my opinion. We use digital material in every lessons, well some might use e-books but we use Internet and the students use vocabulary apps and we have a digital exercise book in Pedanet and also some video material and everything else. So almost every lesson and those who want to proceed faster, I do not want to hold them back but with the help of digital material they can proceed in their own pace. (Teacher 3)

Not only does the digital material help the students but it can also enhance collaboration between teachers because, as teacher 2 suggested, teachers can use the groups in Facebook, for example, to share tips and links. Moreover, teacher 4 pointed out that as a result of the digital leap the material is easily obtained and the searching does not require too much time. However, as can be seen in example 32, one of the reasons that the teachers utilize the digital software is because the students need to know how to use them in Matriculation Examinations, which are electronic nowadays in Finland. Teacher 1 notes that the electronic material is a positive feature but the instruction should not be based on digitalization. It was also mentioned by teacher 2 that, currently, the digital material seems to be directed more to the weaker students.

(32) No auttaa sillä tavalla, että siellähän on aika paljon materiaalia, siellä tota sähköisellä puolella esimerkiksi SanomaPro:ssa ja sinne voi itse tehdä materiaalia. Mä oon enemmän käyttänyt abittia sen takia, kun oppilaitten pitää siihen tottua ja me tehdään abitissa kokeita ja sen sellaisia, kirjoitetaan aineita, et he tottuu siihen. Mut joo, kyl paljon niinku kaikennäköisiä sähköisiä järjestelmiä voi tehdä tai käyttää hyväksi. Mä käytän niitä aika paljon lisämateriaalina ööö mä en mielellään haluis sitä, et kaikki olis pelkästään sähköistä, koska mä en itse haluis elää pelkästään sähköisessä maailmassa, mun mielestä tarvitaan ihan sitä ihmiskontaktiakin ja ihan keskustelua niinku face-to-face, et se olis ihan kiva. (Teacher 1)

Well, it helps in a way that there is a lot of material in the digital side for example in SanomPro and you can create material there. I use Abitti because students need to get used to it and we do tests, write essays and stuff like that in Abitti. But one can utilize several digital systems. I use them as extra material because I would not want everything to be digital

because I would not want to live in that kind of a world. I think human contact is important and it is necessary to have face-to-face conversations with people. (Teacher 1)

Additionally, teacher 3 argued that since today everything is electronic and the world is digitalized, teachers should encourage learners to use the devices such as laptops, pads and mobile phones in the classroom instead of collecting them away in the beginning of the class. It is possible that the devices disturb the lesson but teachers should get the students to utilize the devices when completing the tasks because in the future work life the students are expected and required to use them correctly. Moreover, the digital world brings possibilities for upward differentiation in a sense that source criticism can be practiced by the advanced students, at least, as can be seen in example 33.

(33) Ja sitten toisaalta myöskin niin ää se, mikä mun mielestä tossa digitaalisuudessa on vielä lisäksi hyvää ja mikä on sellasille edistyneille opiskelijoille, mikä tuo haastetta niin tavallaan se, he pääsee semmoseen niinku mediakriittisyyteen myöskin pureutumaan niitten tehtävien avulla, et se tuo sit semmosta haastetta vielä lisää. (Teacher 3)

And one positive side of the digitalization especially for the advanced students is that they can grab onto topics such as media criticism through the tasks and, thus, it brings more challenge to them. (Teacher 3)

Teacher 4 was slightly more critical about the contents of the digital leap. She argued that in recent years, the main work has been to digitalize the material but, at the same time, the focus on pedagogical aspects has been neglected as example 34 shows. Thus, now that the digital processes are completed, the focus should be brought back to the contents.

(34) Nyt kun ne [kustantamot] saa ton digiloikan valmiiks tuolla ja nyt ne on saanu kaikki abitit sähköseks tai siis kaikki yo-kokeet sähköseks ja kaiken muun, niin jos nyt olis sit aika taas keskittyy siihen pedagogiikkaan siellä taustalla, et niinku tekniikka ja kaikki se on valmista niin nyt niitä pitää lähtee kehittää eteenpäin nimenomaan pedagogiikan näkökulmasta eikä niin, että et ei tehä enää sitä, mikä on toteutettavissa vaan sen, mitä niinku halutaan oikeesti toteuttaa. (Teacher 4)

Well, now that [the publishers] have wrapped up the digital leap and have made everything electronic, I mean have made the matriculations electronic and everything else, now would be the time to focus on the pedagogical aspect in the background. So now that everything is ready with the technical side, they should continue on developing the contents on the pedagogical perspective and execute what is wished to be executed. (Teacher 4)

It can be concluded that, all in all, the opinions about digitalization and its usefulness in upward differentiation were positive. All of the teachers utilized the digitalized material in their instruction, some less and some more. However, the digitalization gained criticism as well and the teachers emphasized the importance of social interaction. What is more, it was pointed out that when digitalizing the material, the pedagogical aspects cannot be forgotten. One explanation for this might be that the educational world, in Finland, is living in a culmination point and the digitalizing world is rapidly changing the educational environment as well.

5.2.4 In-service education

In this section the need for in-service education regarding upward differentiation is discussed. In the Finnish context we ought to think about how the educational field can support teachers in such a way that they feel comfortable and competent in differentiating their instruction. Additionally, one must note that in-service education could offer new methods for upward differentiation and make it possible for the teachers to find out that slight alterations can make a positive difference.

Mostly, the need for in-service education was recognized by the teachers. Common views were that education is always a good idea and since the student constituent and the materials are constantly changing, there is a demand to update skills. Teacher 3 pointed out that education regarding upward differentiation would be necessary for experienced teachers as well as young teachers as can be seen in example 35.

(35) Inklusion myötä niinkun sitten ne ryhmät on niinku todella, todella kirjavia saattaa olla, et et tota, enkä mä tiedä onko vieläkkään, miten paljon teille on puhuttu [eriyttämisestä] niin, että varmasti on tarvetta [täydennyskoulutukselle] sekä niinku pitkään ammatissa työskennelleille mut että sit myöskin niinkun tuoreille opettajille niin tota siin [eriyttämisessä] on nimittäin niin monta näkökulmaa ja varmasti auttais tässä työssä. (Teacher 3)

As a result of inclusion, the groups can be very heterogenic and I do not know if they have talked to you about differentiation in your studies, so definitely there is need for it [in-service education] both for those who have a long working history but also for new teachers. There are so many different views on differentiation and it would help in this occupation. (Teacher 3)

However, three of the four teachers who were interviewed in the present study pointed out some factors that need to be considered when asking for in-service education. According to teacher 1, recently the problem has been that the in-service education has not included any relevant or new information but rather has repeated the issues that the teachers are quite familiar with (see example 36). The teachers are already struggling with time as a resource and, thus, if there is a chance to get in-service education, it needs to be relevant.

(36) Mä en oikein tiedä onks meil kellään aikaa siihen. Et koulutus sinänsä on aina mun mielest hyvä asia, jos koulutus on oikeella tavalla suunnattu, et kouluttaja tietää kenelle hän puhuu, et on ollu sellasia koulutuksia tänäkin vuonna, et me oltiin niinku koko opettajakunta paikalla ja sit me mietittiin, että me tiedettiin tää asia jo 80- luvulla, et minkä takia tää kouluttaja oli niinku tääl tänään? (Teacher 1)

I do not know if anyone of us has time for it. Education itself is a good thing but it needs to be directed properly. In such a way, that the educator knows the audience because we have had such educations this year for example that all of the teachers thought that we know this issue already in the eighties, why is this educator here? (Teacher 1)

What is more, teachers 2 and 4 stated that the only in-service education that they have gotten in recent years has dealt with digitalization and knowing how to use the software and appliances as examples 37 and 38 show. Teacher 4 mentioned the digital in-service education but also education in assessment. Because of the digital leap, it is understandable that in-service education has focused on learning how to use the electronic devices but maybe now the focus could shift more towards pedagogical issues such as differentiation.

(37) Varmasti, en ikinä sano ei täydennyskoulutukselle et se on se on mun mielestä, tai siis eihän tää oo vaan mun ajatus et täähän on ihan yleistä, et meil Suomessa on hyvä opettajankoulutus, mut meil on erittäin huono täydennyskoulutus. On hyvin vaikea löytää niinku vaivan arvoista täydennyskoulutusta, että viimeiset 15 vuotta kaikki työnantajan tarjoamat täydennyskoulutus on oikeestaan siis melkein kaikki on ollu vaan sitä, että opetellaan ohjelmistojen käyttöä, minkä alta tota löytyy mikäkin ominaisuus ja mistä pääsee muuttamaan jotakin sen sijaan, et se olis semmosta niinku laajempaa ajattelun kehittämistä ja suurien asioiden hahmottamista. Se on ollu aikalailla tämmöstä niinku annetaan resepti käteen, et toimit näin. (Teacher 2)

Most definitely, I never say no to in-service education. And this is not only my opinion but it is widely known in Finland that we have a good teacher-training program but our in-service education is very bad. It is a struggle to find a proper in-service education and for the last 15 years the educations have focused on learning to use different softwares instead of learning to develop thinking and understanding the bigger picture. They have given us a recipe and instructed us to do as being told. (Teacher 2)

(38) Ylipäätään täydennyskoulutusta pitäis saada enemmän, et sen pitäis olla niinku selkeesti semmosta kohdennettua. Et ainut, mitä mä nyt keksin tässä äkkiseltään, mistä lukio-opettajaa on viime aikoina koulutettu niin on yo-kirjotus muuttuneet noi sähköiset kokeet ja sitten arviointi. Toi siis kirjoitelmien arviointi. (Teacher 4)

Overall, we should get more in-service education and it should be properly directed. The only in-service education that I can come up with has had something to do with the digitalized Matriculation examinations and assessment. I mean the assessment of essays. (Teacher 4)

Teacher 4 summarizes the opinions of all of the teachers in example 39. It is important that the focus of in-service education has been on ICT-skills because many teachers are struggling with the pressure that the digital leap has brought to education. However, there is a need for in-service education that focuses on English teacher's pedagogical skills but it should be targeted in a correct way and be provided by someone who understands what it means to be an upper secondary school teacher today. Thus, pedagogical skills could include for example differentiation and in-service education could be targeted at it.

(39) Et varmaan, jos sitä täydennyskoulutusta ois niin sitä pitäis osata markkinoida ja kohdentaa oikein ja se pitäis olla jonkun sellasen laatimaa, jolla on oikeesti käytännön kokemusta nykypäivän lukio-opettajan työstä, arkipäivästä, et mihin sitä tarvittas ja vaikka meiltä kysytään, okei siis it-asioihin me saadaan täydennyskoulutusta koko ajan, koska sillä on selkee semmonen niinku gappi vielä niinkun noitten tieto- ja viestintätaitojen kanssa, mutta mut ihan siis mun vaikka englannin ammattitaitoo, englannin opettajan ammattitaitoo niin ihan äkkiseltään muista, mitä mä oisin, ooksmä mitään koulutusta käyny tässä ihan lähiaikoina. (Teacher 4)

Probably, if there were in-service education, it would need to be focused in a right way and it should be given by someone who actually knows what it is to be an upper secondary school

English teacher today. We get in-service education about ICT- issues, because there clearly is a gap with the skills in that area. But I cannot come up with any in-service education that would have had something to do with my expertise as an English teacher. (Teacher 4)

It was interesting to find out that even though the interview question focused on in-service education of differentiation (see Appendix 1), the teachers were unified in demanding education of pedagogical issues as a whole. Therefore, it can be stated that there is need for in-service education of differentiation but with certain preconditions. Firstly, it needs to be selected accordingly and it needs to be targeted at certain subject teachers and well-limited. Secondly, the in-service education should be topical and deal with issues that the teachers find motivational. Thirdly, and most importantly, the in-service education must be qualified and the contents relevant.

5.3 Geographical differences in school-specific work

When analyzing the interviews, it was remarkable that the teachers were strikingly unified in their opinions. When discussing for example the challenges that upward differentiation faces in the upper secondary school classrooms, the perceptions were similar. One explanation might be that the teachers and the schools follow the same national guideline, the National Core Curriculum. There were, however, a few interesting features that were geographically specialized. These specialties are discussed in the following sub-sections.

5.3.1 Southern Finland

In the target upper secondary school in Southern Finland an English workshop was held by teacher 1. At first, I thought that the workshop was directed for weaker students and, therefore, considered as a supporting teaching. However, as teacher 1 describes in example 40, the workshop serves both the more proficient students as well as the students who need more practice. What is more, the workshop is easy to approach and is organized often.

(40) Ja mähän pidän sitä [englannin pajaa] nykyään ihan hirveesti. Et mä pidän sitä kohta melkein yhtä paljon ku mä opetan. Et nyt mä pidän sitä niinku maanantaista torstaihin aina vikalla tunnilla niinku kaikkien oppituntien jälkeen. Ja sit mä pidän erityispitkää kolmen ja puolen tunnin pajaa keskiviikkoisin, kun mul ei oo iltapäivällä opetusta, pelkästään abeille. Ja nyt esimerkiks viime viikolla mul oli 15 abii täällä. Kaikki tähtää johonki muuhun arvosanaan, kun pelkästään läpi. Ja siellä on sellasia, jotka sai E:n ja haluaa Laudaturin. Ne tulee tekee kaikkea mahdollista, mulla on aina abitissa joku ylppärikoe pyörii tai sit ne voi tehdä muita kuunteluita, voi tehdä sähköisiä tehtäviä, ihan mitä tahansa. Ja se on niinku mulla semmonen valtti tässä, et mä pystyn sen pajan kautta eriyttää mihkä suuntaan vaan. (Teacher 1)

And I keep it [the English workshop] a lot these days. I give it almost as much as I teach. I give it from Monday until Thursday always in the last lesson after other lessons. And the extra- long workshop that is 3,5 hours I keep on Wednesdays, when I do not have my own

teaching only for seniors. For example, last week I had 15 seniors here. Every one of them were aiming at higher grades than just passing the exams. And there were some students who got an E but wants to get a Laudatur. They come and do everything, I always have some old matriculation examinations in Abitti or they can do other listening comprehensions, digital exercises, whatever they want to. And through the workshop, I can differentiate in any direction I want to. (Teacher 1)

The English workshop gives the freedom to the teacher to differentiate instruction in a whole different level than in regular classes. Most importantly, the size of the group is generally smaller than normally which, as teacher 1 notes, gives the possibility to differentiate better. Moreover, the workshop does not stigmatize the students because it is voluntary and it focuses on both ends as example 41 demonstrates.

(41) Ja se paja on sillä tavalla, se antaa mulle tosi vapaat kädet niinku siihen et mä pystyn eriyttää minne tahansa ja ketä tahansa ja millä tahansa tavalla. Ja se on niinku mun mielestä ihanaa. Ja se on niinku kaikista antosinta tässä työssä, että on se sitten se, että joku huippuoppilas niinku tekee tietsä kielioppikirjaa kannesta kanteen, koska hän haluaa varmistaa, et hän osaa tai on se sitten heikko oppilas, joka ensimmäisen kerran osaa taivuttaa be-verbin oikein. Niin se on niinku mulle hirveen palkitsevaa. (Teacher 1)

The workshop gives me the freedom to differentiate in any way possible. And I love it. And it is most rewarding in this occupation when some excellent student does the grammar book from cover to cover because he/ she wants to make sure that he/she is competent or when some weaker student knows how to inflect be-verb properly for the first time. That is very rewarding to me. (Teacher 1)

It must be noted, that the upper secondary school in Southern Finland organizes web courses as well. It seemed that teacher 2 was focused on coordinating the web courses (see example 42). According to her, the web courses are especially popular among the more proficient students.

(42) Siinä mielessä sen verkkokurssin suorittaminen on ollu semmonen aika niinku näppärä ratkasu, että niillä ei mene, ei tarte tylsistyä tunnilla, voi edetä omaa tahtiaan ja niis on sit semmosii tehtävii, jos must niinku pääsee näyttämään et jos ne haluaa niin ne pääsee näyttämään sitä ajatteluaan ja käyttämään sitä, että just sen sortisia tehtäviä että minkä takia sä luulet, et kirjantekijät valitsi tämän aiheen et pitää vähän niinku laajentaa niit ajatuksii tai et mitä ajatuksii tää teksti herätti. (Teacher 2)

In a way, the web course has been a good solution because the advanced students do not need to get bored in the lessons and they can proceed in their own pace. And there are such tasks that they can show their skills and their thinking. The authors probably choose the tasks because the students need to broaden their thinking and analyze the thoughts that the text awakened. (Teacher 2)

As can be seen in example 42, the students with stronger proficiency can go forward in their own pace and challenge themselves with different tasks and exercises. Moreover, the web courses do not involve the risk that the advanced students would get frustrated in the regular classes. It must be noted that upward differentiation is, thus, enabled in the schools' course selection.

5.3.2 Central Finland

In Central Finland, there were a couple of examples of special courses that showed improved possibilities for upward differentiation. Teacher 3 in example 43 explained that she tried co-teaching with her colleague in the previous English course. Even though the number of students doubled, the teachers felt that they could differentiate better.

(43) Meil oli mun kollegan kans viime kurssissa, meil oli kakkos kurssia niin niin tota me tehtiin sillä tavalla, että meil oli samanaikaisopetusta, meil oli viiskyt opiskelijaa yhteensä, mutta jotenki se tuntu silti, että kun meitä oli kaks niin me pystyttiin paremmin eriyttämään siellä, kun sitten se, jos on vaan yksi opettaja ryhmässä. (Teacher 3)

In last course, we had a co-teaching experiment with my colleague. We had 50 students but somehow it felt, when there were two of us, that we could differentiate better than when there was only one teacher. (Teacher 3)

Teacher 3 continued explaining the organization of co-teaching and noted an interesting observation regarding the students' grouping. As can be seen in example 44, the students formed groups that were quite homogenous, i.e. the students on the same level were in the same groups. However, there were also groups that included students from different levels of English. In the heterogenous groups, the advanced students could instruct the weaker ones and, thus, the teachers could help the whole class better. The teachers had very positive opinions about the co-teaching experiment.

(44) He vähän semmosissa isommissa ryhmissä hakeutu niihin eri paikkoihin ja aika tavalla he hakeutu niinku samantasosten, et oli toki sellasia, et oli niinku oli semmonen opiskelija, joka pysty hyvin neuvomaan sitten tällasta, joka ei ehkä ollu yhtä nopea, et siinä tapahtu jo heiän niinku niissä ryhmissäki sitä eriytymistä mut myöskin niin, että siellä oli niinkun tämmösiä heterogeenisia ryhmiä, jotka autto toisiansa ja sitten me kierreltiin hyvin paljo, meil oli aika paljon, aika paljon he eteni niinku sitä omaa tahtia. Esimerkiks rakenneasioissa, et me opetettiin yhdessä jokin, sit he tsekkas sen itsearviointia käytti apuna ja sit me kierrettiin ja katottiin ja vielä autettiin, jos niinku joku tarvi erityistä apua, et se oli silleen kyllä tosi hyvä kokemus. Mutta hirveen vähän meillä on niinkun samanaikais/rinnakkaisopetusta. (Teacher 3)

When they are in bigger groups, they searched for different places and grouped with students who belonged to similar proficiency level. But there were such groups where advanced students could advise the weaker students, so differentiation happened already in the groups. But there were heterogenic groups that helped each other and then we walked around a lot. But mostly they proceeded in their own pace. For example, in structure issues we taught together and the students used self-assessment as help and we walked around and checked and helped if it was needed and it was a great experience. But we do not have that much co-teaching. (Teacher 3)

One of the most exciting features was the new course that will be piloted in 2019-2020. Contrary to the normal courses that are open to every student, this course is directed for the more proficient students who aim at academic education (see example 45). Instead of focusing on the structural use of language, this course focuses on the contents and different skills that

are necessary at the academic level. In my opinion, this course is upward differentiation at its best and, probably, the more proficient students find it not only useful but also motivational.

(45) Nyt ens vuonna meil on ensimmäistä kertaa kurssi, joka me tavallaan tarjotaan ylöspäin eriyttämiseksi.-- ja meil on 22 opiskelijaa ilmoittautunut esivalintojen kautta sille kurssille, suurin osa ja ehkä se markkinointikin kohdistu nimenomaan, suurin osa on niinku selkeesti semmosia korkeakouluopiskelijatyypisiä sit, et varmasti lähtevät tästä eteenpäin sitten yliopistoon tai ammattikorkeakouluun. Siel tulee nyt ja sitä mä vähän niinku markkinoinakin semmosin sanankääntein, että et jos kiinnostaa korkeakouluopinnot ja jos haluat niinku preppausta vaikka nyt erilaisten tekstien lukutaitoon ja erittelyihin ja itsetuottamiseen niin tää on sulle tää kurssi ja mä luulen, et ihan osallistujalistaa kattomalla niin se on nyt onnistunutkin niin. (Teacher 4)

Next year, we have a course for the first time, that offers upward differentiation.-- 22 students have applied for the course through pre-selections and most of the students are academic-oriented and maybe the marketing has focused on those students as well. So probably they will continue to university or university of applied sciences from here. I have marketed the course in such a way that if you are interested in academic studies and want to practise for example reading skills of different text types and producing texts then this course is for you. And by looking at the participant list, I feel that I have succeeded in the marketing. (Teacher 4)

Finally, similar to the upper secondary school in Southern Finland, web-based courses were organized in Central Finland as example 46 demonstrates. In Central Finland as well, the web courses were generally chosen by students with stronger proficiency. It seems that the more proficient students find the courses easier to approach and require less work than regular classes.

(46) Ja onhan meillä sit myöskin, hehän voi tehdä myöskin verkkokursseja eli he voi sitten tehdä nopeammin, nopeampaan tahtiin. Mutta tietysti verkkokurssilla on on se, että siinä jää sitten se semmonen sosiaalinen pois, mitä on sitten taas luokkatilanteissa. (Teacher 3)

We have web-courses, so they can proceed faster when attending those. But web-courses lack the social interaction, which normal class circumstances include. (Teacher 3)

To conclude, it was surprising that even though the Finnish school system is known for its equality and similar course structures, there were some differences that were divided geographically. However, in my opinion, it is rather positive that the schools have the kind of liberty to organize specialties that serve the students. Of course, there were similarities as well such as the web-based courses.

In the following section, I will focus on the students' perceptions of English teaching and learning at upper secondary school. What is more, I will discuss how the students define upward differentiation and how they would alter the contents of the English lessons.

5.4 The more proficient students' perceptions of using and learning English

In this chapter, the opinions of the more proficient students are discussed and analyzed. Similarly to the teachers, two students were interviewed from both schools, thus, altogether four students participated in the present study. In the excerpts I have marked the students anonymously by using a code *student* with a number indicating the person. Students 1 and 2 come from an upper secondary school in Southern Finland and students 3 and 4 come from Central Finland.

When studying upward differentiation practiced in schools, it is important that the students are represented in the study, because they are the targets of differentiated instruction. If the students find that teachers value their opinions, it will result in refined suggestions and motivation in completing the tasks. Thus, the students' opinions matter (see chapter 3.6, Roiha and Polso 2018: 28-30). In sections 5.4.1 and 5.4.2 the students everyday use of English is discussed. What is more, it is interesting to find out from which channels (such as school, social media, music and television) the students think they mostly learn English. Before focusing on the educational environment and upward differentiation (see chapter 5.5), it is necessary to present the students' general perceptions of the English language.

5.4.1 The students' use of English

The dominating role of English in the Finnish youth culture is visible. The youth easily adopts new terms and phrases in English and then continues to use them in their everyday interaction. As it was noted in chapter 2.3, the youth is acquainted with English through different channels such as music, internet and television and, today, the Finnish youth is somewhat acquainted with English even before they begin studying it at school. This phenomenon can be seen in examples 47 and 48 where the students explain that they had been acquainted with English either through television programs and movies or English language club even before they went to school.

(47) No siis varmaan jostain, jostain sieltä ala-asteen alkupäästä et niinku silleen suurinpiirtein aina muistaa, et on niinku ohjelmat kattonu pääosin englanniks ja ettei oo niinku silleen, no on jonkun verran dubattui elokuvii muistan, mitä on lapsena katottu mut enemmän kuitenkin silleen et on kattonu sit alkuperäiskielellä ja kaikkii tommosii. (Student 1)

Well, probably from the beginning of elementary school, I remember that I have always watched television programs mostly in English, a few of the were dubbed [into Finnish], what I remember, but mostly I have watched them in their original language. (Student 1)

(48) Osasin jotenki mut ainakin muistelin sillein, että se ei mitenkään ollu kaikki uutta. Sillon tarhaikäsenä, kun mä alotin Saksassa tarhan niin siel oli joku semmonen englantti-

kerho tai joku semmonen. Sinne me tuotiin sit aina jotai lappusia, että a car ja a dog, sun muita tämmösiä. Sit mä muistan vaan sen et mä aina unohin sen lappusen ja sen takia lopetin sen. Mutta joitakin kertoja olin siellä, et se oli niinku ekoi kertoi [tutustua englantiin]. (Student 2)

I knew it somehow and I remember that not everything was new. When I was in kindergarten in Germany, they had this English-club or something. We used to bring small pieces of paper, like a car and a dog and stuff like that. Once, I remember that I forgot the paper and I quit it because of it. But a few times, I attended it and it was the first time [to encounter English]. (Student 2)

It has to be noted, however, that one need not be a natural talent in English to become a more proficient learner of it at school. Despite the strong exposure to English through different channels, not everyone adopts it easily. One can, however, become interested in it later and learn it at school. As example 49 describes, well-done teaching and interest can have a positive impact on English skills.

(49) No siis, mähän en ollu yläasteella hirveen hyvä englannissa tai et tai olin semmonen seiskan, kasin oppilas ja sitte mä tulin lukioon ja sit mul nous yhtäkkiä se niinku kymppiin ja mä rupesin kiinnostuu sillon niinku ysin jälkeisenä kesänä ihan hirveesti ja mä opettelin niinku itsenäisesti tosi paljon niin sit siitä lähtien jotenki mä oon ruvennukki käyttää sitä enemmän, kun ymmärtää paljon paremmin nii ehkä silleen lukion alussa tai ysiluokalla. (Student 3)

Well, in secondary school, I was not that good at English, I was like an average student and then I came to upper secondary school and suddenly my grades got higher and after secondary school I became interested in English and started learning independently a lot. Consequently, I have begun to use it more often because I understand it better than in the beginning of the upper secondary school. (Student 3)

When interviewing the students about their everyday use in English many noted that they watch English television series, movies, listen to music in English and search for information in English (see examples 50 and 51). It was surprising, however, that the students pointed out that their verbal use of English is, often, limited to the oral practices at school. When asked about the language that the students use with their friends in social media such as Snapchat, most students said that often they use Finnish with friends.

(50) Mä haen tietoa englanniks joo ja sit kattoo jotain videoit, dokumentteja ja elokuvia. Joskus luen sanomalehtiä mut se on aika harvinaista ja tota nyt sitten tällais tarvittavissa sosiaalisissa tilanteissa, jos on jotain englanninkielisiä tota yhteyksiä vaikka kaveria, vanhempia tai ynnä muita. Siihen se pääosin rajottuu. (Student 1)

I search for information in English and then I watch videos, documents and movies. Sometimes I read newspapers but that is pretty rare. Also in social interaction circumstances if I have some English connections such as friends, parents or something else. In those situations. (Student 1)

(51) No puheessa ehkä vähemmän mut sitte must tuntuu, et aikalailta melkein kaikki asiat niinku, mitä tekee silleen, jos vaikka sosiaalista mediaa selaa, niin kyl mä katon aika paljon sillee, esim. Youtubesta niinku ulkomaalaisten melkein pä pääasiassa, että niinku aika paljon. (Student 3)

Not so much when I speak but I feel that in almost all of the things I do, for example scrolling through social media. I mostly watch content that is foreign for example in Youtube. (Student 3)

Students 3 and 4 noted in examples 52 and 53 that in addition to listening to English or watching English language programs, they use English when traveling abroad or with foreign friends. It seems that the youth has more courage to use English than the older generations such as their parents for example. It can be argued that the vast exposure to English and the fact that the youth knows English even before they begin studying it, encourages them to use it.

(52) Noo englantia ehkä mä matkustelen aika paljon niin sitten tota siellä mun vanhemmat on aina pienestä pitäen laittanu niinku mut tekemään semmosia pieniäkin, vaikka keskusteluja käymään kaupassa tai jossain. Ja sitte, ku kattoo paljon sarjoja esim. niin siinä tulee käytetty englanti. tai katottuu sit englanninkielisii ja sitten mä luen aika paljon nykyään kirjoja englanniks että siinä kans. Ne on varmaan semmosta. (Student 3)

Well English, I travel a lot and my parents have always put me to do stuff in English for example discuss with people in stores or somewhere else. And then, I watch series in English and then I read books in English also. So in those situations. (Student 3)

(53) Joo, kyllä me kavereitten kanssa käytetään tosi paljon ja sitten mulla on ulkomailta ystäviä ja käytetään niitten kanssa. Muuten sitten perheessä on ollu ihan pienestä asti kyllä sillain kuullu englantia niin. -- eniten just kavereitten kanssa ja no sit ehkä peleissä ja semmosissa, kun kattoo jotain sarjoja ja ja sitten mä oon opettanu joskus esim mun serkuille tai semmosta. (Student 4)

Yes, with friends I use [English] a lot and then I have foreign friends and use [English] with them. Otherwise, I have always heard English in my family.-- Mostly, with friends and when playing video games or when watching series. And then I have taught it to my cousins and stuff like that. (Student 4)

All in all, every student said that they either use English or at least are exposed to English daily. Exposure here means that the students watch for example Netflix without subtitles or with English subtitles. Some students mentioned that they listen to podcasts that are in English. What is more, some students underestimated their use of English but when they were given examples of exposure, they noticed that they are in contact with English every day. Therefore, it is no wonder that the Finnish youth is competent in English. In the following section, I will examine the channels that the students found to be significant when learning English.

5.4.2 Learning English through different channels

It was interesting that when being asked about the channels that teach most English to the students only one student (see example 54) did not mention school. Instead he noted the Internet and the role of different media as the best teachers of English. In addition, he mentioned that he succeeds in all languages in general.

(54) Kyl mä oon varmasti niinkun internetin kautta ja sillee, et niinku internetin ja medioiden kautta silleen kaikist eniten. (Student 1)

I feel that mostly through Internet and through Internet and different media. (Student 1)

Three of the four students, however, thought that school is one of the best teachers of English. Despite the vast exposure through different channels such as media, the English lessons at school focus on special vocabulary and create a base for the learning and acquiring of English as examples 55 and 56 demonstrate. Thus, it seems that learning English at school helps learning English through other channels.

(55) Varmaan kuuntelemalla ja sitten koulu. -- Tavallaan kun ne podcastit tai sitten ne sarjat on ehkä ennemminkin aina jotain tiettyä sanastoa niin sitte enkun tunneil tulee tavallaan kaikki ne muut sanastot sitten sieltä mitä ei ehkä tulis kuunneltua muuten. (Student 2)

Probably through listening and then school. -- In a way, podcasts and series include always some special vocabulary and in English lessons you learn other vocabulary that you would not learn otherwise. (Student 2)

(56) No ehkä eniten on tullu semmosta pohjaa koulusta, mutta just kyl televisio-ohjelmista [oppinut englantia], kun mä oon ilman tekstejä kuunnellu ja sitten peleistä, mä pienenä pelasin [videopelejä] paljon enemmän niin... (Student 4)

Well, the base has come from school but television series [have taught English], because I have listened to them without subtitles and then video games. I used to play [video games] much more when I was younger.. (Student 4)

Student 3 was the strongest advocate for school being the best channel to learn English. She especially mentioned the role of the teacher as being a motivator in the learning process. The teaching methods can have a huge impact in the student's willingness to learn as example 57 indicates. Consequently, the student who was an average student in English in the upper comprehensive school, can with a little help from the teacher flourish in upper secondary school and become a more proficient learner of English.

(57) No ehkä mä sanoisin, että niinku koulu ja sitte ohjelmat. Tai koulussa mä huomasin, että ku en hirveesti kokenu itelle hyväks niinku yläasteella sitä mun opettajan opetustapaa niin sitte ku mä tulin täällä niinku (opettajan nimi) tunneille niin sit mä huomasin siitä, et sil oli jotenki semmonen tapa opettaa, et mä motivoituin ja sit sai just, ku se tarkisti aina tehtävät tai katto, et oli tehny ja tälleen nii sit siin tuli jotenki tehtyy ja tuli semmonen motivaatio oppia ja teki siit semmosta kiinnostavaa. Nii ehkä se täällä tullu opetus ja sitten just sarjat. (Student 3)

Well, I would say that school and programs. In secondary school, I noticed that I did not find the English teacher's teaching methods good for me but when I came to upper secondary school and began learning with new teacher, I noticed that she taught in such a way that motivated me. She always checked the homework and, thus, I would always do the homework and I got more motivation to learn and she made the learning interesting. So I feel that the teaching here in upper secondary school and then series. (Student 3)

It was rather surprising to notice that even though the students intercommunicate daily in English at some level, most of them acknowledged the role of school in the learning process. Thus, this may indicate that the students value the English lessons at school and find them most

helpful when it comes to developing their English skills. It could be that the students perceive that their free-time use of English maintains their English skills rather than enhances them. What is more, individual teachers and teaching methods can affect the student's motivation and attitude towards language learning. This is an important observation and emphasizes the significance of differentiation which will be discussed in the following sections. With proper guidance, the students can thrive in English and, thus, become even more interested in the language. This, of course, serves the teachers as well.

5.5 Upper secondary school English lessons and upward differentiation according to the more proficient students

In this section, the students' perceptions of the English lessons in upper secondary school are discussed. Firstly, in section 5.5.1, I will present definitions that the students gave to upward differentiation. It must be noted that the students needed not know the correct definition for upward differentiation but it is interesting to find out if the more proficient students have heard about it and if they understand the term. Secondly, the following sections will answer to the third research question *How do the more proficient students experience English lessons at upper secondary school?* Based on the interviews about the students' perceptions of the teaching of A-syllabus English in upper secondary schools, it will be discussed whether there is a demand for upward differentiation. By asking the students about their wishes or modification suggestions to the tasks and lessons, the teachers are given concrete feedback from the advanced students and, thus, can utilize the information.

5.5.1 Defining upward differentiation

Roiha and Polso (2018: 9, 17, see section 3) have defined differentiation as a method of teaching that notices students as individuals and understands that different students have different needs. Thus, it supports teaching and its aim is to bring out the best in students. With differentiated methods students can develop according to their own level. Thus, differentiation can focus on the weaker as well as the more proficient students. In the present study, upward differentiation is a term given for the differentiation of the more proficient students.

When the target students were asked to give definitions for upward differentiation, it was surprising that all of them had heard of the term and, moreover, they were able to define it

relatively well. The students' definitions for upward differentiation in their own words can be seen in examples 58- 61.

(58) Joo. No se on niinku sitä, et oppilas on parempi tai huonompi ja sit se niinku saa erityis... tavallaan opetusta tai tämmöstä ryhmänohjauksesta poikkeavaa niinku käsittelyä. (Student 1)

Yes. Well, it means that a student is either advanced or weaker and then gets special... sort of special education or handling that differs from mass education. (Student 1)

(59) Oon mä varmaan kuullu joo, oisko se sitten sitä, että tavallaan eriytetään niitä oppilaita sen tason mukaan.-- Niille, joilla on vahva englannin taito ja jotka ehkä opiskelee, vaikei opettaja ois läsnä siinä koko aikaa. (Student 2)

I think I have heard about it, yes, maybe it could mean that the students are differentiated based on their proficiency levels. -- For those, who are more proficient in English and who maybe study even when the teacher is not there all the time. (Student 2)

(60) No eiks se oo vähä sillee, että tota niinku koetetaan, annetaan vaik jotain vaikeempii tehtäviä niille, ketkä niinku tavallaan vois tehdä niitä, että tai sillee. (Student 3)

Well, does not it mean that one gives, for example, more demanding tasks for those who could be able to complete them, or something like that. (Student 2)

(61) No onks se vähän semmosta erottelua, että saa ehkä vähän vaikeempia tehtäviä tai semmosta enemmän yksilöllistä. (Student 4)

Well, is it like a sort of separation, that one gets more difficult tasks or something more individual. (Student 4)

It can be said that the students were more or less acquainted with the term. One explanation might be that they had received differentiated instruction since all of them were above average students of English. It did not, however, become clear in the interview how the students knew the term. Student 3 mentioned that her parents work in the educational field and, hence, she had heard the term.

For the upcoming sections, it is important to know that the students were aware of the term upward differentiation. When the students understand that there are methods that can value their individual differences and that can help design lessons around their needs, the students' observations and suggestions become even more relevant. In the following section, the students' experiences of current English lessons in upper secondary schools are discussed.

5.5.2 The more proficient students' perceptions of the English lessons

Generally, the students considered the English lessons being relevant and enhancing the learning of English. However, when asked about the teaching methods, the students thought that the methods are quite old-fashioned and focus too much on formal language learning such as teacher-oriented lecturing. Both views are represented in examples 62 and 63. Many students

noted that the exercises are usually too easy and if teachers give extra tasks, they repeat the already known topics.

(62) No, se just riippuu tosi paljon opettajasta, että mä koen ne [englannin oppitunnit] kyllä yleisesti silleen aika mukaviks tai semmosiks miellyttäviks. Mutta se riippuu just siitä, että millasta se opetus on, että jos se on sellasta hirveen luentoo ja sitte tehään vaan pelkästään jotain tehtäviä niin sit se aika menee tosi hitaasti mut sitte jos on vaikka välis jotain keskustelutehtäviä tai jotain ööm tota niinku enemmän semmost, mis pääsee niinku tekemään jotakin muuta kun vaan kuuntelemaan sitä opetusta niin sit ne menee paljon mukavammin ja oppii monipuolisemmin siitä. Se on kivempi silleen. (Student 3)

Well, it depends so much on the teacher, I think that they [English lessons] are usually quite nice and pleasant. But it depends on the teaching, the time goes slowly if it is only the teacher lecturing and then some tasks, but if it includes some discussion tasks and some tasks where you can do something else than only listen to the instruction, the lessons are so much more pleasant and one learns better. It is much nicer that way. (Student 3)

(63) Mmm, no ne on vähä semmosii jakaa et ne on vähä tota ehkä vähä silleen tavallaan vanhanaikasiks tavallaan et vähä silleen et opetetaan ja luetaan kappaleita ja vähä sillee et niinku se on mun mielest semmonen pikkusen turhauttava asia. Et mä... just niinku tavallaan se, et lukee kappaleit ja käy sanastoo nii se ei oo mun mielest niinku semmonen kauheen inspiroiva tapa opiskella, ku on kuitenkin kymmenen vuotta koht lukenu tätä kieltä. Vois jo jotain muutaki olla, et siinä mieles vähä turhauttavia, mut sit joskus siel taas ihan hyvin tulee jotain vaikka tällasia ryhmäkeskusteluja pidetään joskus. Mut pääpiirteissään vähä semmosii turhauttavia ne ehkä on. (Student 1)

Mmm, well it depends, maybe they are a bit old-fashioned and frustrating in a way that they include teaching and reading chapters from the text books. I do not feel that reading chapters and going through vocabulary is a very inspiring method of learning, especially when you have studied the language for almost ten years. There could be something else, so in a way, slightly frustrating, but sometimes they include group discussions that are good. But mostly frustrating. (Student 1)

The students were, however, quite understanding towards their English teachers and noted that today's class sizes in upper secondary school are so big that it is not possible to give individualized tasks to every student. Therefore, the teaching tends to be unvaried and directed to masses. Student 1, however, argued that since the proficiency levels are remarkably different in today's A-syllabus English classes something ought to be done as example 64 demonstrates.

(64) No ehkä just tavallaan se et siel niinku tavallaan et ku tää on kuitenkin a-kieli ja sitä on luettu niin kauan nii ehkä se et vähä niinku keskitytään semmosiin epäoleellisiin asioihin ja sit se niinku ehkä se et siel on kuitenkin tai siis ymmärrän, miks keskitytään, mut se et niit tasoeroi pitäs rupee vähä huomioimaan et niinku tavallaan se, et niinku siel on niit oppilaita, keille se parinsadan sanan esseen tuottaminen on hankalaa, mut sit on taas semmosii, jotka vois kirjottaa hyvin tuhat sanaa vaikka. Et niinku se et sitä pääsis vähän omaa potentiaaliaan käyttämään paremmin. (Student 1)

Well, maybe especially because this an A-syllabus language, sometimes we concentrate on issues that are irrelevant and I understand why we concentrate on those issues but I think that they should take into notice the differences in proficiency levels. There are students who struggle with writing a two hundred word essay but then there are those, who could easily write thousand words. One should be able to use his/her full potential there. (Student 1)

In addition, the students were asked about the negative and positive factors in the English classes to get a proper general view. The students had several thoughts on the negative sides in

the English lessons. Almost all of the answers included extra-tasks that repeat the same topic. The impact of such tasks is that the students get frustrated and do something else instead of the exercises. According to the students, extra-tasks, as such, are not irritating but the tasks should be more challenging and, thus, motivating such as old Matriculation Examination booklets. Thus, frustration and boredom were common terms to describe the English lessons as can be seen in examples 65 and 66.

(65) No mun mielest just, täähän liittyy varmaan vähän ylöspäin eriyttämiseenki, että jos me käydään just jotain tosi helppoja tehtäviä, mitkä on ollu vaikka läksynä, kun ne käydään niinku läpi siinä tunnilla niin sit siihen saattaa mennä tosi kauan aikaa ja sitte se voi vähä tuntuu turhauttavalta tai tylsältä. (Student 3)

Well, I think, and probably this relates to differentiation as well, that sometimes we go through some easy tasks, for example homework, and it might take such a long time and that can feel frustrating or boring. (Student 3)

(66) Välillä joo, jos nyt on joku, vaikka opetellaan jotain kielioppia, mikä on opeteltu jo viis kertaa ja se on itelle selvää ja tulee jo sillee, et sun ei tarvii miettiä sitä vaan se vaan tulee. Nii sit se on vähä silleen, että no mitäs tässä tekis sitten sen aikaa, pyörittelee peukaloita. (Student 2)

Sometimes, yes, if we study grammar that we have studied five times already and it is so familiar to you that you do not have to think about it, it just comes. And in those situations, you are like, rolling your thumbs. (Student 2)

Additionally, student 1 argued that the teaching methods should be updated because they affect the contents of the lessons as well (see example 66).

(66) No ne [opetustavat] on mun mielestä kans vähän niinku vanhanaikaset. Niinku opettajien opetustavastahan noi tuntien sisällötkin on lähtösin, et et se on vähä semmosta, et kyl siel nyt niinku jo silleen, et niinku ei oo semmost täysin ryhmäjohtosta et välil laitetaan kuitenkin työskentelemään pareittain tai pienryhmissä, joka on kuitenkin ihan hyvä mut vähä semmost edelleen niinku pikkusen vanhanaikasta. (Student 1)

Well I think that they [the teaching methods] are old-fashioned. And the contents of the lessons base on the teachers' teaching methods. Sometimes we have pair work or mini groups, which is a good thing, but mostly it is a bit old-fashioned. (Student 1)

It seems that the students would like to work in groups and, thus, get to practise their oral skills during lessons. Moreover, at least according to the more proficient students in the present study, the students dislike the outdated, teacher-oriented learning. Because of the large group sizes the students with stronger proficiency feel that they get less individualized instruction and are given less tips on how to improve their English skills.

Even though the students' thoughts focused mostly on the negative issues in English lessons, they found positive sides as well. The students were aware that they are being taught by academic professionals and they praised the teachers' language knowledge. The students also noted that the English teachers are helpful and encourage the students to learn more and

challenge themselves. Additionally, student 3 mentioned that the best feature of English lessons is the versatility (see example 67).

(67) No, hyvää on se et saa aika paljon kuitenkin niinku monet opettajat kiertelee siellä ja just jos tehään vaik jotai parijuttuu, semmosta a/b-harjoituksia niin sit siin voi sillee kysyä, et se on siinä hollilla, et voi kysyä niin se on ehkä kiva ja sitte tota ehkä et käydään tosi selkeesti asioista tai en mä oikein osaa sillee sanoo.-- Ehkä et me ei niinku just se on tosi monipuolista, et kuunnellaan kappaleita ja käydään sanastoja läpi ja tälleen. Se monipuolisuus ehkä mut en mä osaa sanoo. (Student 3)

Well, positive factors include the fact that the teachers walk around the classroom and if we have some pair work such as a/b-exercises, then you can consult the teacher which is a nice thing. And also the fact that the issues are clearly presented, I cannot really say.-- Maybe that it is so versatile, because we listen to chapters and go through vocabulary and stuff like that. The versatility maybe, I cannot really tell. (Student 3)

To conclude, when the more proficient students were being asked about their perceptions of the English lessons at upper secondary school, the negative issues dominated the answers. The different geographical locations did not bring any differences to this. The lack of individualized learning and unvaried extra-tasks were the most frequently mentioned issues. However, some students pointed out that the teaching methods can vary substantially between different teachers of English. In the following section, the development of language proficiency in the English lessons is discussed. When studying the more proficient students and upward differentiation, it is relevant to see whether the regular English lessons actually improve the students' English skills according to them.

5.5.3 The development of language proficiency in the English lessons

In spite of being above average level students in English, the students revealed that there are areas in their language proficiency that the English lessons at school develop. The students seemed to value the education they get in upper secondary school and no one suggested that the lessons were useless. Nevertheless, there were some areas in language proficiency that the English lessons develop more.

As examples 68 and 69 demonstrate, the students believed that oral skills, especially speaking, were enhanced in the English lessons. Students 1 and 2 noted that even though they are exposed to English often, they cannot practice speaking in their free time. At school, speaking is practiced through different exercises with pairs or in groups. The students spoke very positively about course 8 in A-syllabus English (see chapter 2.2). "The speaking course" as the students named course 8, concentrated solely on practicing oral skills through different discourse

practises with peers and teacher. The students mentioned that they would gladly participate in such courses and wished that there were more oral practise in the curriculum.

(68) No varmaan, varmaan niinku ehkä puhetta ja jonkun verran kielioppii, et niinku se kuullun ymmärtäminen on jo silleen aika hyvä. Et ne on mun mielest vähä epäoleellisii mitä nää ylioppilastutkintolautakunnan ja muiden kuuntelukysymykset on. -- Ja siis no luetun ymmärtäminen on kans kyl niinku silleen, et ehkä sit vähä sitä suomentamistaitoo kans kehittää, sitä et osaa niinku et sä osaat niinku jonkun englanninkielisen asian, et mul on jotain sillee, et mä saatan tietää hyvinkin jonkun sanan englanniks mut mul ei oo harmainta aavistusta, mikä se on suomeks. Et niinku se siin kehittyi kyl sit ku pistetään joskus suomentamaankin jotain. (Student 1)

Well probably, oral skills and grammar, my listening comprehension skills are quite good already. I think the exam questions in Matriculation Examinations are somewhat irrelevant. -- And well, reading comprehension as well, and they develop also the translating skills, for example, when you know something in English but you do not have a clue what it is in Finnish. So translating skills are developed when they make you to translate something in Finnish. (Student 1)

(69) No puhuminen ehkä, koska ite nyt ei tuu puhuttuu enkkuu niinku silleen mitenkää puhelimessa kenenkään kanssa tai vapaa-ajalla. (Student 2)

Well, oral skills, because I do not speak in English that much in phone, with friends or in my free time. (Student 2)

Student 3, however, felt that since oral skills are mainly exercised in course 8, the English lessons at school do not improve them enough. Students 3 and 4 suggested that the English education at school enhances vocabulary knowledge because the study material includes a great deal of special vocabulary that needs to be learned (see examples 70 and 71).

(70) No must tuntuu, et ei ehkä kehitä silleen yleisesti puhumista, koska sitä ei niin paljon harjotella muutaku siellä puhekurssilla, et just niinku kieliopin varmuuteen semmosta kielikorvaa ehkä kehittää mun mielestä eniten. Ja sitten, no sanastoaki, se tulee ehkä enemmän niitten tehtävien kautta, mut ei silleen tunneilla niin paljoa, mutta just sillee semmosta yleistä kielitietoo tai silleen just kielioppi ja sanasto ehkä eniten. Kyl se puhumistakin silleen välillä, jos on jotain puhumistehtävii mut ei siinäkään silleen niinku tavallaan sitä ääntämisen oikeutta tai sitä niinku opi vaan siin oppii ehkä vaan rohkeemmaks puhumaan, mut sitte muu pitää tehdä sillee puhumisen kautta ehkä ite kotona. (Student 3)

Well, I feel that they do not develop oral skills in general, because oral skills are only practiced in the speaking course. So they develop mostly grammar knowledge and your proficiency in English. And then, well vocabulary as well, through different exercises but not so much in the lessons. Maybe mostly they develop the general language knowledge and grammar and vocabulary. Sometimes oral skills when we have discussion tasks but you do not learn pronunciation, you only get more encouraged to use the language. Everything else that has something to do with orals skills you have to learn it yourself at home. (Student 3)

(71) No mun mielestä mulla ainakin sanavarasto just koulussa paranee, kun on semmosta erilaista sanastoo, kun yleensä mitä kotona käyttää. Ja sitte varmaan kans just semmonen, just semmonen luetun ymmärtäminen, mitä ei välttämättä kotona tuu tehtyä. (Student 4)

Well, for me at least, my vocabulary knowledge is developed at school, because we learn different vocabulary than what you use in everyday life at home. And then also reading comprehension is developed, because you do not do that at home. (Student 4)

Both areas of language learning, oral skills and vocabulary are important and it is positive that the students with stronger proficiency support the view that upper secondary school education advances their language skills even though they are rather proficient in the subject. What is more, the students' views agree somewhat with what teacher 2 mentioned in example 11 (see chapter 5.1.1). Teacher 2 mentioned that the students seem to need more practise on vocabulary learning and, especially, reading because the fluency of translation tasks has decreased. Therefore, it is no wonder that the students indicate that especially vocabulary skills are improved at school. In my opinion, these issues should be taken into consideration when planning upward differentiation. If the more proficient students propose that these are the skills they would need to practise, upward differentiation could focus on these issues and, thus, enhance the language learning for students with stronger proficiency.

5.5.4 Familiarity with students: the students' point of view

In chapter 5.1.2, familiarity with students was analyzed from the teachers' point of view. However, in the interview, I asked the students about the topic and how they perceive it in the upper secondary school English courses. What is more, the students gave examples of how the teachers' familiarity with students is seen in the classroom or in the teacher's interaction.

According to the students, the teachers' familiarity with students is not very comprehensive. One reason could be that upper secondary schools located in larger cities tend to have several English teachers. Consequently, the students can choose courses rather freely and, thus, the teachers. Therefore, the familiarity cannot deepen if the student attends only one course with the same teacher. However, if the student can choose the same teacher repeatedly, the chances to deepen the relationship increases as can be seen in examples 72 and 73.

(72) No ei ehkä ihan [tunne opiskelijoita tai heidän kykyjään]. Et se on täälki vähän semmonen vääristynyt, kun paljon on eri opettajia kelle voi mennä nii se on vähä semmonen et niinku, jos nyt käy samalla opettajalla koko ajan nii kylhän se tietää sun tasos mut sit toisaalt et se [oppilaantuntemus] ei oo ehkä semmonen, mist lähtis opettajien osaamista syyttämään vaan enemmänki sellast, et ku ei vaan nyt saa sillee järjestymään, et olis sama opettaja. (Student 1)

Well, not quite [know the students and their abilities]. It is a little distorted here, when there are so many different teachers you can go to and if you attend the same teacher's courses all the time, it is inevitable that the teacher becomes aware of the language proficiency level but I would not blame the teachers' competence [about the familiarity with students]. It is rather that it is not always possible to get the same teacher. (Student 1)

(73) No, yleisesti ei, mut mul on sattunu olee silleen, et mul oli ekat kolme kurssii just [opettajan nimi] ja sitten siin tavallaan [opettajan nimi] oppi tuntemaan ja sitte varsinki silloin, ku me oltiin vielä kaks eri kouluu nii sit ku me yhistyttiin niinku nyt syksyllä niinku yheks kouluks kaks koulua, nii silloin ku oli pienemmät porukat ja tuli, kävi samat niinku oli

vähemmän enkun opettajia niin sitä tavallaan oppi tuntemaan enemmän, mutta nytte täällä tuntuu, että ne ei aina ees meinaa muistaa nimiä sillee vasta ku joskus yli puolen kurssin jälkeen. (Student 3)

Well, generally no, but I happened to have the same teacher [name of the teacher] for three courses and, therefore, the teacher got to know me. Especially before the fusion, there were two separate schools and we had smaller groups, the English teachers knew us better but now here, they do not remember even our names sometimes until towards the end of the course. (Student 3)

The students might, however, begin to select the English courses based on either the teacher's character or the eagerness to get to know the students and their language abilities as examples 74 and 75 indicate. Thus, it seems that the familiarity with students is significant to the student as well. If the teacher is not interested in learning even the name of the student, there is a chance that the student will not select the teacher's course in the next period.

(74) No must tuntuu, et ne oppilaat, jotka on niinku kaikilla kursseilla aina sillä samalla opettajalla, jos ryhmäkoko pysyy semmosena hyvin pienenä niin kyllä sitten ainakin, kyl mä oon huomannu, että mun opettaja kyllä sillai tuntee jo, että mä osaan hyvin ja sitte oppii just niitä oppilaitten tarpeita niinku ulkoo. Jos on semmonen tosi iso ryhmä niin ei sil oo oikeen niinku mahdollisuuttakaan oppia kaikkia. (Student 4)

Well, I feel that the students who attend the courses held by the same teacher and if the group size stays small, then yes. I have noticed that my teacher knows me and that I am good in English and also other students' abilities. But if the group is very big, it is not possible to remember everyone's skills. (Student 4).

(75) Mmm, siis jos sul on ollu sitä samaa opettajaa nii kyl ne, mulki on ollu niinku nyt kuus kurssia [opettajan nimi], ja ja yks kurssi [opettajan nimi] nii [opettajan nimi] kyllä tuntee ja tietää mun tason. (Student 2)

Mmm, yes, if you have attended the same teacher's courses. I have attended [name of the teacher] courses six courses in a row and one course by [name of the teacher] and they know me and my proficiency level. (Student 2)

In the interview, the students described the teachers' familiarity with students with concrete examples that can be seen in the classroom or in teacher's intercommunication. Many students noted that, often, teachers order the more proficient student to answer if no one else raises their hand and, thus, shows that the teacher is aware of the student's skills (see example 76). However, it seems that the familiarity is valuable to the students because they do not have to worry or feel embarrassed if they do not succeed every time. Consequently, it can be said that the teachers' familiarity with students decreases the students' stress-levels as example 77 shows.

(76) On kuitenkin sellasii, jotka tietää tietää hyvin sut niinku nimeltä ja tietää, et jos kukaan ei osaa vastata niin sä osaat vastata tai tietää että sä et varmasti osaa vastata tähä kysymykseen ja. -- Se on just sillee, et se tietää et jos luokka on ihan hiljanen, kukaan ei viittaa nii se tietää, et tolt voi kysyy ja se tietää, vaikkei se viittaakaan niin se nyt on semmonen mikä niinku kertoo siit, et tuntee opiskelijat about. (Student 1)

There are such teachers who know you well and know that if no one else knows the answer, you know it and.-- If the class is quiet and no one raises their hand, the teacher knows that she/he can ask from him/her, even if she did not raise his/her hand. It shows that the teacher knows pretty well the students. (Student 1)

(77) No vaikka joku essee nii se tietää et oonks mä alisuorittanu vai ylisuorittanu. Se vaan sanoo sitte, että ei vissiin ollu hyvä päivä tai ei oikein onnistunu, että tavallaan se, että jos nyt menee kerran huonommin nii ei tarvii pelätä sitä, et nyt se luulee, et mä oon kauheen huono vaan sit se tietää, et oli vähän huonompi päivä ja ens kerralla sit paremmin. Et se pysyy tavallaan ehkä se itseluottamus siinä, et kyl sä osaat, tänään oli vaan huonompi. (Student 2)

Well, take an essay for example, the teacher knows if I have underachieved or overachieved. The teacher might say that this was not such a good day or this time it did not go so well but you do not have to be afraid of failing because the teacher knows your competence and knows that next time better. So you can keep your confidence even if you do not succeed always, it was just a bad day. (Student 2)

One convenient example of the teachers' familiarity with students' abilities was the students' division into groups for certain tasks as example 78 demonstrates. If the teachers divide the students into groups based on their proficiency levels, they need to be aware of the students' skills. Grouping is also one method of upward differentiation as was discussed in chapters 3.6 and 3.7.1. Therefore, it can be noted that grouping combines both familiarity with students' skills and upward differentiation.

(78) Hmm, no ehkä siinä, jos on tämmösiä no ryhmätöitä jaetaan niin sitten aika monesti jaetaan just semmosella hyvällä tasolla... tasokkain, et vähän paremmat on ja sitten vähän huonommat tai sitten välillä saattaa sekottaakin sillain, että on ihan eri tasosia eri ryhmissä. (Student 4)

Hmm, well maybe in that if we have group assignments, the teacher divides the students into groups based on the students' proficiency levels like the more advanced ones and the weaker ones or the teacher might mix the groups so that they include students from different [proficiency] levels. (Student 4)

Student 4 mentioned, however, that grouping based on students that belong to the same proficiency level is useful and fun. If the group consists of students from different proficiency levels, it can be frustrating because the more proficient one might have to do everything that the task requires. One positive side of the mixed groups is that the advanced student may help and support the weaker ones.

It can be said that not only is the familiarity with students valuable to the teachers but it is also important to the students. It can lead to selectivity especially in larger upper secondary schools but it can also help the students to cope with the workload and, thus, increase their well-being. Teacher 4 in chapter 5.1.2 emphasized the importance of a relationship between the teacher and the student and it seems that the students value it as well. One must remember that the familiarity with students can be seen as the base of upward differentiation (Tomlinson, 2014).

In the Finnish context we ought to think about how the schools can support this important issue. One factor could be smaller group sizes in upper secondary schools.

5.5.5 The more proficient students' suggestions for English lessons

In the present study, it has been shown that according to the students the English lessons could be improved by for example modernizing the tasks and the teaching methods (see chapter 5.5.2). In addition, it has been proposed that when it comes to the more proficient students, their subjective experience was that English lessons at upper secondary school develop only certain areas of their language proficiency such as oral skills and vocabulary (see chapter 5.5.3). Therefore, it is important to examine the answers to the sub-question of the third research question *How would they modify the teaching or the lessons?*

There was one recurring element that emerged from the students' answers. Every student recommended discourse exercises such as conversations in groups to the lessons as examples 79 and 80 reveal. This finding connects to what was explained in chapter 5.5.2 that the students would like to practise their oral skills during the English lessons. Student 3 advocated for discourse activities because she likes to discuss and would like to practise it more in English. In my opinion, discourse activities could enhance the fluency of English and encourage the students to use it outside the school context

(79) Mä ehkä haluaisin niinku just sellast tavallaan et et niinku pystyttäs tämmöst käytännön kieltä ikään kun hyödyntämään et käytäs jotain tämmösii vapaamuotosii keskusteluita ja sit ehkä et hyödynnettäs jotain tällasii niinku kirjallisuutta tai jotain medioita tai tällasii, et se on niinku sellanen, mikä ois mun mielestä sellanen toivottava tapa opiskella. (Student 1)

What I would want is that we could utilize practical language in a way that we could have informal discussions and we could utilize different literature or media or stuff like that. In my opinion, that would be a desirable method of studying. (Student 1)

(80) En mä tiää jotenki sillee ryhmässä ehkä niinku käydä läpi jotai niinku discuss. -- Niinku keskustella aiheista, käydä jotain ajankohtasia aiheita esimerkiks Brexit tai Donald Trumppi, jotain hommia tai ilmaston lämpenemistä sun muita tavallaan ajankohtaisia aiheita, mistä puhua tai kirjottaa tai niihin liittyvää sanastoa. (Student 2)

I do not know, maybe we could discuss in groups. -- We could have discussions about topical issues such as Brexit or Donald Trump or about global warming or other topical subjects that we could talk or write about and learn vocabulary. (Student 2)

Student 4 felt that the content of the English lessons are satisfactory but she suggested that the lessons could include more autonomy and groupwork as can be seen from example 81. She noted that the teachers could use other sources than the mandatory books in the instruction and, consequently, make the studying more creative.

(81) No varmaan just alussa, tunnin alussa voitais käydä yhdessä niinku tehtäviä tai kielioppia läpi, mutta sitten ehkä semmoset ryhmätehtävät ois kiva tehdä pienryhmissä, ja sitten kans itsenäisesti. Et varmaan sillain olis. (Student 4)

Well, maybe in the beginning of the lesson we could go through exercises together or grammar, but group tasks would be nice to do in small groups and also independently. Like that. (Student 4)

Furthermore, student 1 suggested that the English lessons could learn from Finnish lessons. Thus, the English lessons could include more of reading books and analyzing them as well as creating conversations and debates on hot topics in the society. There was a general desire among the more proficient students that when, for example assessing essays, the teachers could focus more on the content than the grammar and the correct use of language. Thus, it could serve the more proficient students' needs better and develop them in the areas they might find difficult. In other words, this could be a form of upward differentiation as was discussed in chapter 5.2.1.

There were some suggestions that, on one hand, seemed quite radical but, on the other hand, describe the current situation with English at upper secondary schools and in the society. The students discussed that the only problem with the English classes is not only the large size but also the fact that the proficiency levels are so heterogenous. Thus, the instruction that is targeted to the mass does not serve the more proficient students. Therefore, there were a couple of cautious suggestions that the English lessons could be divided into different groups based on the proficiency level of the students such as in mathematics (see examples 82 and 83). As a consequence, it would be up to the student which group he/she wants to choose and, thus, could get instruction that serves his/her educational needs better.

(82) No siis, mä en tiedä, voisiko se sit olla silleen et niinku mitä matematiikas on et monet opettajat tai et niinku lyhyes matematiikassa on yleensä samat opettajat suurin piirtein ja pitkässä samat et siel on niinku tai tiedetään, kun matematiikassakin tiedetään et tää opettaja vaatii vähän enemmän kuin tää ja tän kokeet on vaikeimpia nii jos sitä englannissakin vois olla sit silleen et tää tietty opettaja vetää vaan sit vähä vaikeempia kursseja. (Student 1)

Well, I do not know, could we, like in mathematics, where in basic syllabus and advanced syllabus mathematics we usually have the same teachers, so the students know that some teachers might demand more than someone else and some teacher's tests may be more difficult than some other's. So in English as well, a certain teacher could teach only the more difficult courses. (Student 1)

(83) No mun mielestä siis vois tehdä niitä enkun kursseja silleen, et on vaikka samasta kurssista semmonen niinkun tavallaan advanced tai silleen, et niinku ois silleen vähä.-- Ois oma tai tavallaan vois saman kurssin valita silleen semmosen simppelempään tai semmosen vähä haastavamman tai mun mielest se ois niinku ehkä paras keino, koska sitte ne ympärillä olevat ihmisetki ois niitä, ketä tota osais tai vähä paremmin ja ois vaikka kiinnostuneempiakin. Niin sitte tavallaan ne tunnit vois mennä vähän nopeempaa ja vois käydä vähä enemmän asioita.-- Vähä silleen tasojen mukaan, mut sit silleen, et sais ite päättää

eikä laitettais silleen, koska niin. Ehkä. Se tuli mulle nyt vaan mieleen, en oo aiemmin miettiny. (Student 3)

Well in my opinion we could have English courses that are leveled such as advanced.. -- The course would be the same but one could select either a simpler course or a more advanced one, I think that would be the best way, because then the students would probably be in the same proficiency level in the course. They could be more advanced and more interested in the subject. Thus, the lessons would go faster and they could include more topics. -- Based on the proficiency level but in a way that the student could decide the course type, because yes. Maybe. It just popped into my mind, I have not thought about this before. (Student 3)

To conclude, the students' wishes and suggestions were surprisingly careful even though during the interview I encouraged them to think creatively and reminded them that they were free to use their imagination. Moreover, the suggestions linked strongly to the school environment and activities they were familiar with. One explanation might be that the students are per se satisfied with the instruction they receive and do not need profound modifications.

Nevertheless, the notions of ability grouping that were suggested by student 1 and 3 could be taken into consideration. In the Finnish context we ought to think about this because the situation with English is extremely different in the society than with other foreign languages (see chapter 2). If the class sizes continue to grow, the voluntary ability grouping or adding advanced English courses to the curriculum could be considered as an option, because the large class sizes hinder differentiation.

6 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This chapter will, in section 6.1, summarize the findings of the research and give answers to the research questions of the study. Secondly, in section 6.2 the study will be evaluated and possible implications of the findings will be discussed. Finally, in section 6.3, suggestions for future research will be presented.

6.1 Findings of the present study

The present study was a qualitative study that had a special focus on both the students' and teachers' perceptions of upward differentiation from two different upper secondary schools in Finland. It targeted both students and teachers because it is relevant to find out the opinions of both groups and, moreover, it is interesting to compare the results and seek for the similarities and differences. For improving the education of English of the more proficient students, it is

relevant to find out the students' views on English education at upper secondary school and what kind of teaching could serve the more proficient students' needs. The data for the study was gathered by interviewing personally the teachers and the students at the upper secondary schools (N= 8) and it was analyzed by using a qualitative content analysis method (for more information, see chapter 4.2.4).

As for the first research question (RQ 1: *How does the status of English in Finland show in the more proficient students' English language skills?*) the findings show that the dominant status of English in the Finnish society is clear and it affects greatly the students' language skills according to the English teachers. However, even though the effect is visible, it is unevenly distributed i.e. it divides the students into advanced and weaker ones more than it used to. Thus, it creates polarization between the students' proficiency levels. The glaring differences in proficiency levels might have an interrelationship with learner group sizes, in other words, the larger the learner groups, the greater the differences in proficiency levels.

What is more, the prominent role of English seems to distort the students' perceptions of their own language skills. Many teachers pointed out that when students manage in social media with their English language skills, they become more confident but they also become blinded to their actual proficiency level in English. Therefore, it is important that the students would be exposed to the grammatically-correct English that is required in academic and work life.

However, some teachers also pointed out the fact that the demands in the society have increased because of the visible role of English. Because English is seen and heard in everyday Finland, it is automatically assumed that everyone is competent in it. This attitude, however, increases the polarization between the students' skills because not everyone is exposed to the language and not everyone is as interested in learning it as someone else. It is a fact that the Finnish youth knows English well but the demands for example in the Matriculation Examinations of English are rather high today. Therefore, it is not far-fetched to say, as one teacher did in the interview, that in order to succeed in the examinations and upper secondary school English courses, one must be interested in English and learn it as a hobby besides school.

The second research question (RQ2: *How do the more proficient students experience English lessons at upper secondary school?*) focuses on upward differentiation from the teachers' perspectives. Generally, every English teacher in the present study considered upward

differentiation as important as downward, which answers to the first sub-question about the teachers' attitudes towards upward differentiation (*RQ 2.1: What is their attitude towards upward differentiation?*).

However, as for the second sub-question (*RQ 2.2: What are the factors that assist or challenge upward differentiation?*) many of the teachers noted that in upper secondary school there are less opportunities to differentiate, at least upward, because there are too many learners in groups. The large group sizes complicate the familiarity with students, which creates the foundation to differentiation. As Tomlinson (2014: 20) notes teachers cannot differentiate without knowing the student's learning profile, interests and readiness, which are the factors that together form the familiarity with students (see figure 1.). It is clear that time and proper understanding of the students' abilities would be promoting factors for upward differentiation. In addition, it was stated that upward differentiation is important on an individual level but on a societal level, downward differentiation was considered more necessary. These findings are similar to Karjula and Pisto's (2019: 27-28) findings.

It seems that in upper secondary school English classes the extra attention is paid to the weaker students, because the goal is that everyone would pass the courses and the Matriculation Examination. Upward differentiation in the English courses in upper secondary school generally means extra-tasks for the advanced students or more challenging exercises. Some teachers mentioned that they use advanced students as assistant teachers in the classes, which was a refreshing finding. These elements were also found in Karjula and Pisto's study (2019: 23), which shows that there are generally approved methods of upward differentiation. Moreover, the findings showed that the advanced students are more liberated to choose from the activities and can proceed at their own pace. However, as the findings show, the upward differentiation methods in English courses are quite limited and the reasons for this vary from the limiting resources to the fact that the teachers might not be aware of the possibilities of upward differentiation methods.

The findings showed also that sometimes the challenge to differentiate upward is not because of teachers' skills or limited resources but because the advanced students do not want to stand out from their friends and from the mass. Jaskari and Karvonen (2014: 67) note that stronger proficiency can result in social pressure and, therefore, these students might want to hide their skills. In other words, the more proficient students might not want any special treatment.

Therefore, teachers need to be very subtle when considering upward differentiation to students. In addition, it could be that the students simply want to work on with the easier tasks than try to develop their proficiency with more difficult ones. In effect, the more proficient students stay in their actual development level (see chapter 3.2, Vygotsky and Cole 1978: 87). Therefore, the teachers of English should create possibilities for the students in reaching the ZPD and this could be done with upward differentiation.

When asked about the role of digital appliances, the teachers considered them as mostly positive factors that assist teaching and differentiation. However, it was suggested that the focus could be more on the pedagogical contents of the digital appliances rather than the features of the appliances. Moreover, the teachers were unified when discussing in-service education and noted that it is needed but it must be relevant, good quality and practised by someone who knows what it is to be an English teacher in today's upper secondary school.

Despite the fact that the participant students in the present study were sometimes rather straightforward in their answers, they had some relevant arguments concerning the education of English in upper secondary schools. As for the third research question (*RQ 3: How do the more proficient students experience English lessons at upper secondary school?*), it can be seen from the findings that English is present in the more proficient students' lives daily in different ways and via different channels such as Netflix and social media. Even though the students do not necessarily speak it daily, they are exposed to it. At an upper secondary school level this finding is interesting, because the students are surrounded by English in many different ways outside the school context. The school, however, still seems to be the biggest influencer in learning English and provide necessary resources to the students' language knowledge such as special vocabulary and oral communication.

When asking the students about differentiation, it was surprising that every student in the present study not only had heard of it but also could define the meaning of it at least on some level. Thus, this answers to the sub-question (*RQ 3.1: How do they understand the term differentiation?*). In my opinion, this is an important finding because it tells that differentiation is being practiced in schools and the students are being informed about possibilities offered by differentiated instruction. Hence, when the students know about these opportunities they are able to demand differentiation as well.

When interviewing the more proficient students about the English lessons at upper secondary school in general, the students noted that they do get extra-tasks if they are ready with the given tasks but, usually, the extra-tasks repeat the already-known topic which results in frustration and boredom. They also noted that the teaching methods are somewhat old-fashioned and include monologues from the teacher and exercises from books. Familiarity with students was, however, valued by the students, as well, and it seemed to correlate positively with respect towards the teacher. The teachers who showed interest in their students' issues and cared for them were seen as the best teachers according to the students.

The textbooks were not considered solely as negative because many student noted that their special vocabulary skills are developed in English lessons. The textbooks and the topics they handle were seen as positive and important also because for some students it might be the only source of reading. In addition, group work tasks and different oral practises such as group or pair discussions were highly valued by the students.

Perhaps the reason why the students were very keen on oral communication practises such as discussions is that English lessons seem to develop the students' oral communication skills the most, at least, according to the more proficient students. Oral communication skills are also the ones that the students would like to practise the most because in their free time they generally cannot develop the skills. In extra-curricular contexts the students are exposed to English via different audio-visual methods but the actual speaking of it is rare and as the students noted it happens only when, for example, traveling abroad. In my opinion, this could be a gap that upward differentiation could fill. The findings of the present study show that different oral communication tasks would be welcomed as well as needed by the students. Consequently, the more proficient students could find these tasks motivational and useful which would decrease the side-effects of frustration in the lessons. It could be a win-win situation for both the students and the teachers. Examples of upward differentiation for discourse activities were presented in chapter 3.5 (Roiha and Polso, 2018; Kerry and Kerry, 1997).

As for the final sub-question (*RQ 3.2: How would they modify the teaching/the lessons?*), the students presented a few new ideas for English lessons but were quite moderate and cautious with the suggestions. The more proficient students wished for more discourse activities in groups because discourse skills are the ones that they cannot develop by themselves properly. What is more, the textbook topics were seen as interesting but the students suggested that there

could be more use of extra-curricular material such as news articles that would handle topical issues and would be relevant to discuss. This would improve also the societal knowledge of the students and would emphasize the cross-curricular teaching. As for extra-tasks in the lessons, the more proficient students suggested the use of novels and other reading material which would enhance the learning of new vocabulary instead of tasks that repeat the already known topics. The exploitation of topical material is also suggested in the NCC (2015, see chapter 2.2)

The most courageous idea presented by the more proficient students was a grouping suggestion where the students could choose from different leveled A-syllabus English courses such as advanced English and, thus, the groups could be more homogenous and easier to teach as well as more motivational and developing for the students. Groups based on ability levels were also discussed in Jaskari and Karvonen's study (2014: 59) from the teachers' point of view but they were not seen as a problem-solving function. All in all, the suggestions by the students were quite careful and cautious which probably indicates that, despite the few issues, the A-syllabus English courses are generally considered as improving and the students are satisfied with the teaching they get at school and value the highly proficient teachers of English.

6.2 Evaluations and implications of the study

The goal of the present study was to investigate teachers' and the more proficient students' perceptions of upward differentiation in A-syllabus English lessons in upper secondary schools. The purpose was to find out how the teachers differentiate upward and what the factors that assist or hinder upward differentiation are. In addition, it was studied how the more proficient students would like to be taught in the English lessons and whether they have improvement or modification suggestions for the teachers.

Because the data was gathered from two different educational institutes in different parts of Finland it was interesting to find out that no critical areal differences arose between the two upper secondary schools that participated in the present study. The schools follow the same national guidelines and the teachers have similar educational and academic background which probably is the most important reason for the similarities between the educational institutes. What is more, both schools experienced similar issues such as considerable differences in students' proficiency levels in English.

The present study was conducted to offer insights of upward differentiation and to increase the teachers' understanding of the situation of more proficient students in the English lessons. Its purpose was also to present ideas and opinions from the students which is important since the education focuses on them and on their development in the language. It must be noted, however, that the findings of the present study correlated well with the findings of previous studies on differentiation in Finland (see for example Pistola and Karju, 2019; Jaskari and Karvonen, 2014; Valta, 2012 and Weckman, 2017).

As for evaluating the ethical aspects of the study, Hirsijärvi and Hurme (2014: 20) note that in studies that focus on human participants, the most important ethical principles are information-based consent, confidentiality and anonymity. The present study or the research methods did not put in danger the ethicalness of the examinees because it does not include any personal or demographic details about them. The participation of the examinees was voluntary and permissions were collected from the participants, which also Dufva (2011: 142) regards as an important procedure in an ethically conducted study. The gathered data and the research permissions were used only for this research and were destroyed after the transcription process. It goes without saying that the research process followed the principles of confidentiality and anonymity.

As the number of the participants was quite small ($N=8$), no generalizations can be made from this research on a societal level. In addition, it can be argued that the present study could not reveal enough how the upward differentiation is present in the English lessons from the students' point of view or give concrete suggestions of upward differentiation for the English teachers, even though the students seemed to understand the term. The data, however, was gathered by personally interviewing the participants and the participant groups were homogenic in such that they consisted of English teachers and the more proficient students. In addition, when interviewing the participants, the topics were discussed on a deeper level and it was easier for the participants to elaborate more on the topics. Therefore, some implications can be drawn from the present study.

The learner group size was a great concern among the participants and it affects differentiation because proper familiarity with students may not be reached in groups that have too many learners. Thus, the implication this could have for upper secondary school teaching is that the

concern is real, it affects learning and the focus should be on making the groups smaller. Hopefully, the present study manages to shed light on upward differentiation of English and the fact that the instruction of English can be differentiated in various ways. Moreover, the present study could encourage the English teachers to consult the students more about the possibilities of upward differentiation. Thus, the students could participate in the planning process, which could show positively in their motivation and, what is more, it could decrease the teachers' amount of work and stress levels.

6.3 Suggestions for further research

Since there is a gap in the research field when it comes to upward differentiation, research in the future could focus on upward differentiation on a larger scale i.e. this type of research could be conducted in several upper secondary schools in Finland and with more participants. Further research could also compare results between different languages and also between different subjects. Upward differentiation methods are manifold and can easily be modified according to the subject and the students' needs. What is more, it would be interesting to study the upward differentiation methods that are practiced in compulsory school and find out if those methods could be implemented in upper secondary English education.

In addition, based on the findings of the present study, a material package of upward differentiation in upper secondary school A-syllabus English courses could be conducted. A material package could give concrete examples for teachers and, thus, aid them in planning upward differentiation methods. The material package, however, should include the consultation of the students. Thus, it is important that further research takes into notice the students' perceptions as well.

After proper material packages, it would be, not only interesting but also relevant, to study the effects of upward differentiation for example in learning results. After all, the goal is that every learner can develop their proficiency in English at school and upward differentiation could offer equal and manifold possibilities for each student's subjective development in the language.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1. The interview questions in English and in Finnish

The interview questions in English:

Teachers:

Background:

1. What is your background as a user of English?
2. What is your history as an English teacher?
3. Do you use English out of school/ work?
 - a. In which contexts?

Students and English generally

4. How does the changing role of English in the society come across in students' language skills? (The increase in the use of English, "the third national language" in Finland, the demands of language skills in working life..)
5. Does it show in English lessons that students use English outside the school context? How does it show?
 - a. Does the use of English show in students' English skills? In what ways?
6. Do the students present suggestions on the contents of the lessons? What kinds of suggestions?
 - a. Can you take into consideration the suggestions?

Differentiation

7. How do you experience the familiarity with the students in the English courses? Do you have time to get acquainted with the students in such a way that you get to know their readiness and capabilities as users of English?
8. Do you differentiate upward?
 - a. How? Upward differentiation examples?
 - b. If not, why don't you differentiate upward?
 - c. Can you find tips to upward differentiation from the learning materials?
9. What factors advance upward differentiation in the English lessons?
 - a. From teachers' side
 - b. From students' side
10. Do you get help from your colleagues to upward differentiation? What kind of help?

11. What is the role of digital appliances/ software in upward differentiation?
12. What factors hinder upward differentiation?
13. Do you feel that generally the focus is on developing the weaker students (downward differentiation)? Why?
14. Should teachers get more education on differentiation?
15. What is your personal opinion on upward differentiation?
 - a. Does it interest you? Why/ why not?
 - b. Is there need for it?
 - c. Are there enough resources for it?
 - d. Is upward differentiation important?
16. Do you feel that you put more emphasis on the needs of advanced or weaker students?

Something else

17. Is there something else you would like to elaborate on?

Students:

Background

1. When have you begun learning English at school?
 - a. Has English been your A-syllabus language always?
2. Can you tell me of your background as a user of English?
 - a. In what situations do you use English? How much/often? Since when?
3. Do you use English outside the school context?
 - a. Where?
 - b. How much? (Daily, weekly, monthly..)
4. Which is the best channel to learn English in your opinion? (social media, television series, school etc.)

English lessons in general

5. What do you think term *differentiation* means?
6. How do you experience English lessons?
 - a. What do you expect from English lessons? Why?
 - b. What do you find positive in English lessons? What is negative?
 - c. Do you ever feel frustrated?
7. What language does the English teacher use?

8. Are the lessons challenging enough for you? If not, what topics/issues are too easy for you?
9. Do you practice for English exams? If yes, what kinds of things? Does it hinder your performance?

The subjective development of English language skills in the English lessons

10. How do the English lessons develop your language skills?
 - a. What areas do they develop? (Grammar, listening comprehension, oral communication, reading comprehension...)
11. What kinds of activities/practices would you like to include in the lessons that would develop your language skills?

The contents of English lessons and the subjective development in them in student's point of view

12. Do you feel that you get enough exercises/tasks?
 - a. What kinds of extra exercises do you get?
 - b. Do the exercises repeat the topics that are already familiar to you?
13. What do you think of the contents of the English lessons?
 - a. Would you like to change them somehow?
14. How do you experience the teaching styles of the teachers?
 - a. Would you like to change them somehow?
15. Are the English teachers familiar with their students and the students' capabilities properly enough?
 - a. Does the familiarity with students show in any way? How does it show?
16. Do you feel that the teaching of English is individual or mass education? Why?

Something else

17. Is there something else you would like to elaborate on?

Haastattelukysymykset suomeksi:

Opettajille:

Tausta

1. Millainen tausta englannin käyttäjänä sinulla on?
2. Millainen historia englannin opettajana sinulla on?
3. Käytätkö englantia opetuksen/ työn ulkopuolella?
 - a. Missä yhteyksissä?

Oppilaat ja englantia yleisesti

4. Miten englannin roolin/ aseman muutos näkyy oppilaiden kielitaidossa? (Englannin merkityksen kasvaminen yhteiskunnassa, ”kolmas kotimainen”- asetelma, työelämässä käytön kasvu...)
5. Käykö oppitunneilla ilmi käyttävätkö oppilaat englantia koulun ulkopuolella? Mistä se käy ilmi?
 - a. Näkyykö englannin käyttäminen koulun ulkopuolella oppilaiden kielitaidossa, millä tavalla?
6. Esittävätkö oppilaat toivomuksia oppituntien sisällöstä? Minkälaisia?
 - a. Pystyykö toivomuksia ottamaan huomioon?

Eriyttäminen

7. Millaiseksi koet oppilaan tuntemuksen lukion englannin kursseilla? Ehditkö tutustua oppilaisiin niin, että saat käsityksen heidän valmiuksistaan ja kyvyistään kielenkäyttäjänä?
8. Eriytätkö ylöspäin?
 - a. Miten? Esimerkkejä ylöspäin eriyttämisestä?
 - b. Jos ei, miksi et eriytä ylöspäin?
 - c. Löytyykö oppimateriaaleista ylöspäin eriyttämiseen vinkkejä?
9. Mitkä seikat edistävät ylöspäin eriyttämistä englannin oppitunneilla?
 - a. Opettajan puolelta
 - b. Oppilaan puolelta
10. Saako kollegoilta apua ylöspäin eriyttämiseen? Millaista?
11. Mikä on digitaalisten laitteiden/ ohjelmien/ appien rooli ylöspäin eriyttämisessä?
12. Millaiset asiat haittaavat ylöspäin eriyttämistä?

13. Koetko, että yleisemmin panostetaan enemmän heikompien oppilaiden kehittämiseen eli alaspäin eriyttämiseen? Miksi?
14. Pitäisikö enemmän saada täydennyskoulutusta eriyttämiseen ylipäänsä?
15. Mitä mieltä olet itse ylöspäin eriyttämisestä?
 - a. Kiinnostaako se? Miksi/ miksi ei?
 - b. Onko sille tarvetta?
 - c. Onko sille tarpeeksi resursseja?
 - d. Onko ylöspäin eriyttäminen tärkeää?
16. Koetko keskittyväsi ja suhteuttavasi opetussisältöä enemmän etevämpiin vai heikompien oppilaiden tarpeisiin?

Muuta

17. Tuleeko vielä jotain muuta mieleen mitä haluaisit kertoa?

Oppilaille:

Tausta

18. Koska olet aloittanut englannin opiskelun koulussa?
 - a. Onko englanti ollut A- kieli aina?
19. Millainen tausta sinulla on muuten englannin kielen kanssa?
 - a. Missä tilanteissa käytät englantia? Kuinka paljon/ usein? Mistä lähtien?
20. Käytätkö englantia koulun ulkopuolella?
 - a. Missä yhteyksissä?
 - b. Minkä verran?
21. Mitä kautta koet oppivasi eniten englantia (some, tv-sarjat, koulu ym.)?

Englannin oppitunnit yleisesti

22. Mitä ylöspäin eriyttäminen sinusta tarkoittaa?
23. Minkälaisiksi koet englannin oppitunnit?
 - a. Mitä odotat englannin tunneilta? Miksi?
 - b. Mikä siellä on hyvää/ huonoa?
 - c. Turhauttaako tunneilla koskaan?
24. Mitä kieltä opettaja käyttää?
25. Koetko oppitunnit tarpeeksi haastavina? Jos et, mitkä asiat tuntuvat liian helpoilta?
26. Luetko englannin kokeisiin? Mitä asioita kertaat, jos kertaat? Haittaako se?

Englannin kielitaidon subjektiivinen kehittyminen oppitunneilla

27. Millä tavalla englannin oppitunnit kehittävät kielitaitoasi?
- a. Mitä osa-alueita koet oppituntien kehittävän? (Kielioppi, kuullun ymmärtäminen, puhuminen, luetun ymmärtäminen..)
28. Minkälaisia tehtäviä tai aktiviteetteja haluaisit englannin oppitunneille, joiden kokisit kehittävän kielitaitoasi?

Oppituntien sisältö ja sisällöllinen kehittäminen oppilaan näkökulmasta

29. Koetko, että saat tarpeeksi tekemistä/ tehtäviä oppitunneilla?
- a. Millaisia lisätehtäviä saat?
 - b. Toistavatko tehtävät jo opittua/ osaamaasi asiaa?
30. Millaiseksi koet englannin oppituntien opetussisällön (eli sen, mitä oppitunneilla tehdään)?
- a. Haluaisitko muuttaa sitä jotenkin? Miten?
31. Millaisiksi koet englannin opettajien opetustavat?
- a. Haluaisitko muuttaa niitä jotenkin? Miten?
32. Tuntevatko englannin opettajat kurssien oppilaat ja heidän kykynsä mielestäsi riittävän hyvin?
- a. Näkyykö oppilaantuntemus opetuksessa millä tavalla/ millään tavalla?
33. Koetko englannin opettajan opetuksen olevan yksilöllistä vai ns. massaopetusta? Miksi?

Muuta

34. Tuleeko vielä jotain muuta mieleen mitä haluaisit kertoa?