

Views on the use and the effects of action-based teaching in
sixth graders' English language classes in Finland

Bachelor's thesis

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<p>Tiivistelmä – Abstract</p> <p>Toiminnallisuus kielten opetuksessa on yleistynyt 2000-luvun alusta alkaen ja se jatkaa suosiotaan edelleen. Tähän ovat vaikuttaneet muun muassa kielenopetuksen viitekehykset, kuten Eurooppalainen viitekehys kielille (EVK) sekä Perusopetuksen opetussuunnitelma (OPS). Molemmat viitekehykset painostavat toiminnallisten työtapojen käyttämistä kielten oppimisessa eri ikäluokilla. Vaikka toiminnallisuudesta nykyään puhutaankin kielen opettamisen yhteydessä suhteellisen usein, tämän opetusmenetelmän vaikutuksista oppilaisiin ja oppimiseen ei ole laajemmin tutkittu.</p> <p>Täten, tämän tutkielman tarkoituksena oli tutkia, kuinka toiminnallisia opetusmenetelmiä käytetään peruskoulun englannin kielen tunneilla sekä millaisia vaikutuksia toiminnallisilla tehtävillä on niin oppilaisiin kuin oppimistilanteisiin. Tutkielma otti huomioon sekä oppilaiden ja opettajien näkökulmat, mutta painotti kuitenkin oppilaiden kokemuksia. Aineisto koostui kahdesta englannin kielen oppitunnin observoinnista ja kahden englannin kielen opettajan sekä kahden oppilasryhmän haastatteluista. Aineiston analyysissä on käytetty sisällönanalyysia.</p> <p>Tuloksien mukaan toiminnallisten työtapojen osuus viikoittaisesta opetuksesta on rajallinen, vaikka opettajat käyttävätkin monipuolisia aktiviteetteja opetuksessaan. Toiminnallisuuden käytön vähäisyyteen vaikuttavat kurssikirjojen tiukka etenemistahti sekä haasteet erilaisten ryhmien kanssa. Kuitenkin niin oppilaat kuin opettajatkin suosivat toiminnallisuutta ja pitävät sitä mieluisana oppimis- ja opetusmenetelmänä. Tutkimuksessa ilmeni, että toiminnallisilla työtavoilla on positiivisia vaikutuksia oppilaiden oppimiskokemuksiin, heidän käyttäytymiseensä sekä motivaatioon. Opettajien mielestä toiminnallisuus vaikuttaa muun muassa oppilaiden oppimistuloksiin, keskittymiseen, mielentilaan sekä luokan yhteiseen ilmapiiriin. Tutkimustuloksia ei voida kuitenkaan yleistää rajallisen aineiston perusteella.</p>	
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

1	INTRODUCTION	1
2	ACTION-BASED TEACHING	3
2.1	Foreign language teaching approaches	3
2.2	Defining action-based teaching and its effects	4
2.3	Action-based teaching in guidelines	6
3	THE PRESENT STUDY	9
3.1	The research design and questions	9
3.2	Data and methods of analysis	10
3.2.1	Data collection.....	10
3.2.2	Methods of analysis.....	11
4	FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION	12
4.1	Use of action-based teaching in English classrooms	12
4.2	Reasons for using action-based activities	14
4.3	Effects of action-based teaching on class enjoyment	15
4.4	Effects of action-based teaching on students' behavior	16
4.5	Effects of action-based teaching on learning motivation	17
5	CONCLUSION	19
6	BIBLIOGRAPHY	22
	APPENDIX 1: The questions used when observing the classes	24
	APPENDIX 2: Observation notes (Teacher 1's class)	25
	APPENDIX 3: Observation notes (Teacher 2's class)	28
	APPENDIX 4: The teachers' interview questions	30
	APPENDIX 5: The students' interview questions	31

1 INTRODUCTION

Among new language teaching approaches action-based teaching (*Fin.* toiminnallisuus) has reached support increasingly during the 21st century. Action-based teaching is described as student-centered and students' agency focused teaching approach which includes some movement or action (van Lier, 2007: 46-47). One reason behind this raised popularity in educational field is the changing world which creates new challenges regarding to teaching and learning (Plous 2000). Another reason is the educational frameworks, as the Common European Framework of References for Languages (CEFR) (Council of Europe 2001) and the Finnish National Core Curriculum for Basic Education (FNCC) (Opetushallitus 2016), which direct teaching globally and nationally. The CEFR (2001: 9) proposes to use the action-oriented teaching method, a synonym for action-based teaching, in language teaching to enhance interaction and communication between students to increase multilingualism and to make learning efficient and enjoyable. According to Inha and Mattila (2018), the National Core Curriculum in Finland has followed the CEFR's preferences and added action-based teaching to the framework in 2004 and increased the support of diverse and activating tasks in the framework in 2016.

Moreover, action-based teaching is found in many studies which discuss factors that have positive effect on learning and students. As Lengel and Kuczala (2010: 19) point out in their book, movement has a significant effect on learning as it prepares brain for storing new information and thus, makes learning more efficient. In addition, Dörnyei (2001: 77) argues that movement included activities are diverse, interesting and they break the basic structure of a classroom procession and therefore, improve class enjoyment as well as learning motivation.

However, research on action-based teaching and its effects on students, motivation, class enjoyment, learning and behavior is limited. It is beneficial to acknowledge how action-based teaching approach could make learning more efficient and enjoyable, therefore, enhancing students' language learning experiences at school. Thus, my research concentrates on discovering how and why action-based activities are seen in today's English language classes in Finnish primary schools and what kind of effects they have on students.

In this research, I will first introduce the background of action-based teaching approach and then, I shift to focus on the previously mentioned frameworks for language teaching and the discovered benefits of action-based activities. Second, I will propose the data collection and analysis method. I collected the data from two different sixth graders' English classes. I observed two English language classes and interviewed the teachers and the students of these classes. To analyze the data I used content analysis. Lastly, I will present my findings on the use of action-based teaching in class, its effects on students' class enjoyment, their behavior and on their learning motivation.

2 ACTION-BASED TEACHING

The developing and changing world requires new aspects in teaching as students' habits and preferences vary simultaneously. Thus, new teaching approaches emerge constantly by the work of the researchers on the field. A current trend in teaching approaches is concentration on students' activity and autonomy as learners. In this chapter, the history of teaching approaches, currently popular method action-based teaching as well as its background and benefits will be discussed within a few dominant guidelines in foreign language teaching.

2.1 Foreign language teaching approaches

Teaching approaches refer to the aspects of teaching that include some theoretical background and a model to guide teaching (Hummel 2014: 107). According to Hummel (2014: 107), the term approach is used overlapping with the term *method* as, in spite of their slight differences, they both refer to teaching practices. As multiple approaches can be found in different works, it is necessary to point out that different approaches are parallel with each other and used simultaneously as Kohonen agrees (1987: 69-70). No teacher uses only one teaching method, instead mixes different approaches in different parts of teaching as in vocabulary teaching or teaching communicative skills. However, some approaches reach more popularity than others among teachers, and it can sometimes lead to monotonous teaching. Thus, teachers should be open to apply and mix different methods as according to Kohonen (1987: 69-70), one method cannot be helpful and suitable for every student. Students are individuals who have different backgrounds, experiences and challenges in learning and therefore, it cannot be predicted that every student benefits similarly from the same teaching method.

As mentioned previously, teaching approaches and methods develop continuously as more studies are conducted on the educational field. The first language teaching approaches emphasized systematic language learning through exercises which were aimed to produce correct language as in *grammar-translation approach* in the 1500s (Zainuddin 2011: 64). Subsequently, the shift from grammatical correctness developed to emphasize and concentrate on producing and enhancing oral skills as in *audiolingual method* (Hummel 2014: 110). The development continued to focus on the learning environment's atmosphere (*suggestopedia approach*) (Zainuddin 2011: 65). Atmosphere was enhanced, for instance by using soft and relaxing music and thus, making the classroom as relaxed and peaceful as possible (Zainuddin

2011: 65). Lastly, the evolution led to emphasize students' own activity. This emphasis increased the importance of both meaningful learning process and learner's agency (van Lier 2007: 46).

A comprehensive approach, which emphasizes students' roles and engages them in versatile socialization processes aiming to use the language in realistic, meaningful and active exercises, is called *communicative approach* (Hummel 2014: 115). This approach, as its name suggests, focuses on developing communicative skills which are rehearsed through activities that require diverse use of language (Zainuddin 2011: 72). A current and recently presented approach relating to communicative approach is called *task-based language teaching* (TBLT) (Hummel 2014: 116). Both communicative approach and task-based language teaching put strong emphasis on students' active roles as learners. The focus on completing a task and using authentic language in task-based language teaching, however, differs it from communicative approach. The tasks in TBLT are usually related to real-life like situations as going to a doctor or having a job interview. After these presented shifts and developed ideas of language learning as more student and action focused, new method called action teaching originated.

2.2 Defining action-based teaching and its effects

The term *action teaching* is first mentioned in Plous' article (2000) in which he considers having a pedagogical counterpart to Kurt Lewin's *action research*. Plous presents action research as "a research that would lead to effective science-based forms of social activism" (Plous 2012: 1). In other words, this research method aims to affect the activity and the standard of activity of the research subject. After World War II Lewin wanted to make a change in the world as the groundbreaking events had had significant effects on the world and therefore, he started to develop action research (Plous 2012). These radical changes did not only have an effect on the world but as well on people's perspectives on life and consequently new research models were needed. Although the action research spread gradually around the world after World War II, as said, its pedagogical counterpart, action teaching, started to reach publicity just after Plous' publications in the 21st century (Plous 2012).

Today the concept of *action-based (AB) teaching and learning* (*Fin. toiminnallinen opetus ja oppiminen*), also known as *action-oriented teaching and learning*, is encountered instead of the term action teaching. As exemplified previously, AB teaching is relatively new and different

approach among other older methods (e.g. suggestopedia). However, van Lier in his article “Action-based Teaching, Autonomy and Identity” (2007: 48) points out that AB teaching is closely related to previously mentioned communicative and task-based approaches. The difference between the two older methods and action-based teaching is that action-based teaching emphasizes the focus on action and on students’ own agency in learning significantly more. More specifically, van Lier (2007: 47) defines action-based teaching as student agency-centered teaching approach which involves, as the name suggests, a learner’s action as the base of teaching, learning and task performance. However, according to Finnish Schools on the Move programme (*Fin. Liikkuva Koulu*) (2016), a Finnish national programme to increase students’ activity at school, action tasks are not only break activities separated from teaching rather included in it as a part of everyday classroom setting. Activities that include any movement allow students to expose their own way of performing and to use their knowledge according to their personal skills, identity and individuality (van Lier 2007: 47). In classroom practice AB teaching tasks would appear, for example as games (e.g. pantomime, Simon says), races, drama classes, presentations or as any movement included and student-centered exercises which can often be related to students’ own interests.

Although action-based learning itself is not comprehensively studied; the use of action teaching can be found in diverse contexts considering its aspects as positive effects on students and learning. I divided the most occurred aspects into four different categories: an effective learning process, increased practice of social skills, increased class enjoyment and motivation.

First, movement has been studied to have significant benefits on making learning processes more efficient as movement simultaneously activates and engages the parts of the brain which are connected to learning. Thus, movement creates more comprehensive and clear learning process for students (Lengel and Kuczala 2010: 19-20). In other words, when students move during an activity the parts of the brain that enable learning, become activated. Including many other effective factors between movement and learning, Lengel and Kuczala (2010: 19) consider also the fact that movement supports learners’ attention by activating brain for learning and thus, making learning proficient.

Second, AB tasks increase students’ interaction and communication within classroom setting as often AB tasks are group or pair work oriented. Working together with the help of a teacher or a mentor, students are directed to resolve (real-life related) problems by using and developing

their personal capacity and social skills (Delibas and Günday 2016: 151). In groups students are able to create new connections with classmates as pair or group work does not always mean working with a best friend. Moreover, working with others helps students to fill their communicational needs and rehearse acting with different people. I believe that group work is not as unambiguous or self-evident as it might be assumed here, but the conflicts and problem solving will advocate in everyday life issues.

Third, leading from the previous point, one benefit of AB teaching is the aspect of creating real-life like and interesting activities in classrooms which enhance class enjoyment. Making both realistic goals and purposes for the tasks emphasizes the meaningfulness of the exercises (van Lier 2007: 54-56). According to Dörnyei (2001: 75-76), tasks which students can connect to their own life, interests or personal issues will help increase enjoyment and therefore, help them to remember learnt more easily as students can connect the task to something meaningful. It is obvious that themes and subjects that students are interested in will arouse their interest and motivation to follow lessons and concentrate on the exercises done in a class.

Fourth, action and activity in class are considered to be motivational learning strategies for students. Dörnyei (2001: 1) describes *motivation* as “an abstract, hypothetical concept that we use to explain why people think and behave as they do”. Applying this description to learning, motivation could be seen, for example as the reason why, how hard and how long learners are working to pursue and sustain activity in a classroom (Dörnyei 2001: 7). In other words, motivation thrives students to participate, gain more knowledge and work in order to reach goals like improving language skills or getting good grades. Dörnyei (2001: 78) describes that introducing bodily exercises to class is a simple strategy to increase motivation.

2.3 Action-based teaching in guidelines

Previous research on action-based teaching is limited and it mainly concentrates on defining the term from slightly different perspectives as in the studies of van Lier (2007) and Delibas and Günday (2016). For instance, van Lier (2007) uses the term action-based teaching but Delibas and Günday (2016) use action-oriented teaching when discussing learning which includes movement and action. Generally, most of the studies are done from the aspect of general education field, not from the point of view of language teaching. The studies, however, disregard practical research on the matter. They do not consider, for instance what kind of

action-based activities are present in classroom neither how these kinds of activities influence students, teachers, learning or teaching. Nevertheless, a few frameworks for foreign language teaching in both international and Finnish context, as the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) (Council of Europe 2001) and the Finnish National Core Curriculum for Basic Education (FNCC) (2016), suggest using action-based teaching in foreign language classrooms to enhance learning.

The CEFR (Council of Europe 2001), an international standard for language skills identification, adopts action-oriented teaching to its recommended teaching approaches in order to reach good foreign language learning outcomes. According to the CEFR (Council of Europe 2001: 9), action-oriented approach considers students' cognitive, emotional and volitional resources and therefore, it creates comprehensive environment for language learning. This can be seen in the CEFR's description of language use and learning as it comprises performed individual and social actions developing general and communicative competences through the use of multiple strategies which engage language activity (Council of Europe 2001: 9-10). Regarding to the description, this framework clearly aims at long-term goals in foreign language teaching and learning rather than achieving the best grades which are only seen in diplomas. Thus, the suggested activities in the CEFR include high amount of social skills and interaction between learners as well as real-life related and multicultural themes.

In Finland the Finnish National Core Curriculum (Opetushallitus 2016), a guideline for Finnish schools and teachers to obey inevitably, emphasizes the importance of using different teaching methods in every school subject, and for that using actions and motions are mentioned multiple times in the curriculum. The current National Core Curriculum, which was published in 2014 but introduced on August 1, 2016, has a major shift compared to the previous curriculum which was introduced in 2004. In the previous curriculum (Perusopetuksen opetussuunnitelman perusteet 2004: 138) action-based teaching is mainly seen in the first and the second grades of language teaching as the nature of teaching is highly action- and play-oriented but in the higher grades action and students' agency is not emphasized. On the contrary, in the present curriculum action- and play-oriented teaching and learning are included in grade of the basic education. In foreign language teaching the Finnish National Core Curriculum and the CEFR stress the importance of multilingualism, action, plays and physical activity (Opetushallitus 2016: para. 13.4.3, para. 14.4.3 and para 15.4.3). In that way, students get to utilize their own capacity and role in a classroom as well as to practice their social skills (Opetushallitus 2016:

Working methods, para 4.3). That will be beneficial for the students far beyond the classroom. According to the current curriculum (Opetushallitus 2016), action-based activities should, therefore, be seen in every classroom in the form of, for example plays, games, songs, trips and projects but most importantly as activities which focus on students' own activity, agency, identity and autonomy.

Although both of these frameworks are separate, the CEFR has had a major effect on developing the Finnish National Core Curriculum (Inha and Mattila 2018). As the CEFR was published to guide the language teaching methods, grading and the concepts to fit the needs and expectations of the changing and globalizing world, the FNCC started to follow the guidelines in the Common European Framework of References (Inha and Mattila 2018). The rising emphasis on students' movement, agency and need for multiple social skills in the CEFR reflected to the FNCC (Inha and Mattila 2018). As discussed above, today the emphasis on students' agency and movement is also greatly considered in the FNCC which is partly because of the guidelines in The Common European Framework of References.

Furthermore, voluntary Finnish Schools on the Move, the national action programme conducted by the Finnish National Agency of Education and the Ministry of Education and Culture, is aiming to increase movement and physical activity in school environment during both classes and breaks (Finnish Schools on the Move 2016). Every school can decide how they want to include the programme in the school's weekdays as long as it increases students' activity instead of sitting still (Finnish Schools on the Move 2016). As the programme is voluntary, some schools decide to involve in this more seriously than others which creates many differences between schools. However, through this programme students' activity and physical health is aimed to enhance by naturally increasing physical activity in students' everyday life (Finnish Schools on the Move 2016).

3 THE PRESENT STUDY

3.1 The research design and questions

First, I presented teaching approaches as a comprehensive subject and then shifted the focus on one approach on the field: action-based language learning and teaching. I presented some literature supporting the use of action and motion as an effective and positive way of learning and moreover, the way how action-based teaching is present in three dominant guidelines for teaching. However, as little research is done on the benefits of this relatively new teaching approach, it would be essential for language teaching and development to have more knowledge on these themes.

Previously mentioned fact that every teaching approach does not serve every student (Kohonen 1987: 69-70) gives a reason to study different approaches from the point of view of the students. The other reason is that, presumably, teaching and education are for students; Therefore, students' desires and the most beneficial and effective learning methods should be acknowledged. This research attends to showcase how the concept of action-based teaching is seen in today's English as a foreign language classroom and what kind of affects it has. To be more accurate, the research aims to answer to the following questions:

1. How is action-based teaching used in English as a foreign language (EFL) classroom?
2. How do action-based teaching and learning affect students?

The first question discovers the practical use of action-based teaching in English as a foreign language classroom. Moreover, it examines which kind of action-based activities the teachers use and why they are used. The first question is also set out to support the findings of the second research question.

The second question discovers if and how action-based learning methods affect students or if some benefits of this method can be found. More specifically, the aim is to understand what kind of acts, changes or differences can be seen when action-based teaching is used in EFL classroom. This question is broad and therefore, I will answer to it through my research material. These aspects are studied from the point of view of the students themselves and also from the perspective of their teachers in order to get more diverse answers.

3.2 Data and methods of analysis

3.2.1 Data collection

I gathered the data in January 2020. The data were collected anonymously and the names of the students, the teachers or the schools will not be published in any case. The students' guardians received a research permission letter which explained the aims and the reasons for the study as well as research privacy issues.

The data consist of two (2) class observations and two (2) teacher interviews as well as two (2) group interviews of the students. I used both methods to provide broader view and understanding of the use of action-based teaching in English language classrooms and its effects on students. Observation gives concrete examples on how AB activities are used, and they also provide more information on how students act and behave when doing action-based activities. Likewise, interviewing both teachers and students gives different point of views and more in-depth information on the research questions as teachers see the effects on the students as educators, and students can reflect themselves on personal level.

I conducted the observations in two (2) different sixth graders' English classes in primary schools in Eastern Finland. I chose sixth graders as my subject because they are at the age when they are presumably still playful but most importantly, they are able to evaluate their own behavior and motivation and thus, provide more reliable information considering the areas of interests in this research. Both classes were 45 minutes long and were held in afternoon. I made notes of the observations (see Appendices 2 and 3) in order to be able to address the data afterwards.

The teacher interviews happened after the lessons to get direct response relating to the observed classes. Both interviews took about 30 minutes and they were recorded. I structured the interviews according to the areas of interests of the research, but they were conducted differently on the basis of how teachers answered the questions and which subjects occurred (see Appendix 4). In other words, the interviews were semi-structured. The questions considered the term action-based teaching, how it is seen and used in the teachers' English classes and moreover, how the teachers see the effects of AB teaching on the students and on learning. The interviews were held in Finnish as it is the native language of both teachers.

The interviews of the students were recorded group interviews because in a group children might be braver to answer questions as they are surrounded by familiar people. The student interviews were as well in Finnish as it is the mother language of all the interviewed students and therefore, more answers could be expected compared to having the interviews in English. The first student interview took only about 10 minutes due to the lack of time, whereas the second student interview took about 25 minutes as the time was not limited. These interviews were also semi-structured and followed the same main questions (see Appendix 5), however, they progressed slightly differently according to the answers. The questions mainly considered the students' approaches in action-based learning and how they think AB activities affect them.

3.2.2 Methods of analysis

I analyzed the data of this study using qualitative content method as it is common method to use when analyzing interview recordings and observations (Julien 2012: 2). I transcribed the recorded interviews as written text is easier to address than audio material. The observations were saved in written form for the same reason.

In the observation analysis the main concentration was on what kind of action-based activities are used and how the students react and behave when completing these tasks. Observation notes helped to examine the examples of the AB activities held in class and how the students' behavior changed between different exercises. Moreover, the observation data were reflected to the data of the interviews.

In the analysis process of the interviews, I first examined and coded the data. Second, I categorized the interview data according to common themes that occurred in the interviews. Through categorizing many similarities were recognized between the students and the teachers' interviews but on the other hand, some differences appeared as well. Third, I interpreted the occurred themes in relation to previous research. The collected data are in conversation with previous research of AB teaching and with the research questions of this study through the whole analyzing section.

4 FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to examine the use of action-based teaching method in English as a foreign language classroom and to better understand its effects on students. In the center of attention was the students' own experiences and how the teachers interpret different aspects of action-based teaching and learning from the students' point of view. This chapter introduces and discusses the findings of the research.

4.1 Use of action-based teaching in English classrooms

During both of the observed lessons action-based teaching was used. In the first observed lesson the teacher used two different action-based activities: speech-supporting signs when learning new vocabulary and a dice board game. In the second observed lesson the students used pantomime to learn new words. Rest of the classes included coursebook exercises and the teachers' teaching sessions. Moreover, in the interviews both teachers confirmed their use of action-based teaching activities as they both said that they use such activities approximately once a week with their sixth graders groups. The examples they mentioned of the action-based learning activities they have used in their English classes were, for instance different memory games, presentations, bingo, plays, races and musical activities. These activities were characterized earlier in the description of term action-based teaching.

However, the students in both interviewed groups agreed that their classes mostly follow the structure of the coursebook used in class. When they were asked what they usually do in English classes they answered as follows in Examples 1, 2, 3 and 4.

- (1) S1: We do exercises.
- (2) S2: We read chapters [in coursebook].
- (3) S3: We usually like do the activity book.
- (4) S4: We learn the vocabularies in the activity book and then we pronounce them all.

Both student groups told that they have action-based activities approximately once a week or once in two weeks. That is quite a small part of the weekly lessons as sixth graders have three 45-minute long English lessons a week. Both interviewed groups and both teachers described similar action-based activities used in class. These activities are rather integrated into teaching than separated break activities which equates to what Finnish Schools on the Move programme (2016) advocates. These example exercises are also identified in the definitions of action-based

teaching and learning as they are movement included and student agency-centered activities in which students can utilize their own way of learning (van Lier 2007: 47).

Even though both teachers use large variety of different action-based teaching methods, they agreed that they should and could use action-based teaching more often. The teachers mentioned two different reasons for not involving more action-based activities in class: lack of time and challenges with different groups. As mentioned above, the students agreed that their English classes concentrate mainly on the coursebooks and doing written exercises. This was supported by the teachers. They agreed that the coursebooks require fast proceeding and leave minimum time for extra activities like plays and games. In addition, students' age might have an effect on the amount of used action-based activities in English classes. Teacher 2 teaches grades from third to sixth and said that the use of AB activities is higher with younger kids as it comes more naturally, and it is also natural way for 9-12 years old kids (3rd and 4th graders) to act and learn. On the other hand, Teacher 1 teaches grades from sixth to ninth and agreed that the amount of action-based activities is approximately the same regardless the students' age (13-16 years old). However, in Examples 5 and 6 can be seen that both teachers agreed that the age is not the dominant factor for them to use or not to use action-based teaching in class rather the class and team spirit are more significant factors.

- (5) T1: I would say that it is above all the groups' internal trust that if they dare to do different things... When they do in smaller groups so then it works also or like you can do action-based activities with every class but so, I think it is more affected by the group dynamic than age...
- (6) T2: It is affected by also so many different things that it is of course the group dynamic that is like... at least it has felt to me that it complicates that first and foremost something like that could be done or like that they would do that kind of foolery or...

These teachers' use of AB teaching is somewhat equivalent to the guides of the Finnish National Core Curriculum on how action and motion should be used in every subject as well as in every grade of primary school regardless students' age or group. In this way it can be interpreted that the teachers follow the guideline on some level as the exact amount of action, plays and games in teaching is not written in the curriculum. However, using different activities is strongly emphasized in the FNCC (Opetushallitus 2016: Working methods, para. 4.3) and as the teachers agreed they should and could use action more often.

4.2 Reasons for using action-based activities

A common reason for using action-based teaching methods was that the teaching materials the teachers use have many ready-made action-based activities which make it easier for the teachers to include action in teaching. These activities are connected to the grammar, the vocabulary or the theme that is being studied at that moment and therefore, the teachers do not need to use extra time to plan and structure the activities they want to use. However, both teachers agreed that sometimes they invent their own action-based activities; Teacher 2 uses ‘vocabulary walk’ in which students read words out loud simultaneously walking around the school, and Teacher 1 has a team game for students to learn comparative adjectives in which students need to form queues according to, for example their age or height as fast as possible. These ready-made and self-invented activities were present in both observed lessons as Teacher 1 used a dice game on the students’ textbook and speech-supporting signs when learning new words, and Teacher 2 used pantomime to teach new words to the students. Since today the teaching materials are full of action-based learning exercises, it seems that the new Finnish Core Curriculum (Opetushallitus 2016) has influenced the teaching materials by adding more action-based activities to use in language classes. This helps teachers to save time and makes using action-based activities easier, enjoyable and more convenient when trying to connect the activities to, for instance the learned vocabulary or grammar.

Although the different guidelines recommend the use of action and motion in English classes, the most common reason for the interviewed teachers to use action-based teaching was that from their experiences action-based activities are helpful and beneficial for students’ learning. Teacher 1 thought that action-based activities improve learning as the activities involve many different senses and thus, support learning from many different aspects. Likewise, Teacher 2 thought action-based teaching cannot be unbeneficial for anyone, but rather useful for every student in some way. For instance, it is studied that movement exercises include senses as sight, hearing and touch which make the learning process diverse and therefore, it is easier for brain to remember the learned (Lengel and Kuczala 2010: 28). When allowing the students to use different senses, they can utilize the senses which are suitable and the most preferred for their learning strategy. Moreover, the more connections and associations brain develops the more efficient it is for the brain to remember as it has created multiple ways to recall the learned things (Lengel and Kuczala 2010: 18- 19, 28).

4.3 Effects of action-based teaching on class enjoyment

According to the teachers, the nature of action-based activities seems to have a great deal of positive effects on the students' enjoyment in class. Action-based activities are pleasant and invigorating as they are different and exciting for students from the teachers and the students' perspectives. Enjoyable activities increase students' positive feelings in class which enhances learning atmosphere and affects enjoyment in class (Dörnyei 2001: 42). The teachers also pointed out that the students generally like movement included exercises. Examples 7 and 8 illustrate how the teachers viewed the activities regarding attractiveness.

(7) T1: It [using AB activities] makes learning nicer. Or it is nice for the students or it is that generally students like them. And it is like preferable. And of course, if students have fun then the teacher has fun, too.

(8) T2: It seems like it [using AB activities] excites the, the situation is more excited, and it is definitely fun to do something else...

Another common opinion among the students, which was also agreed by the teachers, was that learning by acting and moving is more pleasant as the activities are not as monotonous or boring as written exercises. According to the students, these action-based activities keep the students activated and awake in the class. That increases also class enjoyment. The students described this as follows.

(9) S5: I don't get as bored or tired as easily when we do something fun.

(10) S6: They help me to manage to do the exercises better.

Action-based activities able students to use their knowledge and different styles of learning in more variable ways which adds variation into learning. For instance, in the student interview 2 one student said that AB activities help the student to remember words better and that the exercises are not as tiresome as the written exercises on the coursebook which helps the student to stay more energetic and interested. As Dörnyei (2001: 77) points out, making exercises varying and different from the basic class structure helps increasing motivation and enjoyment among students which, furthermore, can even affect learning outcomes.

An aspect which improves students' satisfaction, according to Teacher 2, is that action-based tasks can be connected to real-life issues. AB tasks usually consider familiar, everyday life subjects (Council of Europe 2001). Dörnyei (2001: 75-76) agrees that tasks which are realistic and related to the students' own life will affect their class enjoyment positively. When students

have practiced everyday life events in English classes, such as buying a train ticket, it helps them to utilize this experience in real life. Thus, realistic tasks create meaningfulness in learning, and they help the students to realize that the exercises matter. In Example 11 Teacher 2 agrees that the effects of these real-life related activities are positive.

(11) T2: Anything that can be connected to like free time or to life or action outside school is a nice way to learn.

In addition to increased variation in class and rehearsing realistic tasks, action-based activities were seen to involve a great deal of interaction between the students. Thus, AB activities can improve students' interaction and communication skills. The students agreed that action-based activities are also pleasant because they often allow students to work together with a partner. Moreover, both teachers pointed out that in group or pair work students can help each other simultaneously learning themselves. More advanced students learn when they help poorer students and the poorer students might learn better when a peer is explaining the contents. All of these aspects were also mentioned when the teachers and the students were asked if and how action-based activities motivate students. Thus, it can be seen that AB exercises make learning more interesting for the students and help students to pay attention and to increase learning motivation (Dörnyei 2001: 77).

4.4 Effects of action-based teaching on students' behavior

Action-based activities had effects on the students' behavior. Some differences were seen in the students' behavior when comparing it between the AB activities and the coursebook exercises. For instance, in the class observations the students were rather restless when they checked the homework or did the listening comprehension. Restlessness was recognized in the way the students acted as some of them rocked back and forth on their seats, chatted with a neighbor or doodled on their books. Moreover, the teacher needed to calm the students to concentrate on the given exercises which informs about, as previously discussed, students' difficulties in concentration when they are assumed to listen on their seats. This aspect was supported in both student interviews as many students agreed that it is easier to concentrate and delve into the exercises when it includes movement or action.

In contrast, during both observed lessons the teachers needed to push some students to work according to the instructions when the exercises were on the coursebook. However, many

students started to work quite quickly, and some started the exercises after the teachers had told them a few times. Only one student in each class did not start working until the end of the class. This informs about the lack of eagerness and motivation towards these exercises. If the tasks had been preferable for the students, they would have probably started to work quicker.

On the other hand, during the action-based activities the teachers did not need to push the students to start playing which seemed that the exercises were preferable for the students. All the students took part in the action-based activities except one student in observation 2 although participating was not voluntary. The students were more relaxed and acted freely compared to when they were doing the exercises on the books. This is cause from the nature of action-based activities which usually allow students to move around, act freer and interact with peers (van Lier 2007). Moreover, in action-based activities the students do not need try to stay still or be quiet which seems to be naturally challenging for some students.

Mostly the behavior changes were seen on the students' facial expressions and their use of voice. When playing games in both observed classes the students were smiling and laughing more. They chatted with each other during the games and seemed to enjoy the moment. Good atmosphere and communication between students clearly enhance their behavior.

4.5 Effects of action-based teaching on learning motivation

As well as action-based exercises affected the students' learning experiences and behavior, they influenced the students' motivation in learning and in class participation. In both student interviews most of the students answered yes and nodded when they were asked if action-based exercises motivate them. Examples 12, 13 and 14 illustrate this.

(12) Students in interview 1: Yes, yes., Yes, it motivates., Yep!

(13) Students in interview 2: Yes! So, yeah it motivates.

(14) S7: Well, I think it is motivating because like I talk all the time and then when [when doing AB exercises] I can talk at the same time, so it motivates because it is more relaxed.

However, a few students thought that action-based activities are motivating only if the exercises are enjoyable and nice for them and if they are able to work with a classmate that they want.

(15)S8: Yeah, it [motivation] like depends on with who you are working.

In the teacher interviews the same claims were made with the support of the teachers' examples on how the students are most of the time eager and motivated to start almost any game or play rather than the activity book exercises in their English lessons.

The reasons which make action-based activities motivating are related to the differences of AB activities compared to regular text- or workbook activities. The students said that action-based exercises are preferable, fun, diverse and they usually involve working with classmates or the whole class. As Dörnyei (2001: 75-78) examines, learning motivation is created and increased through multiple strategies which include, for instance "making learning stimulating and enjoyable" by creating more attractive tasks and requiring students to involve themselves in learning mentally and bodily. Thus, breaking the basic structure of a classroom, which often follows the structure of a coursebook, motivates students (Dörnyei 2001: 75). These factors reduce boredom which, for its part, increases motivation in the long term (Dörnyei 2001: 75).

Motivation was seen during the observations as eagerness, laughter and as positive atmosphere in the classes. In observation 1 the students used speech-supporting signs and they were allowed to suggest their own signs which made them raise their hands eagerly and show the signs they had invented. Although all the students did not suggest signs, they followed others and used the signs with the class. The other action-based activity in the class 1, a dice game, made also all the students, except one student, laugh and eagerly participate in the game. As well, in observation 2 the students were happy to start playing pantomime in which they had to perform different Australian animals. Happiness was seen on their faces and in the tone of voice as they were laughing, smiling and chatting eagerly during the activity. These positive emotional experiences in learning affect motivation increasingly (Dörnyei 2001: 42) and therefore, push students to do the exercises in class.

As mentioned previously, during neither of the classes the teachers did not need to tell the students multiple times to start working or push them to do the action-based exercises. According to Teacher 1 in Example 16, motivation in students is seen as students' participation in tasks.

(16)T1: I do not need to push them to do and do not need to take as much that instruction like 'start now'.

This shows how students, for the most part, like to do action included activities which reflects to learning motivation. Forcing someone to involve in activities does not create good experiences and therefore, does not make learning motivational. Moreover, both teachers agreed (Example 17 and 18) that the students often ask, for example games and plays which is a clear sign that they are motivated to do action-based activities.

(17) T1: They ask to do them [AB exercises].

(18) T2: Of course, one concrete example is that they always ask that could we do them [AB activities] again and that it is a nice way to work.

However, in the student interviews some students told that action-based exercises do not motivate them if they cannot work with a partner they like. Many students agreed that if they get to choose a partner to work with, it makes the exercises nicer and simultaneously more motivational. Another reason for not to be motivated about AB exercises was that if the students get more homework because they do not have time to do as many coursebook exercises during the class and the teachers tell to do them at home instead. Examples 19 and 20 show how two students commented the effects of homework on motivation.

(19) S9: If we get more homework, it does not motivate.

(20) S10: It is better to do something else than the coursebook exercise except if we then get too much homework.

5 CONCLUSION

The research questions of this study could be answered. The first question was “How is action-based teaching used in English as a foreign language (EFL) classroom?”. The findings of this study showed that the teachers use action-based teaching methods in their sixth graders’ English

classes even though it is not used in every class or even every week of the three 45-minute long lessons that the sixth graders have a week. The teachers were able to list many different activities they use in their classes and both teachers' activities were quite similar. However, they both agreed that they should include more movement and action in their classes. The reason why they do not use action-based activities more often is that the activities take time in class and the classes mostly follow the procession of a coursebook which leaves limited time for any extra activities. Nevertheless, the coursebooks' have ready-made action-based activities which make including movement in class somewhat easier. Moreover, the students age and the group dynamic have great effects on using AB activities. Teacher 2 commented that they do not use that many action-based activities with older students, but Teacher 1 told that they use approximately the same amount with every age group. Both of them strongly emphasized that the more significant factor affecting the amount of action-based activities is the group dynamic. If the groups' internal communication and relationships are positive and loose, it is more comfortable for the teachers to use action-based activities which usually require a great deal of socialization.

The second research question was "How do action-based teaching and learning affect students?". The findings showed that the teachers saw that generally, action-based activities have only positive effects. One major effect was on the students' class enjoyment. Learning through action-based activities is rarely monotonous or boring from the point of view of the students. Many of them agreed that movement makes learning different and fun which helps them to concentrate in class. Furthermore, these activities often increase the amount of interaction and communication between students and with the help of the experience they can utilize the skills learnt in class also outside the school environment. Another great effect of action-based activities was the influence on the students' behavior. The students were eager to participate in the activities and the teachers did not need to push them to start working except one student. The students' facial expressions and the positive atmosphere in class were straight signs that they enjoyed the AB activities.

In addition, one notable effect of action-based teaching was the effect on the students' increased motivation. Most of the students agreed that action-based teaching is motivating because, as previously mentioned, the activities are different from the coursebook exercises which cover the most part of the lessons. The teachers also agreed that the students get more motivated and excited when it is time to, for instance play a game. However, some students told that for them

action-based activities are only enjoyable if they are fun, they can work with a partner they like and doing AB exercise does not mean that they get more homework instead. The students' motivation was seen on how they react and act when participating in action-based activities. The teachers pointed out that the students smile, giggle and laugh when they are doing these exercises which indicates motivation.

It is essential to point out that these results cannot be generalized due to the low amount of the research subjects and research material. Through this research many new questions considering action-based teaching emerged. These questions are, for instance how action-based activities could be more integrated into everyday language teaching, how to get students more involved in class and how to present action-based teaching to teachers who are not using it. Moreover, according to the study, AB activities have many benefits on students and therefore, its effects should be studied further. In the study the teachers mentioned, among other benefits, the benefits on students' learning. However, studying learning outcomes would require more comprehensive and long-term study which would include, for example monitoring students' learning results when using action-based teaching and comparing them to learning results when AB teaching is not used. For the future research these questions above would be essential to consider. Moreover, the interest and the perspectives of students should be always considered when studying and developing effective learning methods.

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APPENDIX 1: The questions used when observing the classes

1. What is happening in the class? How is the structure of the class?
2. Are action-based activities present? How are they used and what kind of activities are there?
3. How they affect the students? And the teacher?
4. How students' behavior (acts, feelings, are they excited or not, do they want to take part in the activities) change?
5. Is their behavior different than during other exercises (book activities, listening comprehension etc.)?

APPENDIX 2: Observation notes (Teacher 1's class)

The students come to the class and take their places. The teacher starts by welcoming the students to class but first, she silences the class with a finger sign which the students follow and quiet down.

SAYING THE DATE IN ENGLISH

The teacher shows a power point which says the date of the day in Finnish. The teacher asks a student to say a number between 1-20 and this number points who is going to say which student the date in English. First, the student says the date wrong and the teacher gives hints to the students to correct the date. However, the student does not say the date right and therefore, the teacher asks another student to help her. The teacher writes the correct date on the board.

CHECKING EXERCISES:

The class checks an exercise on the workbook. The exercise includes drawing on different famous bridges around the world and the students are supposed to mark in which country and city they are located. The students raise their hands and wait for their turn to answer.

The word "bridge" is brought up by the teacher. She explains how it has many letters in spelling but not all of them are pronounced. The teacher asks which sounds the students hear when pronouncing "bridge". They go through the word sound by sound and the teacher writes the phones on the blackboard.

The same students raise their hands to answer, others go through the book. Most of them check the homework. Many students sway restlessly and chat. One student screams over the teachers' speak.

How does the students react:

Most of the students concentrate on checking the homework which is seen from how their gaze goes from the board to their workbooks. One student does not concentrate at all and the teacher needs to tell the student many times to listen and be quiet when someone else is talking. At the end the student calms down.

FOODSTUFF WORDS:

The students open their textbooks. The page has foodstuff words. A student recognises the word “honey” on the page and asks the teacher in Finnish: “Doesn’t honey also mean “rehellinen” (honest) in English?”. The teacher explains that “honest” is the word for “rehellinen” and then the class goes through the differences between the words and the different meanings of “honey”.

The class starts to go through the foodstuff words one by one. First, the word is translated into Finnish and second, the students suggest a movement to connect to the word. The students can suggest the movements and then the choice is made by voting. After deciding the movement, the teacher says the word in English and the students say it after her. Lastly, the word is heard in audio and the students repeat the word and do the chosen movement at the same time.

The foodstuff words and the movements connected to them are as follows:

tea= drinking tea

coffee= stir the coffee and drink it

soft drink= open the cork and drink it

toast= toasting the bread

jam= spreading jam on pancakes

honey= pouring honey into tea

sugar= putting sugar into coffee

cream= cat which drinks cream

sauce= stirring sauce

oil= pour oil into a pan

beef= cow’s horns

pork= pig’s trunk and pigtail

lamb= sheep’s wool (signing with hands)

salmon= fishing a fish

How do the students react:

Students are excited. Most of the students repeat the words and are willing to suggest different movements. Conversations and arguments are brought up. About half of the students suggest

different movements and the other half stays quiet and follow the lesson. All the movements are done by mostly using hands. The students do not get up to do the movements.

Also, the teacher seems excited and happy as she is suggesting different movements herself. She smiles and laughs as the students make the movements. She answers the students' questions and pays attention to everyone.

VOCABULARY DICE GAME:

Students start to play a dice game using the foodstuff words. Students make groups of 2-4 people. The students rehearse the use of the learned foodstuff words in the game. The game goes as follows:

A student throws a dice and moves from a picture to picture as many steps as the dice points.

The student needs to come up with a sentence in which she/he uses the foodstuff word.

After the student has said a sentence the turn changes.

How do the students react:

Again, a lot of conversations and arguments are brought up. The students talk about the game but also about everything else. Some of them concentrate more than others. They look happy and they laugh and smile. Everyone is taking part in the game and nobody is leaving out.

FINISHING THE LESSON:

The teacher gets the dice and students move to their own seats. The teacher writes homework on the black board. The homework is rehearsing the learned foodstuff words.

APPENDIX 3: Observation notes (Teacher 2's class)

The students come to class and take their seats.

The teacher plays an audio of “a tongue twister” on the computer. The teacher says the tongue twister first and then the students repeat the sentence. They do it three times and every time the audio goes faster.

AUSTRALIAN ANIMALS

The teacher shows words and pictures of Australian animals on the whiteboard. The class repeats the animal words one by one after recordings. The animals are, for example, a kangaroo, a koala, and an emu. After repeating, the words are translated into Finnish. The teacher asks the word and the students answer by raising their hands.

The students also repeat and translate a few sentences which include Australian animals. These sentences are, for example, “What does a kangaroo look like?” and “Does it have a pouch?”.

PANTOMIME

The students play pantomime with a partner using Australian animal words. One student plays an animal and the other one must guess it right.

How do the students react:

The students are excited about the game as they are laughing, talking and expressing excited feelings. They move around when they play the animals. Sometimes they need to crawl, jump, run and move around differently. All the students take part in the activity excluding one student who does not participate.

The teacher is also excited, and he is the first one to give an example how pantomime is played. He is also smiling and laughing while the students are doing the activity.

LISTENING COMPREHENSION:

The class moves to do a listening comprehension on the workbook. The teacher gives the instructions in English. On the recording the students hear the instructions also in Finnish. The first part of the exercise is to connect which description fits which animal. The animals are numbered in the order. The second part is to write the description of an animal. The same

recording is listened to again. The third part of the exercise is to write extra information about the animals after listening to the same recording again. The class goes through the right answer with the lead of the teacher. The students raise their hands when they want to answer.

How do the students react:

The students are a bit restless when listening to the recording and filling the answers. Some of them (about 1/3th) talk with each other and do not concentrate on the exercise. The students move restlessly.

BOOK EXERCISES:

The students start to do exercise on their workbooks. The first exercise is a crossword puzzle. Most of the students start to work on the exercise right away. Two of the students talk about something else and do not work on the exercise even though the teacher tells them multiple times to start working. One of them starts working at the end of the lesson but the other one does not start the exercises but talks with friends.

FINISHING THE LESSON:

The teacher gives the students their word tests back which they have done earlier. He gives the students two exercises to do at home but the students are allowed to start to do them already. They are also planning to do presentations of the Australian animals in the future. The lesson ends with a little chat about the presentations.

APPENDIX 4: The teachers' interview questions

1. How long have you worked as a teacher? Have you worked in multiple schools?
 2. What education do you have?
 3. Which school subjects and grades do you teach?
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4. How would you describe the term 'action-based teaching'? What does it mean in teaching languages?
 5. a. Do you use action-based teaching methods in your own English classes? Why, why not?
b. Describe with the help of examples how you use action-based teaching?
c. Could you say, how often you use action-based activities in your teaching?
 6. Do you come up with the action-based activities by yourself or do you use materiel for example, on the internet?
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7. Do you think action-based teaching affects students and/or their learning in English classes? How?
 8. Have the effects been more negative or positive?
 9. Do you think action-based teaching motivates students to learn and take part in the exercises? How is motivation seen?
 10. What do you think that students like about action-based activities comparing for example, to book exercises?

APPENDIX 5: The students' interview questions

1. How many English lessons you have in a week? How long is one class?
2. How the English lessons usually are? What do you usually do during the classes?
3. How often do you have action-based exercises in the class?
4. What examples of action-based activities you remember being used in your English classes?
5. Do you like these kinds of activities? Do you prefer them over book exercises?
6. Do you think you learn during doing action-based activities? Do them help you to learn?
7. Do them motivate you to learn and/or study?
8. What kind of English class would you have if you got to decide?