

GOING INTO THE REAL WORLD

Language learners' views on how foreign language teaching
prepares them to use language in authentic situations

Master's thesis

Katri Pietilä

University of Jyväskylä
Department of languages
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<p>Tiivistelmä – Abstract</p> <p>Englannin kieli nähdään oikeutetusti maailmankielenä, sillä se on vakiinnuttanut asemansa kansainvälisen kommunikaation välineenä. Kielenkäyttö ja kommunikatiivisuus ovat olleet teoriassa vieraiden kielten opetuksen tärkeimpiä tavoitteita jo pitkään. Tämän tutkimuksen tarkoitus oli tarkastella kielenoppijoiden näkemyksiä siitä, miten englannin kielen opetus suomalaisessa peruskoulussa valmistaa oppijoita käyttämään kieltä autenttisissa kielenkäyttötilanteissa peruskoulun jälkeen. Tarkoituksena oli myös selvittää, mitkä opetuksen osa-alueet lisäävät oppijoiden kykyä käyttää kieltä. Lisäksi tutkimus pyrki selvittämään, millaisia kielenkäyttötilanteita oppijat ovat kokeneet. Tutkimuksen tavoitteena oli myös tarkastella kielenoppijoiden näkökulmia siitä, miten englannin kielen opetus vastaa sille asetettuihin tavoitteisiin ja haasteisiin käytännön opetuksessa.</p> <p>Tutkielman aineisto koostuu neljästä puoli-strukturoidusta ryhmähaastattelusta, joihin osallistui 12 yhdeksäsluokkalaista englannin kielen opiskelijaa kahdesta eri peruskoulusta. Haastatteluissa oppilaita kehoitettiin tuomaan vapaasti esiin ajatuksiaan ja mielipiteitään tutkitusta aiheesta. Tutkimusaineisto analysoitiin käyttäen aineistolähtöistä sisällönanalyysia.</p> <p>Tutkimuksessa selvisi, että oppilaat ymmärtävät englannin kielen viestintätaitojen tärkeyden kaikessa toiminnassa nykyajan globaalissa maailmassa. Lisäksi oppilaat suhtautuvat myönteisesti englannin kielen viestintätaitojen opettamiseen ja oppimiseen. Kaikenkaikkiaan oppilaat kokivat, että englannin kielen opetus peruskoulussa antaa valmiuksia käyttää kieltä autenttisissa kielenkäyttötilanteissa. Tutkimuksen tulokset kuitenkin osoittivat useita seikkoja, jotka ilmaisivat, ettei kielenkäytön ja kommunikatiivisuuden kehitystä tueta englannin kielen opetuksessa asetetuista tavoitteista huolimatta.</p> <p>Tutkielman tulokset osoittivat, että englannin kielen viestintätaitojen opettamiseen ja oppimiseen tulisi kiinnittää enemmän huomiota perusopetuksen aikana. Lisäksi tutkimuksen tulokset ilmaisivat selkeän tarpeen viestintätaitojen harjoittamiseen englannin kielen opetuksessa.</p>	
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1 INTRODUCTION

Language teaching methods have always been revised to provide learners the language proficiency they need (Richards and Rodgers 2001:3). Thus, foreign language learning has always had an important role in education and its methods and goals have been widely discussed. Foreign language teaching and learning is still a significant subject of interest and its methods and goals are discussed and developed to meet the needs of the world today and in the future.

Due to the globalization of the world, language learning has a central role in preparing language learners for international interaction and intercultural learning (Kaikkonen and Kohonen 2000:7). The English language has established its place as a global language and thus, the English language is a part of people's everyday lives everywhere. Saville-Troike (2006:100) points out that the knowledge of linguistic competence is insufficient from the social point of view. Due to this, the focus in language education has shifted from linguistic competence to communicative competence (Kaikkonen and Kohonen 2000:8). In addition, the authenticity of language and communication are emphasized and the authenticity of learning situations are emphasized even more (Kaikkonen and Kohonen 2000:9).

It goes without saying that foreign language learners will inevitably participate in communicative situations at some point. Thus, a foreign language in general is learnt for communicative purposes. In addition, as Harjanne (2008:111) points out, communicative language teaching and proficiency have been the aims of foreign language teaching for a long time. Therefore, language teaching by now should be communicative and language should be learnt for communication. Saville-Troike (Saville-Troike 2003 as cited in Saville-Troike 2006:100) defines communicative competence as "what a speaker needs to know to communicate appropriately within a particular language community". Thus, acquiring communicative competence should be the central goal of learning a language.

Both teachers' and learners' perspectives on foreign language learning and teaching have been an object of research to some extent. The focus has often been on the very young language learners in the primary school (Muñoz 2013; Aro 2006) or young adults in senior secondary schools or higher level (Mäkelä 2005). Furthermore, previous studies on learners' perspectives often concentrate on investigating particular skills, such as oral skills (e.g. Mäkelä 2005). Or additionally, studies aim to examine learners' views and beliefs on the foreign language in general (e.g. Muñoz 2013; Aro 2006). Therefore, it seems that there is a need for more comprehensive examination on whether foreign language teaching provides the proficiency the learners need. More specifically, the study aims to examine the impact of foreign language teaching in Finnish basic education on learners' capability to actively participate in communicative situations in the real world. In addition, the present study concentrates on the perspectives of adolescents which have not been the focus of much research.

Today, the focus in learning a foreign language is to be able to use it in the real world. As Hildén (2000:175) argues, practicing language skills in school is crucial in order to prepare learners to deal with the real world communicative situations. Therefore, it is worth considering if schools are preparing their students to be active foreign language users in authentic situations outside the foreign language classrooms. Furthermore, it should be examined whether foreign language teaching is able to encourage students to use their language skills in authentic situations. The primary interest of the present study is in the thoughts, feelings and expectations of the students who are the ones learning. Do they feel that the learning in schools is preparing them to be active language users outside the classroom environment? Does the foreign language teaching meet the needs of learners from learners' perspective? In addition, the study pursues to examine whether foreign language education meets the set goals and challenges in practice from the perspective of the students.

A broader and deeper understanding of students' opinions, expectations and feelings as foreign language users will help foreign language teachers to design classes in a way that will encourage students to use the foreign

language in everyday situations and to help them build self-confidence as foreign language users. I believe it is very important that teachers teach students to be active language users in the world outside school.

In order to find out whether students feel that schools are preparing them to be active language users outside the classroom, a qualitative study was carried out. The study was carried out by interviewing twelve ninth grade students who were about to complete their basic education. Interviews were chosen as the data collection method since it was expected to give more insights into the present study since the students could freely share their thoughts, expectations and matters which they consider to be important.

In the present study, the theoretical background of the study is introduced first. The theoretical framework consists of three chapters. Firstly, chapter 2 begins with briefly defining the concept of communicative competence, after which two important models of communicative competence are presented. In addition, the theoretical framework includes the more recent view of communicative competence provided by the Common European Framework. Secondly, chapter 3 presents the central learning contents and objectives for foreign language education determined by the Finnish National Core Curriculum. Discussion on the models of communicative competence together with the content of the Finnish National Core Curriculum provides a starting point for the present study. Next, chapter 4 concludes the theoretical part of the study by delving into some previous studies on communicative language teaching and learning.

Chapter 5 proceeds to introducing the present study in detail. The justification and research questions of the study are presented first. Then the methodological approach is discussed. Next, the research participants and data inquiry process are presented. Finally, the method of analysis is introduced in more detail.

In chapter 6, the central findings of the study are presented. Finally, chapters 7 and 8 conclude the present study by first interpreting the findings and

drawing conclusions. Finally, the conclusion offers recommendations for further research.

2 COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE

“We don’t need to teach people speak like natives, you need to make the other people believe they can, so they can talk to them, and then they learn.”

-Margaret Mead (1964)

The essential goal of foreign language learning is to be able to communicate with the language or, in other words, to gain communicative competence. It is important to realize that learning a foreign language is more than just learning linguistic structures. However, as Kaikkonen (1998:12) states, learning a foreign language is often defined as learning the competence of a language, the focus being only on the linguistic structures of language. This traditional linguistic-centered approach shifted to a more communicative approach in the late 1970s and early 1980s (Widdowson 1990). As Kaikkonen (1998:12) points out, the actual use of language became the central goal of foreign language learning.

In addition to learning a language as a linguistic system, it is important to include the learners’ need and ability to learn the actual language use in foreign language teaching (Kaikkonen 1998:12). Thereby the learners are able to communicate with the language (Kaikkonen 1998:12). Canale and Swain (1980:9) identify basic communication skills as a minimum level of skills that enables one to manage in the everyday communication situations. Thus, Savignon (1997:7, 16) calls it an “anything-goes-as-long-as-you-get-your-meaning-across” approach, where people and the language are seen as a part of social contexts or settings. Being able to communicate with a foreign language requires communicative competence (Hymes 1971) or the ability to know what to say and how to say it appropriately according to the requirements of the situation.

There are many definitions for the term communicative competence. In addition, there are different views concerning which components should be included in a model of communicative language ability (Weir 1990:8). Dell Hymes first proposed the term ‘communicative competence’ in the 1960s (Rickheit, Strohner and Vorweg 2010:15). Hymes’ notion of

communicative competence was a response to the theories of Noam Chomsky, who was a strong advocate of linguistic competence and argued that social factors were not a part of linguistic ability (Celce-Murcia 2008:42). Hymes pointed out that being able to speak the language and actually communicate with it requires more than just knowing the grammatical structures or, in other words, linguistic competence (Rickheit, Strohner and Vorwerg 2010:15) but also the sociolinguistic competence, that is “the rules of using language appropriately in context”, is needed in language acquisition and language use (Celce-Murcia 2008:42). Thus, Hymes claimed that language use was not context-free (Celce-Murcia 2008:42). In addition, contrary to Chomsky, who drew a distinction between competence and performance (Bagarić and Mihaljević Djigunović 2005:97), Hymes did not view competence and performance as two separate concepts but “as two sides of a coin”; performance action part, which is visible and competence as the ability part which enables performance (Rickheit, Strohner and Vorwerg 2010:17). According to Hymes, cognitive and social factors have an effect on both competence and performance (Rickheit, Strohner and Vorwerg 2010:18). After Hymes presented the notion of communicative competence, the communicative approach to language teaching started to emerge. This new language teaching approach with new material had a new goal for second language teaching: communication (Celce-Murcia 2008:42). Canale and Swain were among the first to develop a model of communicative competence. Canale and Swain (1980) added strategic competence to linguistic competence (Canale and Swain call it grammatical competence) and sociolinguistic competence in order to complement Hymes’ model. Later on, Canale (1983) added discourse competence to the previous model.

As Bagarić and Mihaljević Djigunović (2007:97) point out, there are three models of communicative competence, which are often viewed as a basis for communicative competence research. Next, these models are discussed in more detail by first introducing the model by Canale and Swain (1980). Then a more detailed model by Bachman (1990) is presented. Finally, a more current model by the Common European Framework is discussed.

2.1 Canale and Swain's framework for communicative competence

Michael Canale and Merrill Swain provided a more comprehensive theoretical framework for communicative competence in their studies where they challenged the existing principles for communicative competence (1980:1). According to Canale and Swain (1980:1), these revised principles set a guideline for creating more effective second language teaching. In addition, this guideline provides a tool for more sufficient assessment of communication skills. The model by Canale and Swain (further refined in Canale 1983) was one of the most important adaptations of Hymes' framework and its domination in the field of foreign language education lasted for more than a decade (McNamara 1996:61).

As Canale and Swain (1980:10) emphasize, it is crucial to acknowledge two principles when it comes to the basic communication skills. Firstly, basic communication skills are defined as a minimum level of communication skills and secondly, making one's point and being understandable should be highlighted from the start instead of grammatical aspects of the language and appropriateness in order to learn second language more effectively. A case in point is a child concentrating on being understood rather than getting it grammatically correct when acquiring his first language (Canale and Swain 1980:10). This example points out that this kind of learning could be used as a model in second language learning. However, Canale and Swain (1980:11) point out various reasons why second language learning is not the same as acquiring the first language, for instance the onset of lateralization and formal operations in early adolescence. These factors should be taken into account when planning effective foreign language teaching.

2.1.1 Five primary principles as a starting point

Canale and Swain (1980:27) introduce five primary principles for communicative approach which need to be taken into consideration in second language teaching. After this they propose their theory of

communicative competence, which supports the communicative approach. Next, these principles will be examined further.

According to the first principle, communicative competence consists of three different competencies. The first competence is grammatical competence, which means the knowledge of the rules of grammar. Specifically, knowledge of vocabulary, rules of word and sentence formation, linguistic semantics, pronunciation and spelling are all part of grammatical competence. Secondly, communicative competence consists of sociolinguistic competence, which is the knowledge of the rules of use, in other words rules of appropriateness of both meanings and grammatical forms in different sociolinguistic contexts. And finally, communicative competence involves the rules of discourse and communication strategies or, as Canale and Swain (1980:27) say, strategic competence. In order to achieve communicative competence in a second language, all three competences should be taken into account. Canale and Swain (1980:27) argue that a better outcome will take place when none of the competencies are overemphasized.

Second principle emphasizes the needs of the learner. Canale and Swain state:

A communicative approach must be based on and respond to the learner's communication needs. These needs must be specified with respect to grammatical competence, sociolinguistic competence and strategic competence. (Canale and Swain 1980:27)

Canale and Swain (1980:27) point out that there are two types of needs in each of the competencies; those which are more permanent and those which might change with age or language learning stage. However, the main point is that the communicative approach meets the needs that a second language learner will encounter in real life. This study aims to investigate the students' thoughts and opinions on whether the communicative approach is used in second language teaching and whether it meets the needs which second language users require in real life situations.

The next principle extends the idea in the second principle above. Canale and Swain (1980:27) claim that a second language learner needs opportunities to have meaningful and realistic conversations preferably with a more proficient language speaker. Intelligibly, creating these opportunities in second language teaching is challenging. Canale and Swain (1980:28) rightfully suggest that exposure to these authentic communication situations is essential in gaining communicative confidence. Communicative confidence should be the goal in second language learning and teaching.

In the fourth principle, Canale and Swain (1980:28) emphasize that a second language learner will benefit from using his or her existing communicative competence which has been developed by using native language especially at the beginning of second language learning. Furthermore, Canale and Swain state:

It is especially important that the more arbitrary and less universal aspects of communication in second language (e.g. certain features of the grammatical code) be presented and practiced in the context of less arbitrary and more universal aspects (e.g. the fundamental appropriateness conditions in making a request, the basic rules of discourse involved in greeting a peer). (Canale and Swain 1980:28)

The final principle describes how a communication-oriented second language programme should be organized. Canale and Swain (1980:28) highlight that learners must be provided with the information, practice and experience needed in communicating with a second language. In addition, different aspects of language should be taught in the first language programme as well as the second language culture.

2.1.2 The theoretical framework for communicative competence

Canale and Swain (1980:29) propose their theoretical framework for communicative competence in line with the five guiding principles presented above. The theoretical framework proposed by Canale and Swain (1980:28) consists of three main competencies: grammatical competence, sociolinguistic competence, and strategic competence. Canale updated this model in 1983 as he proposed a model with four competences; linguistic,

sociolinguistic, discourse and strategic competence (Weir 1990:8). In this slightly revised theoretical framework for communicative competence, sociolinguistic competence includes sociocultural rules, while cohesion and coherence are a part of discursal competence. Next, these four competences are examined further.

2.1.2.1 Grammatical competence

Grammatical competence includes the knowledge of language. Specifically, it includes lexical items and different grammatical rules, such as rules of morphology, syntax, sentence-grammar semantics and phonology (Canale and Swain 1980:29). Canale and Swain's view (1980:30) is that grammatical competence is important for second language learners to express and understand the literal meaning of utterances accurately. Thus, grammatical competence is an important part of second language education.

2.1.2.2 Sociolinguistic competence

In Canale and Swain's model (1980) sociolinguistic competence consists of two sets of rules: sociocultural rules of use and rules of discourse. In order to understand the utterance's social meaning, knowledge of these rules is essential (Canale and Swain 1980:30). Canale and Swain (1980:30) define sociocultural rules of use as ways to produce and understand utterances appropriately in different sociolinguistic contexts. These rules determine which factors, such as topic, role of participants, setting and norms of interaction are appropriate in certain contexts (Canale and Swain 1980:30). Furthermore, these rules include the appropriate attitude and register in a given context. In other words sociolinguistic competence deals with both appropriateness of meaning and appropriateness of form (Canale 1983:7). Appropriateness of meaning involves communicative functions (commanding, complaining and inviting), attitudes (politeness and formality) and ideas and how appropriate these are in certain situations (Canale 1983:7). Appropriateness of form deals with whether a given meaning is expressed properly in a verbal or non-verbal way in a given context (Canale 1983:7). Rules of discourse deal with the rules of cohesion

and coherence. Canale and Swain (1980:30) point out that the focus of rules of discourse in their framework is not on the grammaticalness of an utterance nor on the sociocultural appropriateness and communicative functions in a specific context but instead the focus is on the combination of utterances and communicative functions. In Canale's revised version (1983), sociolinguistic competence only includes sociocultural rules and discourse competence is considered to be a separate component.

2.1.2.3 Discourse competence

Canale (1983) divided sociolinguistic competence into two different components by adding discourse competence into their theoretical framework for communicative competence. Canale defines discourse competence as follows.

This type of competence concerns mastery of how to combine grammatical forms and meanings to achieve a unified spoken or written text in different genres. (Canale 1983:9)

Unified text is accomplished by cohesion in forms and coherence in meaning (Canale 1983:9). Cohesion is enabled by the use of cohesion devices such as pronouns, synonyms, ellipsis, conjunctions and parallel structures which link the utterances and facilitate interpretation of a text. The organization of meaning is achieved by the means of coherence which are, for instance repetition, progression and consistency (Canale 1983:10). In other words, coherence deals with "relationships among the different meanings in a text" (Canale 1983:9).

2.1.2.4 Strategic competence

Strategic competence includes both verbal and non-verbal communication strategies which are needed in occurrence of communication break-downs (Canale and Swain 1980:30). According to Canale (1983:10), communication break-downs may occur due to "momentary inability to recall an idea or grammatical form or insufficient competence in one or more of the areas of communicative competence". Canale (1983:11) also points out that communication strategies are used to make the

communication more effective. According to Canale and Swain (1980:30), there are two types of communication strategies; strategies which are associated with grammatical competence and strategies which are associated with sociolinguistic competence. Canale and Swain (1980:31) emphasize that knowledge of these strategies is an essential coping mechanism at least at the beginning stages of second language learning but also later. Furthermore, Canale (1983:11) emphasizes that the learners must be encouraged to use communication strategies rather than remain silent. It has been pointed out that these strategies are acquired through real life communication experiences (Canale and Swain 1980:31) but on the other hand, Canale's view (1983:11) is that the learners should be given opportunities to use communication strategies in order to become familiar with the different strategies.

Canale and Swain (1980:31) add that within these three components of communicative competence, there is a subcomponent of probability rules of occurrence. Probability rules of occurrence means the knowledge of frequencies of occurrence that a native speaker has from the aspect of grammatical competence, sociolinguistic competence and strategic competence (Canale and Swain 1980:31). Therefore, it has been proposed that authentic texts should be included in second language teaching from the beginning (Canale and Swain 1980:31). According to Canale and Swain (1980:31), the second language learner cannot achieve a sufficient level of communicative competence without the development of the knowledge of the probability of occurrence in the three components of communicative competence.

Canale and Swain (1980) and Canale (1983) presented a theoretical framework for communicative competence which minimally includes four competencies; grammatical, sociolinguistic, discourse and strategic competence. As McNamara (1996:61) points out, the most significant aspect of this model is that language knowledge was approached by including sociolinguistic competence, strategic competence and discourse competence in addition to grammatical competence. This model has been very popular in the fields of second and foreign language acquisition and testing in spite

of its simplicity (Bagarić and Mihaljević Djigunović 2007:98). Moreover, Bagarić and Mihaljević Djigunović (2007:98) argue that the easiness to apply the model is probably one of the main reasons for its popularity even today. However, McNamara (1996:61) argues that the concept of ability for use, or in other words, the manner it deals with performance, creates inconsistencies and contradictions. Next, the possible areas of difficulties are examined further.

The model proposed by Canale and Swain describes competences which are solely about knowledge. Characteristically, grammatical competence includes the knowledge of lexical items and rules of morphology along with others, sociolinguistic competence includes the knowledge of sociocultural rules of use and strategic competence includes the knowledge of coping strategies (McNamara 1996:61). Thus, Canale and Swain consider communicative competence merely from the perspective of language knowledge. Canale and Swain intentionally exclude ability for use since they argue that there is no adequate theory which clarifies ability for use and thus cannot be a part of their framework (McNamara 1996:61). As McNamara (1996:62) puts it “*Ability for use* is a Pandora’s Box which they firmly refuse to open”. Alternatively, ability for use is viewed as a component of communicative performance in their model (McNamara 1996:62). McNamara (1996:62) further argues that communicative performance is simply a behavior since it refers to actual use. McNamara (1996:62-63) points out two problematic features of Canale and Swain’s model. Firstly, Canale and Swain include some points of ability for use without recognizing it. As it was mentioned before, ability for use is an aspect of performance. One of the competences Canale and Swain introduce is strategic competence which includes the coping strategies. McNamara (1996:62) points out that coping is actually an aspect of performance. Secondly, Canale and Swain do not consider how components are connected and interact with each other in their model. Canale (1983) acknowledges this issue by involving a model of underlying abilities in performance in his later paper even though it fails to solve the inconsistencies of ability for use (McNamara 1996:63).

2.2 Bachman's framework of communicative language ability

Bachman (1990) presented a more recent model of communicative competence or specifically communicative language ability based on the previous research by, for instance, Hymes and Canale and Swain. The model Bachman provided was more comprehensive and included more detailed characterizing (Huhta 1993:87). In addition to defining the structure of language, the model attempts to clarify language performance, that is, how linguistic competence is accomplished in actual language use (Huhta 1993:87). Bachman and Palmer (1996) also provided a bit altered version of this model. However, this altered model was more concerned with the dimensions of language testing rather than language proficiency of the previous model.

Bachman (1990:84) proposes the framework of communicative language ability which consists of three components: language competence, strategic competence and psychophysiological mechanisms.



Table 1. Components of Bachman's communicative language ability (Bachman 1990:85).

2.2.1 Language competence

Bachman (1990:84) combines different components introduced separately in earlier frameworks into one component which he calls the language component. Bachman establishes language competence on previous findings and classifies language competence into two categories: organizational competence and pragmatic competence which both comprise many different categories. Morphology, syntax, vocabulary, cohesion and organization are components which are gathered under one main component, organizational competence (Bachman 1990:86), while pragmatic competence consists of sociolinguistic competence and illocutionary competence. Bachman points out (1990:86) that in language use components are not seen as separate parts but all components interact with each other in the language use situation. Thus, communicative language use is interaction between all the competences and the actual context (Bachman 1990:86).

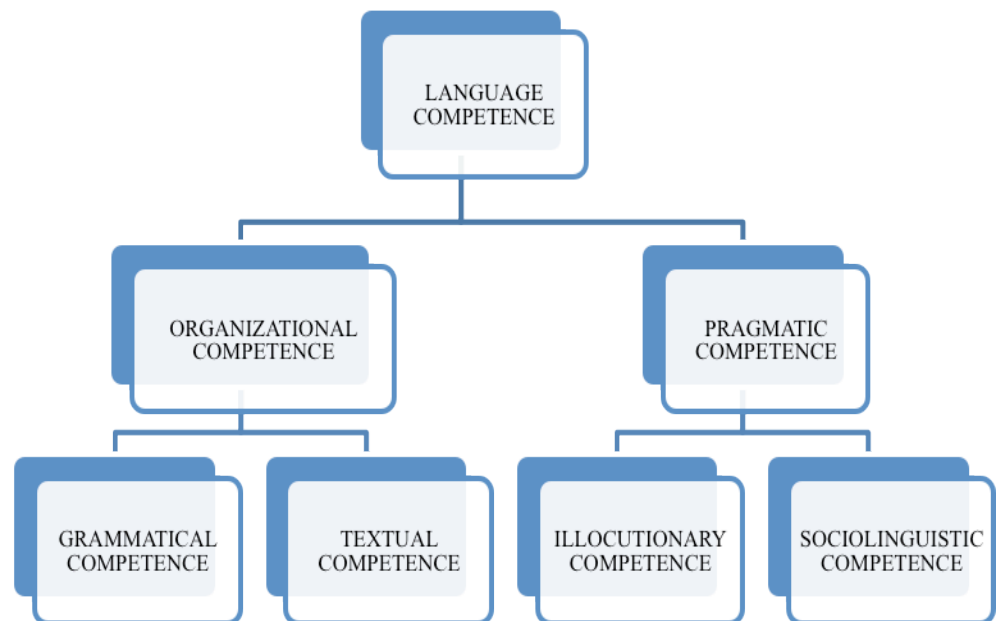


Table 2. Components of language competence (Bachman 1990:87).

2.2.1.1 Organizational competence

One of the sub categories of language competence is organizational competence, which consists of all the abilities which are related to the formal language structures. Such abilities allow language users to develop and understand sentences which are grammatically correct. In addition,

these abilities also enable language users to understand the content and form of written or spoken texts (Bachman 1990:87). Organizational competence is thus divided into two categories; grammatical competence and textual competence.

Grammatical competence refers to competences which are associated with using a language. Such competences are the knowledge of vocabulary, that is, choosing the appropriate words in different situations; morphology, which means the structure of words; syntax, which is the proper order of the words in a sentence, and finally phonology/graphology, which means the actual utterance (Bachman 1990:87).

The knowledge of forming a text, which consists of two or more utterances or sentences, and conversational language use are associated with textual competence (Bachman 1990:88). When forming a text, whether it is spoken or written, rules of cohesion and rhetorical organization are applied. Cohesion means grammatical and lexical links which hold together a sentence or text and give it meaning. In addition, according to Bachman (1990:88), cohesion determines the order of old and new information in conversation. Rhetorical organization includes the theoretical structure of a text, for instance topic sentence, conclusion or transition sentence, and the effects the text has on the language user (Bachman 1990:88). Language use in conversations is also influenced by textual competence. In fact, conversation has been studied by discourse analysis and it deals with the components of textual competence (Bachman 1990:88). Manners in conversations, such as getting attention, composing a topic and maintaining conversation, are comparable to the rhetorical organization in written discourse (Bachman 1990:88). Bachman (1990:89) thus points out that, these conventions should not be seen as separate but should be associated with textual competence.

2.2.1.2 Pragmatic competence

The second category of language competence is pragmatic competence, which includes the relationship between the language users and the actual

communication situation or, in other words, the context of communication. According to Bachman (1990:89), pragmatics constitutes of two different aspects. Firstly, illocutionary competence, which means producing acceptable utterances and language functions, and secondly, sociolinguistic competence, which is concerned with the appropriateness of the language functions in a context (Bachman 1990:90).

As Bachman (1990:90) introduces the aspect of illocutionary competence, he refers to the theory of speech acts. A sentence can have many different functions and these functions are called speech acts. There are three different types of speech acts: utterance acts, propositional acts and illocutionary acts (Searle 1969 as cited by Bachman 1990:90). An utterance act means that a person says something or makes an utterance; propositional act is used when a person refers to something or makes a prediction about something, and finally illocutionary act is the actual function, for example warning or request (Bachman 1990:90). By the reference to the speech acts, the distinction between the form and function in language use can be made.

In addition to speech acts, Bachman (1990:92) recognizes a broader framework of language functions. Bachman (1990:92-94) introduces four groups of functions: ideational, manipulative, heuristic, and imaginative. In language use the ideational function means the way real world experiences are conveyed in meaning. When the objective is to affect others, manipulative functions are used. The heuristic function occurs when the knowledge is shared to others. Finally, imaginative functions are used by telling jokes, writing stories or other ways of creating language functions for humorous or esthetic purposes. Even though Bachman (1990:94) introduces four different functions, most events where language use occurs include several functions at the same time.

Whereas illocutionary competence is needed to perform language functions, sociolinguistic competence refers to the ability to use language appropriately in a specific context. Bachman (1990:95) defines sociolinguistic competence by introducing the following four abilities. The first ability is the recognition of different dialects or varieties. This means

variations in language use which are due to different geographic regions or different social groups. In other words, variations in language use mean different ways of using a language in different contexts. These variations include, for example, standard and more formal use of language in classroom situations, and using informal language or even slang with friends. The second aspect is recognition of differences in register. The term register indicates the differences in language use within a dialect. Different language use contexts such as different interlocutors, situations, topics and communication channels have an effect on the choice of register (Huhta 1993:91). For example, a different way of language use is required in having a chat with a friend about school or in a formal job interview (Huhta 1993:91). The third ability is the recognition of more natural language use. In other words, this involves the production or comprehension of an utterance which is linguistically correct and is expressed in a nativelike way (Bachman 1990:97). Finally, sociolinguistic competence includes the knowledge of expressions associated with particular culture. In other words, it is the ability to use and understand the extended meanings to events, places, institutions, or people which are distributed within a culture (Bachman 1990:97). In addition, it is not enough to know the grammatical structures and words in a specific language but to understand figures of speech. Different figures of speech are for example hyperboles, clichés, metaphors and similes (Bachman 1990:98).

Thus far, those competences which are a part of language competence have been discussed. Language competence primarily comprise of two main competences; organizational and pragmatic. Organizational competence refers to the knowledge of creating and understanding grammatically correct utterances. Pragmatic competence includes the knowledge which is needed in different contexts as well as understanding socially appropriate language use. Next, the second component of Bachman's framework of communicative language ability, which is strategic competence, is introduced.

2.2.2 Strategic competence

While language competence refers to the knowledge of language, strategic competence characterizes the ability to put language competence into practice in real life situations. Thus, strategic competence allows the language user to combine the knowledge of the world and the knowledge of language in context. Bachman (1990:100) introduces three components in strategic competence. These components are assessment, planning and execution.

The assessment component allows language users to recognize the aspects which need to be taken into consideration in order to achieve the communicative goal in a particular context, define the language to be used in order to manage the communicative situation, assess the abilities and knowledge of the person one is talking with, and finally evaluate whether the communicative goal has been achieved or not. The planning component enables language users to use their abilities to manage the communicative situations successfully. As Bachman (1990:102) puts it, the function of strategic competence is to process the new information with relevant information available and thus achieve the most efficient use of language abilities. Finally, the execution component together with relevant psychophysiological mechanisms implements the utterance (Bachman 1990:103).

Bachman (1990:107) considers strategic competence to be an important part of communicative language ability since it connects knowledge of language (language competence) and language user's knowledge of the world and the context.

2.2.3 Psychophysiological mechanisms

According to Bachman (1990:107), language competence and strategic competence are competences which are a part of communicative language ability. However, Bachman (1990:107) points out that psychophysiological mechanisms are an important part of actual language use.

Psychophysiological mechanisms are mainly neurological and physiological processes involved in language use. These processes include the channel and mode (Bachman 1990:108). The channel distinguishes visual from auditory, while mode can be divided into receptive or productive. Furthermore, auditory and visual are used in the receptive mode, whereas neuromuscular skills are employed in the productive mode (Bachman 1990:107). In language use, all these mechanisms are implemented in order to achieve the communicative goal.

Bachman's theoretical framework of communicative language ability proposes that communicative language ability is a combination of knowledge of language and the ability to put that knowledge in use in communicative situations (Bachman 1990:107). According to Bachman's framework, communicative language ability includes three components; language competence, strategic competence and psychophysiological mechanisms. Language competence deals with the different factors which are a part of the actual knowledge of language, while strategic competence includes the language user's knowledge structures and the aspects of the communication context (Bachman 1990:107). Finally, psychophysiological mechanisms are the factors which are necessary in order to put these competences into practice. Bachman's theoretical framework of communicative language ability includes the aspect of actual language use, or in other words, language use in order to achieve a specific communicative goal in a specific context in which communication takes place. However, it should be kept in mind that the focus in the models proposed by Bachman (1990) and Bachman and Palmer (1996) is on the perspective of language assessment and not on language teaching (Celce-Murcia 2008:41).

According to McNamara (1996:66), some of the problems recognized in the model of Canale and Swain (1980) and Canale (1983) are acknowledged and even revised in Bachman's model of communicative language ability. Bachman provided a reorganized model which recognizes the aspect of ability for use in Bachman's notion of strategic competence (McNamara 1996:67). In contrast to Canale and Swain's model, Bachman's model

involves some aspects of underlying capacities in performance but is limited to cognitive aspects of ability for use (McNamara 1996:69). McNamara (1996:69) further reports that there is a clear distinction between language competence and general cognitive skills associated in strategic competence in Bachman's model. In addition, strategic competence is perceived as an ability rather than an aspect of knowledge. However, McNamara (1996:71) argues that illocutionary competence in Bachman's model has some of the same difficulties as discourse competence in Canale's model. Nonetheless, McNamara (1996:71) concludes that Bachman's model is more valid than the model provided by Canale and Swain (1980) and Canale (1983). McNamara further acknowledges that even though there are some restrictions in Bachman's model in recognizing ability for use in performance, a considerable step towards more adequate model has been made. These models provide a useful framework for testing communicative competence but as Weir (1990:8) emphasizes, these models are in need of validation. Furthermore, Weir (1990:8) points out that adequate theory of communicative language use is not yet available. There have not been new models introduced on communicative competence since the models by Canale and Swain (1980), Canale (1983) and Bachman (1990) except the model proposed by the Common European Framework, which will be discussed next.

2.3 The Common European Framework

The Common European Framework (CEF) presents a common guideline for foreign language learning and teaching and it functions as a basis for foreign language education across Europe (CEF 2001:1). In addition, it sets goals for foreign language learning. CEF (2001:1) states what knowledge and skills language learners should learn in order to communicate with the language. Furthermore, CEF (2001:1) includes the importance of learning the effect of the cultural context of the target language and determine proficiency levels which define the learner's progress.

In the communicative situation, a language user draws upon several different competences. Furthermore, language user further develops

different competences, for both short and long-term use, by participating in communicative situations (CEF 2001:101). In CEF (2001:101), the learner's or user's competences are divided into two groups: general competences and communicative competences.

2.3.1 General competences

General competences are regarded as those abilities which are applied in all actions, not only in language activities. Moreover, general competences are not specific to particular language (CEF 2001:9). General competences include a language learner's or user's knowledge, skills, existential competence and ability to learn (CEF 2001:11). Next, these different aspects of general competences are examined further.

According to CEF (2001:11), a person attains knowledge by learning from experience or from more formal learning (education). Knowledge, in other words declarative knowledge, includes the knowledge of the world, sociocultural knowledge and intercultural awareness. Knowledge of the world starts to develop in early childhood and continues to develop throughout life. Human beings use language to understand the world and its workings. Hence, the knowledge of the world and language (vocabulary and grammar) develop in relation to each other (CEF 2001:101). Sociocultural knowledge may be seen as one aspect of the knowledge of the world. However, since sociocultural knowledge comprises the knowledge of the society and culture of the community or communities where a specific language is spoken, it is crucial that a language learner pays special attention to this particular knowledge (CEF 2001:102). Sociocultural knowledge relates to everyday living (e.g. meal times and public holidays), living conditions (e.g. housing conditions), interpersonal relations (e.g. relations in work situations) and class structure of society (CEF 2001:102). Furthermore, sociocultural knowledge includes values and beliefs, body language, giving and receiving hospitality and ritual behavior (CEF 2001:103). Since it is clear that learning a new language is not just about learning new vocabulary or grammar structures, it is crucial that the aspects of sociocultural knowledge are taken into consideration in foreign language

education. In addition, foreign language education should aim to raise learners' intercultural awareness. As CEF (2001:103) describes, intercultural awareness is the knowledge, awareness and understanding between one's home culture and the target culture. Intercultural awareness helps one to see one's own community from the perspective of the other. Intercultural awareness is an important part of language learning since it helps learners to understand the world and themselves even more and from other perspectives.

One of the aspects of general competences is the learner's skills and know-how. Skills and know-how are associated with the ability to do things almost automatically. In other words, a skill is an ability that you learn and you do not have to consciously think about it, when doing it. An example could be driving a car or bike. CEF (2001:104) divides skills and know-how into two categories; practical skills and know-how and intercultural skills and know-how. Practical skills and know-how consist of social skills, the ability to act appropriately in different conventions, living skills, the ability to perform everyday routines such as bathing and eating, vocational and professional skills, the ability to carry out the duties of employment and finally, leisure skills which deal with the ability to successfully perform leisure activities such as sports and other hobbies. Intercultural skills and know-how, on the other hand, include skills such as cultural sensitivity and the ability to use different strategies when in contact with people from other cultures, the ability to understand the relation between one's own culture and the foreign culture, ability to successfully deal with the intercultural misunderstanding and conflict situations and the ability to overcome stereotypes (CEF 2001:104-105).

The existential competence constitutes of a person's individual characteristics, attitudes and personality traits (CEF 2001:11). Attitudes such as openness and interest in new experiences, other persons etc., motivations, values, beliefs, cognitive styles and personality factors all have an effect on learners/users communicative activity (CEF 2001:105). The factors mentioned above have a considerable effect on language learning and how the language user/learner is perceived in communicative situations

and language learning (CEF 2001:106). According to CEF (2001:106), the development of intercultural personality should be one of the central goals of foreign language education.

The final aspect of general competences is the ability to learn. CEF describes the ability to learn as follows.

The ability to learn is the ability to observe and participate in new experiences and to incorporate new knowledge into existing knowledge, modifying the latter where necessary. (CEF 2001:106)

According to CEF (2001:106), the learner develops his/her language learning abilities by participating in learning situations. Therefore, it is very important that foreign language education pays attention not only to teaching the language but to teaching language learning abilities. As CEF (2001:106) points out, language learning abilities prepare the learner to use language more effectively and independently in the real world, where language learning challenges occur. These challenges include another language, another culture, other people and other new areas of knowledge (CEF 2001:12). Like many other competences, the ability to learn draws from many different competences. These competences are language and communication awareness, general phonetic skills, study skills and heuristic skills (CEF 2001:206). Next, these competences will be discussed (CEF 2001:107-108).

Firstly, language and communication awareness deals with how language is perceived and used. In other words, it deals with how well the learner understands the principles of the language in question. In addition, it deals, with the learner's knowledge of the organization of the language and the actual usage of the language. Language and communication awareness enables the learner to learn from new experiences rather than taking them as a threat. Secondly, general phonetic skills include different abilities which are needed in producing and understanding sounds. Thirdly, study skills which enable the learner to participate in learning opportunities effectively. For example, maintaining attention, ability to use given materials for independent learning, identifying one's own strengths and weaknesses.

Finally, heuristic skills include abilities such as the ability to adapt to new experiences, the ability to learn from observation and participation, and the ability to identify one's own needs and goals.

2.3.2 Communicative language competences

CEF (2001:108) points out that in order to act in communicative situations, learners/users bring together their knowledge of the general competences described above and the more language-related communicative language competences. Thus, the second group of language learner's or user's competences mentioned in CEF (2001) is communicative language competences. CEF (2001:9) describes communicative language competences as those that enable a person to perform by using linguistic means. CEF (2001) proposes communicative language competence which consists of three main components; linguistic, social and pragmatic. CEF (2001) further reports that every component involves knowledge and skills and know-how. Next, these components are discussed further.

The first component presented in CEF is linguistic or language competence, which is concerned with the language itself. CEF (2001:109) points out that all languages are continuously evolving because of their use in communication. Subsequently, it is unattainable to produce a complete and comprehensive description of any language. This fact in mind, CEF (2001:109) defines each component of linguistic competence as knowledge of the component itself and the ability to use it. In other words, linguistic competence allows the learner/user to use their knowledge of linguistic components and form well-structured sentences. CEF (2001:109) distinguishes several competences within linguistic competence: lexical, grammatical, semantic, phonological, orthographic and orthoepic competences. Consequently, in order to have linguistic competence, the learner must acquire the knowledge of vocabulary, grammar, the organization of meaning, sound systems, written texts and the use of speech words from the written form.

Secondly, sociolinguistic competence refers to the knowledge and skills of appropriate language use in different social encounters. The understanding of the different social conventions of a certain language is crucial in order to act successfully in different social contexts. These different social conventions include the following aspects: rules of politeness ('please' and 'thank you'), expressions of folk wisdom such as idioms ('I'm all ears'), differences in register, which refers to the differences on the way language is used (formal, informal, neutral, intimate) and linguistic markers of social relations, such as use and choice of greetings (Hello, Good-bye), address forms (Sir, John!) and conventions for turn-taking (CEF 2001:119-120). The final aspects of social conventions are dialect and accent, which refer to linguistic markers of e.g. social class, national origin and occupational group. For instance, linguistic markers include lexical differences, e.g. Scottish word 'Aye' meaning yes and differences in pronunciation (New York accent: father-fatha), rhythm, loudness or even body language (CEF: 2001:121). Understanding the norms which control the relations between generations, sexes, classes and social groups as well as linguistic codification is important and has an effect on all communication even though the participants are unaware of it (CEF 2001:13).

The final component introduced in CEF is pragmatic competence, which is concerned with two different subcomponents; discourse competence and functional competence. In addition, CEF presents a third component called design competence, which refers to "sequencing of messages according to interactional and transactional schemata" (CEF 2001:123). Discourse competence deals with the mastery of organizing sentences to produce consistent language. It consists of the knowledge and ability to master for instance, coherence and cohesion, 'natural' sequencing (He laughed and I told a joke vs. I told a joke and he laughed), and the identification of text types and forms, irony and parody (CEF 2001:123,13). Functional competence refers to the use of spoken utterances and written texts to perform communicative functions (CEF 2001:123,125). In other words, functional competence is an ability to use linguistic resources to produce language functions or speech acts (CEF 2001:13). It includes microfunctions which involve functional use of short utterances (only one

word) such as greetings, apologies and encouragements (CEF 2001:125-126). Macrofunctions contain several words or sentences in spoken or written form such as description, explanation and instruction (CEF 2001:126). CEF (2001:125) points out that the learners/users take part in an interaction where each participant takes initiative, responds and continues the interaction further. In addition, CEF emphasizes the importance of interaction and cultural environment in order to master components of pragmatic competences.

Because human language is a complex matter, the framework presented by CEF defines language competence by classifying it into separate components, which were examined above. However, as CEF (2001:1) emphasizes, this is somewhat problematic since communication involves the whole human being. CEF further argues that the central goal of language education is to promote the development of learners' whole personality and identity. Accordingly, the framework provided by CEF acknowledges that the development of communicative proficiency includes many other relevant dimensions besides the linguistic aspect (CEF 2001:7). These aspects are for instance, sociocultural awareness, imaginative experience, affective relations and learning to learn (CEF 2001:7). According to the CEF (2001:131), the aim of language learning and teaching is to meet the needs of the learners, carry out tasks which satisfy those needs and develop strategies and competences learners need to accomplish tasks. In other words, learners have to learn or acquire the necessary competences (examined above), the ability to put these into action and to apply the strategies in order to put competences into action (CEF 2001:131).

The model presented in CEF is action-oriented and it views learners and users as social agents, that is, as members of society who perform tasks (2001:9). Social agents perform tasks by activating strategies and using their own competences in order to achieve a result. Thus, in an action-oriented approach, the language learner is seen as a future language user. In addition, CEF (2001:43) argues that the learner does not acquire two different ways of acting and communicating but modifies the existing knowledge and skills and develops his/her personality as a whole.

In contrast to the approach promoted by CEF a few years ago where learners' communicative needs were met, CEF now encourages to present different options for learning a language (CEF 2001:142). This is an important and constructive matter since all learners are individuals who learn in different ways. One way of teaching works for one but fails to meet the goals for another. As CEF (2001:17) puts it, "the process of language learning is continuous and individual". CEF continues that it is impossible to find language learners who have exactly the same competences or develop them exactly the same way. Therefore, it is crucial to provide learners with different teaching and learning methods in order to provide tools for more independent and lifelong learning of a particular language. Besides, much of the learning happens outside the classroom.

There are many similarities in the componential structure of the three models of communicative competence, Canale and Swain's model, Bachman's model and the model proposed by CEF. Canale and Swain provide a more straightforward model with four competences; grammatical, sociolinguistic, strategic and discourse competence. Whereas Bachman presents a model which is more detailed and has three competences; language competence, strategic competence and psychophysiological mechanisms. The model provided by CEF is designed to be applied in assessment, teaching and learning languages (Bagarić and Mihaljević Djigunović 2007:99). The model presented by CEF consists of three basic components; language competence, sociolinguistic competence and pragmatic competence, hence strategic competence is not considered a part of basic components. However, as Bagarić and Mihaljević Djigunović (2007:99) point out, each component is determined as "knowledge of its contents and ability to apply it".

The model provided by CEF, however, emphasizes the affective factors in communicative competence. The primary focus of the model provided by Canale and Swain (1980) and the altered version of the model by Canale (1983) is on the structure of the language, yet with a functional perspective in it (Huhta 1993:85). Huhta (1993:86) points out that the competences introduced in Canale and Swain's (1980) model are merely concerned with

language knowledge and the model, thus, excludes the ability to use the language. Canale and Swain (1980) argue that communicative performance involves motivation, needs and psycholinguistic factors such as memory and perception strategies in addition to the competences (Huhta 1993:86). The modified version of this model introduced by Canale (1983) includes both competence and performance (Huhta 1993:86). The model is viewed as a descriptive model, which means that all the parts of the language competence are introduced but excludes to describe the connection between these parts and the outcome of language processing (Cziko 1984 as cited by Huhta 1993:86). Bachman's model (1990) is a more detailed one and the focus is on explaining both the structure of a language and its realization in actual language use. Furthermore, Bachman and Palmer (1996:64-67) emphasize that communicative language ability is influenced by many individual characteristics such as personal characteristics (age, gender and nationality), topical knowledge (real-world knowledge and affective schemata which means emotional response to particular task) and language ability. Bachman's model is often preferred on account of its specific but still systematic description of the components of communicative competence (Bagarić and Mihaljević Djigunović 2007:99).

The main goal of second language learning is to be able to actually use the language in communicative situations. Consequently, second language education cannot draw a distinction between competence (knowledge of the language) and performance (the actual use of language in real situations) but consider them as important parts of learning a language.

3 THE FINNISH NATIONAL CORE CURRICULUM

While the Common European Framework provides European countries a common basis for foreign language learning and teaching, the Finnish National Core Curriculum for basic education (2004) presents central learning contents and objectives for foreign language education at the national level. Furthermore, the Finnish National Core Curriculum for basic education (FNCC¹) is a common basis for foreign language education which should be taken as a framework at the local level.

3.1 Foreign language education in Finland and its aims

English is the most common foreign language learned in Finnish basic education. Students start to learn English as an A1 language (the first foreign language studied in school) at the third grade at the age of nine and continue learning it at least until the end of basic education (age 16). As FNCC (FNCC 2004:138) states, acquiring good learning skills through A-language instruction creates a good basis for future language studies. In addition, intercultural competence starts to develop through A-language studies.

FNCC states that foreign language education should provide students with the ability to communicate with a foreign language in different social contexts (POPS 2004:136). Thus, the aim is to learn the language and be able to actually use it in order to manage in different communicative situations. In addition, foreign language instruction should accustom students with the foreign language and its culture so that they are able to deal with the communicative situations in real life (POPS 2004:136). Furthermore, foreign language learners should learn to view foreign language as a skill which requires long-term practice with communication (POPS 2004:136). Foreign language learners should also learn to respect

¹ In this section both Finnish and English versions of the National Core Curriculum for basic education are used as references.

and appreciate other cultures and different ways of living. The objectives set for foreign language education are valid since the goal is to teach students to be active foreign language speakers after basic education. Moreover, foreign language education should aim to teach and encourage students to learn the language further by using the language independently in real life.

3.2 The objectives of foreign language teaching

In the Finnish National Core Curriculum objectives for foreign language teaching are set separately to different grade levels. If foreign language instruction begins before the third grade, the main objectives are making learners become conscious of language, encouraging learners to speak the language, help them acquire a foundation for language study skills and inspire them to take interest in foreign language learning and different cultures (FNCC 2004:138). According to FNCC (FNCC 2004:139), at grades 3-6 the aim of the instruction is to acquaint the learners with communication in a foreign language in simple everyday situations. In addition, the object is that the learner will learn to communicate with the representatives of the target culture and that the learners are able to tell basic information about themselves (FNCC 2004:139). At the grade levels 7-9 the aim of the instruction is to broaden learners' language skills to more demanding language situations (FNCC 2004:141). In addition, written language becomes more central in language instruction and learners' cultural awareness and knowledge of learning strategies increases (FNCC 2004:141).

As can be seen above, the main objectives which are set to grade levels 1-2 and 3-6 are mainly communicational and practical, whereas the instructional task at the grade levels 7-9 becomes more concerned with the written form of the language and one of the main objectives is that learners' language skills broaden to more demanding social situations. However, learners at these grade levels are facing a challenging period in their lives due to puberty and need more encouragement and inspiration to become confident and active foreign language users. Consequently, encouraging and accustoming to communicate with the foreign language should be objectives

in foreign language education throughout the basic education in order to achieve self-confidence as a foreign language speaker.

3.3 Language competency in the Finnish proficiency scale

The Finnish National Core Curriculum for basic education also provides a language proficiency scale which is the Finnish application of the scales provided by the Council of Europe’s Common European Framework of Reference. The language proficiency scale (POPS 2004:278) describes different performance levels in language learning and defines the knowledge and skills the learner should master at each level. Each level includes the four basic language skills; listening comprehension, speaking, text comprehension and writing and defines the objectives for each skill separately.

C1 Managing in a variety of demanding language use situations	C1.1 First stage of fluent proficiency
B2 Managing regular interaction with native speakers	B2.2 Functional independent proficiency
	B2.1 First stage of independent proficiency
B1 Dealing with everyday life	B1.2 Fluent basic proficiency
	B1.1 Functional basic proficiency
A2 Basic needs for immediate social interaction and brief narration	A2.2 Developing basic proficiency
	A2.1 First stage of basic proficiency
A1 Limited communication in the most familiar situations	A1.3 Functional elementary proficiency
	A1.2 Developing elementary proficiency
	A1.1 First stage of elementary proficiency

Table 3. Levels of language competency in the Finnish language proficiency scale (POPS 2004:278-295).

FNCC (2004:140) describes the level of English language performance in the 9th grade for a grade of 8 as follows.

	LISTENING COMPREHENSION	SPEAKING	TEXT COMPREHENSION	WRITING
ENGLISH A1	B1.1	A2.2	B1.1	A2.2

As the proficiency scale above indicates, the English language learner in Finland should achieve the B1.1 level in listening and text comprehension and the A2.2 level in speaking and writing by the end of his/her basic education in order to get the grade of 8. Hence, the Finnish English language learners should reach the developing basic language proficiency in speaking and writing and functional basic language proficiency in listening and text comprehension. Thus, according to the Finnish National Core Curriculum for basic education, the objective is that the learner is on a higher level in comprehension than in actual use of the language. Since the present study deals with the language learners' preparedness to actually use the language in communicative situations, in other words the use of oral skills, the focus here is on the speaking part in the language proficiency scale.

In order to get a grade of 8 at the end of the 9th grade (the end of basic education), the learner should master the knowledge and skills of the performance level A2.2 in speaking. A2 level implies that the learner has acquired basic needs for social interaction and brief narration. Furthermore, A2.2 indicates that the learner is at the level of developing basic proficiency. There are five points which describe the competence of the level A2.2 in the language proficiency scale (FNCC 2004:284). First of all, a learner at this level can take part in discussions about familiar topics (personal interests or details) although help might be needed from time to time. Secondly, the learner's speech is mostly fluent even though breaks in speech are common. Thirdly, the learner's pronunciation is understandable although foreign accent is noticeable and occasional pronunciation errors take place. Furthermore, the learner is able to use simple and even some demanding structures with various everyday vocabulary including some

idiomatic expressions. Finally, the learner might have some difficulties in free speech and make some basic mistakes.

According to the FNCC, the aim of teaching speaking skills in Finnish basic education is to provide students the basic language proficiency. In addition, basic education should give the capability to develop one's own language skills further. According to the skills categorized at level A2.2, students should be able to be active language users in the real world contexts and develop their language skills further by using the language in communicative situations. However, the language proficiency scale does not include the affective side of the language learning. Thus, it does not regard the personality traits or self image in the proficiency scale. These factors are important and have a big influence on the language use. Thus, foreign language education should focus more on developing students' self-confidence as English language speakers. This would also ensure the development of students' language proficiency since learners would be confident enough to communicate with the language and practice their skills in authentic situations.

In order to accustom students to be active and confident language users outside the classrooms, speaking courses should be added to the curriculum of Finnish basic education. Consequently, students would have a safe environment to practice their speaking skills already during their basic education. This would give the students self-confidence and experience in communicative situations. Thus, students would not be afraid to take part in discussions in the real world.

FNCC states that the aim of foreign language teaching in Finland is as follows.

Foreign-language instruction must give the pupils capabilities for functioning in foreign-language communication situations. (FNCC 2004:138)

Communicative situations often involve the actual usage of the language, in other words, speaking. Thus, it is interesting that speaking skills are not emphasized even more in the Finnish language proficiency scale. As it was

shown above, the aim is that the students' comprehension is more developed than the actual usage of the language. Takala (1993:i) points out that even though teaching speaking skills or oral communication is viewed as a priority in Finland's official curriculum, teaching speaking skills is not regular or efficient. One of the main reasons is the fact that there is not an oral proficiency test in the matriculation examination (Takala 1993:i). Mäkelä (2005) drew similar conclusions in his study on oral exercises in the Finnish senior secondary school. Mäkelä (2005:158) pointed out that the reason for students' willingness to increase oral exercises might be the fact that foreign language teaching lacks enough meaningful oral practice. I also believe that one important reason is the limited time for teaching a foreign language. Foreign language teachers are instructed to involve speaking skills into their classroom teaching. However, they are instructed to do so within the same time limit as before which is not enough to really concentrate on speaking skills. Therefore, adding separate speaking courses to the basic education curriculum would give more time and dedication for teaching and learning speaking skills. As Takala (1993:i) puts it, there is allegedly a laconic communication culture in Finland which might be a problem in communicative situations. Hence, additional speaking courses would be a great asset in improving Finnish students' communicative competence.

4 PREVIOUS STUDIES

Language learners' and teachers' perspectives on foreign language and foreign language learning and teaching have been studied to some extent (for example Muñoz 2013; Aro 2006; Harjanne and Tella 2011). In addition, there is a vast amount of studies conducted on teaching and learning oral skills and communication (Mäkelä 2005). However, it seems that there is not much research available on real life language use and learners' perspective on how foreign language teaching in school prepares them to use the language in actual communicative situations. In addition, there are not many studies which have explored the viewpoints of young learners, precisely adolescents on learning a foreign language and the foreign language teaching. The focus is often on the views and beliefs of the very young learners in primary school or young adults in senior secondary school or university level. Therefore, this section will introduce some previous studies which have similar aspects to the present study and thus, are considered to be significant.

In the studies conducted by Muñoz (2013) and Aro (2006) the views and beliefs of young English language learners on foreign language and foreign language learning were examined. Muñoz and Aro focused on examining the views of primary school students. Thus, the participants were a bit younger than the participants in the present study but to some extent the studies shared similar aspects with the present study.

Muñoz (2013) conducted a study where she explored the foreign language learning awareness of 76 Spanish-Catalan children learning English in the primary school. The study also focused on learner's self-image as a foreign language learner, English language learning and its possible difficulties, learning conditions and the most effective learning tasks. The focus in Muñoz' study was on the views of the young learners of English and it provided important insight of learners' perspective on foreign language learning. The study consisted of cross-sectional and longitudinal data which was conducted by means of interviews. The study by Muñoz (2013:8-14)

showed a significant shift of focus from using the English language in the school to using English in the outside world between the 3-4 graders and 5-6 graders. In addition, the study presented a change in the objects of difficulty in learning English from separate words to building sentences. Furthermore, the study indicated that young learners are aware of effective language learning conditions and tasks which help them learn the foreign language. The study also indicated that at the end of primary education the learners viewed that the most learning-effective activities focused on form and oral production. Muñoz (2013:14) concluded that communicative language teaching is not actively practiced in the studied schools even though learners are potentially capable of learning in communicative classrooms.

Aro (2006) also studied the views and beliefs of primary school children in Finland on the English language and language learning. Aro interviewed fifth grade students and examined the students' views on learning English and the knowledge of English (Aro 2006:88). The study (2006:91-100) showed that the students acknowledged the need of English abroad. The students often referred to the need of English in communicative situations, in other words the need to speak in the language. In addition, the students' recognized the value of English as a lingua franca and in the employment markets. The study also illustrated a strong agreement among the students on the fact that the knowledge of English means being able to speak in the language. However, the students strongly viewed that required speaking skills are learned by writing and reading. Thus, practicing oral communication was not mentioned in the learning practices. As Aro (2006:93) pointed out, the students viewed the knowledge of English as speaking but learning English was considered to be reading and writing. Interestingly, the students did not associate speaking English into learning English. Aro (2006:100) concluded that the students' views provide interesting insight into students' perspectives on the English language teaching in school. According to Aro (2006:100), the aims are on the speaking skills but teaching in schools concentrates on written language. When the focus in teaching is merely on writing skills, it can result in shyness to speak (Aro 2006:101).

Mäkelä (2005) conducted a study where specifically oral exercises were studied. Mäkelä examined a bit older students in the senior secondary schools. However, the students were relatively closer to the age of the participants of the present study than in the studies by Muñoz and Aro.

Mäkelä (2005) examined the views and opinions of both teachers and students on oral exercises in Finnish senior secondary school. In addition, Mäkelä studied English textbooks, particularly the oral exercises in the books and observed English lessons. Here, the findings of 375 student surveys are discussed since it is considered to be relevant to the present study. Furthermore, the most relevant observations from the surveys are described (Mäkelä 2005:109-114). According to the findings, a total of 89% of the students viewed speaking skills to be either the most important or the second most important skill to learn. In addition, 76% of the students considered listening comprehension to be the most or the second most important skill. It is essential to notice that both of these skills are related to oral communication. Furthermore, most of the students wanted to increase the amount of oral fluency exercises and listening comprehension exercises. However, the findings indicated that the students (78.7%) viewed practicing all the skills important. This is also an interesting point since the students were in the senior secondary schools, where the goal is to pass the matriculation examination, which still mainly consists of written part. This indicates that the students at this age look into the future and have the knowledge of the skills which are needed then. The students valued the importance of the knowledge of English since 97% of the students considered English to be important to some extent or very important. Mäkelä (2005:115) concluded that the findings showed a positive view on practicing oral language since speaking and listening comprehension were considered to be the most important skills. However, further examination showed that the students did not value authenticity or interactivity in the oral exercises (Mäkelä 2005:119). Thus, Mäkelä (2005:152) pointed out that the students considered oral practice to be important but also showed some inconsistencies in the knowledge of practicing oral skills. The findings in general indicated that the students feel that they lack sufficient and meaningful language practices, especially oral practices (Mäkelä 2005:162).

KIELO is a national research project which concentrates on examining the foreign language teaching and learning in Finland. In addition, KIELO – project is interested in examining the current situation of foreign language teaching in everyday level. Furthermore, the project aims to provide information on how languages are taught and learned. More specifically, the project is interested in examining the position and meaning of the communicative approach in foreign language teaching.

Harjanne and Tella (2011) provided deeper insights into the views of foreign language teachers on the reality of language classrooms today on the basis of KIELO research project. Findings from the KIELO –project are significant regarding the present study since its main interest is to examine the communicative aspects of language teaching today and specifically on the practical view as KIELO –project aims to examine what really happens in the Finnish foreign language classrooms. However, the project concentrates on examining views of the language teachers while the present study examines the learners’ perspective on the matter. Next, some of the initial findings from the KIELO –project are discussed.

As discussed in previous chapters, Harjanne and Tella (2011:98) also emphasized that foreign language teaching should encourage students to participate in communicative language use. Thus, foreign language education needs to provide teaching the aim of which is on communication skills (Harjanne and Tella 2011:98). Harjanne and Tella (2011:99) conducted a Web-based initial inquiry, in which 15 language teachers around Finland took part. There were altogether 15 dimensions covered in the inquiry but here only the most relevant points regarding the present study are discussed (Harjanne and Tella 2011:100-108). Firstly, the findings indicated that the target language is used in teaching a foreign language quite a lot. Secondly, the findings showed that in general communicative practices are used considerably in teaching. Thirdly, the teachers reported that communicative practices carried out in the lessons are mainly speaking exercises, while written exercises are done at home. In addition, the exercise types resemble real life situations and exercise topics are familiar to students. Fourthly, almost all the participants agreed that important factors

regarding communicative language teaching are authenticity, similarity to real life situations, interaction and target language use. Finally, the teachers recognized that the most important factor in communicative language teaching is that the students are able to use language understandably. The study provided by Harjanne and Tella (2011) in addition to the whole KIELO –project offer interesting and valuable insights on the views of the foreign language teachers on teaching. However, on the one hand, as Harjanne and Tella (2011:110) recognized, it must be noted that the participants in the study were teachers who are willingly part of the KIELO –project and thus, they are aware of the aspects of communicative language teaching. In addition, the participants had a positive view and interest on the matter. Therefore, the generalization of these findings is questionable. On the other hand, the study by Harjanne and Tella (2011) offers interesting counter views to the present study.

According to Byram et al. (2013:251), the shift from a linguistic-centered approach to the communicative approach in language education has been widely discussed in theoretical research. However, there is not much research on classroom practice available (Byram et al. 2013:251). In other words, there is not a lot of information on how theoretical writings are put into practice. The present study attempts to provide a practical viewpoint from the learner's perspective on how communicative approach is put into practice in the English language classrooms today. Thus, the present study aims to find out how the goals and challenges are met in practice by asking the language learners.

5 RESEARCH TASK AND METHODS

In this section, the focus is on presenting the methods of data collection and analysis of the present study. The motivation for the present study and its aims and research questions are presented first. Next, the research methods are introduced by first discussing the methodological approach, then introducing the data collection method and the research participants. Finally, the method of data analysis is discussed in more detail.

5.1 Motivating the study and research questions

Since 1970s foreign language learning in Finland has been perceived as acquiring communicative competence (Kaikkonen 1998:12). Furthermore, as discussed in chapter 3, the central goal of foreign language teaching in Finland is to provide students with the capabilities needed to communicate in a foreign language in different social contexts. Moreover, communicative language proficiency is increasingly significant today and in the future since communicative competence is required in the internationally connected Finland (Harjanne 2008:111). In addition, versatile communication skills are more and more emphasized and required in almost all fields of working life (Luukka and Pöyhönen 2007:21). The language skills which are required are changing with the changing society (Luukka and Pöyhönen 2007:14). Harjanne (2008:111) emphasizes that the language teaching in Finland is expected to meet these objectives. Luukka and Pöyhönen (2007:14) point out that language teaching is perceived from a more traditional viewpoint of language and language proficiency which does not encourage the teaching of versatile language skills, such as oral communication. Harjanne (2008:111) also expresses the concern that language education develops to meet the goals in theory but not in practice. Thus, the present study aims to find out how the goals and challenges are met in practice by asking the language learners.

The aim of the present study is to investigate whether foreign language teaching in schools prepares learners to be active foreign language users in

authentic situations. The focus of the study is on how learners experience foreign language teaching at school. In addition, the study proposes to show the learners' perspective on how foreign language teaching and teachers could support their learning so they could become active foreign language users. Furthermore, there are several objectives set in the Finnish National Core Curriculum for basic education and in the Common European Framework about foreign language teaching and it is therefore important to examine whether these objectives are met in foreign language classrooms in the opinion of the students.

The research questions are as follows:

1. Does foreign language teaching in schools prepare students to be active language users in the real world from the perspective of a selected group of language learners?
2. What aspects of teaching have enhanced the students' ability to use foreign language in authentic situations?
3. What kind of everyday situations students have encountered where they have used their language skills and how they have experienced these situations?

Thus, the present study aims to examine whether foreign language learners feel that they are capable of functioning in the foreign language in the communicative situations they face in the future. In addition, the aim of the second research question is to find out the learners' opinions and thoughts on whether foreign language teaching meets the goals and challenges in practice. The third research question intends to explore the possible need for learning communication skills.

5.2 Methodological approach

In order to find out whether foreign language teaching in schools prepares learners to be active foreign language users in real life situations, a qualitative method is applied. As Dörnyei (2007:38) emphasizes, qualitative research is concerned with opinions, experiences and feelings of individuals

and the goal is to explore the participants' views. Hirsjärvi et al. (1997:157) propose that describing real life is the starting point of qualitative research. Hirsjärvi et al. (1997:160) further point out that one of the characteristics of qualitative research is that it favors methods where examinees' perspective and their "voice" are essential. Thus, examinee involvement is a fundamental part in qualitative research (Eskola and Suoranta 1998:16) and therefore suits well to the present study where the learners' perspective is examined.

Hirsjärvi et al. (1997:200) point out that conducting interviews has been the main method in qualitative study. Therefore, in this study, data were collected by conducting interviews. Kvale (1996:70) points out that the qualitative interview is a sensitive and effective tool when the experiences and lived meanings of the subjects' everyday world are examined. Moreover, interviews enable participants to express their views in their own words and from their own perspective. Furthermore, as Hirsjärvi and Hurme (2000:34-35) put it, one of the advantages of the interviews is that the participant is seen as a person who can bring out matters concerning himself or herself as freely as possible. Thus, the participant is an active part of the research process. In addition, it is known beforehand that the subject of the study might bring forth many different answers, that is, it is not predictable. One of the goals of the present study was to give learners a chance to evaluate foreign language teaching from their perspective. This gives valuable and needed information which can benefit foreign language teaching in the future.

Interviews are divided into different types according to the degree of structure, thus ranging from the highly structured interviews to semi-structured and unstructured interviews (Hirsjärvi and Hurme 2000:43). Firstly, Dörnyei (2007:135) describes structured interviews where a pre-prepared list of questions is strictly followed with every interviewee. This ensures that the focus is on the target topic but leaves little room for flexibility and spontaneity. Next, the semi-structured interview offers a compromise between the structured and unstructured interview. According to Hirsjärvi and Hurme (2000:48), the semi-structured interview proceeds

with certain themes but the question formation and order can vary. In addition, the semi-structured interview gives the interviewee a voice. As Dörnyei (2007:136) points out, the interviewer guides and gives direction but allows and even encourages the interviewee to elaborate on issues discussed. Thirdly, at the other end of the continuum is the unstructured interview, the main character of which is that the structure of the interview follows, above all, the terms of the interviewee and the interview is closer to free discussion than the question-answer form (Ruusuvuori and Tiitula 2005:11). In the present study, the semi-structured interview was conducted since roughly the same questions were asked from all the participants. In other words themes of the interviews were the same. However, the participants were encouraged to bring forth their ideas and opinions on the matter.

As noted above, there are many different interview types but there are also many different ways to carry out an interview (Hirsjärvi and Hurme 2000:61). Commonly interviews are divided into single or group interviews. There are two kinds of group interviews; pair interviews and focus group interviews. Hirsjärvi et al. (1997:205) state that group interviews are commonly used when the interviewees are children, adolescents or their parents. The group interviews are viewed suitable for young participants since the young interviewees are much more relaxed and open when there are other people around (Grönfors 1982 as cited by Hirsjärvi et al. 1997:205). Hirsjärvi et al. (1997:206) further emphasize that group interviews are particularly applicable when it is predicted that the interviewees might be shy to take part in the interview. Therefore, of the different interview types, the focus group interview was seen to best suit the aims of the present study where the thoughts and opinions of the young language learners were examined. Hirsjärvi and Hurme (2000:61) point out that the focus group interview is a good option if the aim is informal. Furthermore, in this kind of interview the participants are able to comment spontaneously and make observations and simultaneously produce valuable information on the matter. In this group interview format, an interviewer records the responses of a small group ranging usually from 6 to 8 members (Hirsjärvi and Hurme 2000:62). By means of the interviews it was possible

to ask foreign language learners about their opinions and thoughts concerning their preparedness to be active language users in real life situations.

5.3 Research participants

In principal, one of the important factors in qualitative research is that the participants have a lot of knowledge and experience on the matter which is examined (Tuomi and Sarajärvi 2009:85). The participants of this study were students from two different secondary schools in Finland. The first school was located in the largest city in central Finland, whereas the second school was located in a small town in southwest of Finland. The schools were chosen in order to get observations from both students living in a larger city and from students living in the countryside.

From each school, two groups of three students participated in the interview. Thus, 12 English language learners in total took part in the interviews. Among the interviewees there were two groups which consisted of girls only, one group included only boys and one group was a mixture of two boys and one girl. The participants were selected randomly from the group of volunteers but the group members knew each other since they were classmates. All interviewees were 9th graders, aged 15-16, finishing their basic education in May 2011. It was important that the participants were 9th graders since the aim of the present study was to examine whether foreign language education during Finnish basic education prepares learners to be active language users. Hirsjärvi et al. (1997:176) point out that the aim of qualitative research is to understand the object of the study. As the purpose of this study was to understand the object (the ninth grade students) of the current study, it was appropriate to choose a group within ninth grade students and interview them. In total, four groups of three students were interviewed and this was seen to be an appropriate number in order to get a view on the matter examined. Even though the material of the study was based on a rather small number of participants, there was quite a large amount of transcribed material in the end. In addition, the purpose of the present study was not to make generalized conclusions on the matter but

rather to gain deeper insight from a small group of students. In order to maintain the anonymity of the participants, pseudonyms were used throughout the study.

5.4 Data collection

Before conducting interviews, an outline for themes and questions was prepared (see Appendix 1). As Measor (1985:67) points out, it is essential to prepare a set of thematic areas which need to be covered when conducting an interview. The outline for the interview consisted of four main themes. The first part constituted warm-up questions, which included some general questions about English language learning. The second theme included questions about speaking English outside of school. The third theme consisted of questions about learning communication skills at school. And finally the fourth theme covered the future plans.

A total of two semi-structured interviews were conducted in April 2011. The interviews were both focus group interviews as this type of interview was considered to create a more informal and comfortable situation for young interviewees to share their thoughts and opinions. The two groups from the school located in a larger city were interviewed in the school building but still the atmosphere was kept informal. The groups from the school located in the countryside were interviewed on their own time in the local youth center. A quiet and peaceful place was reserved for conducting the interviews and only the focus group (three participants) and the researcher were present during the interview. A recorder was used to store the interviews and afterwards the interviews were transcribed. All interviews were conducted in Finnish since it is the mother tongue of the participants. In addition, it was assumed that it is easier and more comfortable for interviewees to share their thoughts in their mother tongue. The qualitative interview data was transformed into a textual form word for word. However, the transcriptions do not include specific and more detailed information such as pauses since the present study focused on analyzing and discussing the content of the interviews. To make the data extracts more readable, speech which was not considered relevant to illustrate a specific

point was left out and marked with dots in brackets [...]. Furthermore, the data extracts include rough translations into English. These interview transcriptions were then analyzed, which will be discussed further next.

5.5 The method of analysis

The qualitative interview data illustrates students' views and opinions on the matter examined. As Alasuutari (1995:38) points out the conducted material is often viewed in its entity in the qualitative analysis. Hirsjärvi et al. (1997:157) also emphasize that in qualitative research the object is examined comprehensively. Whereas Barbour (2008:142-143) emphasizes that in analyzing the focus group data, it is important to pay attention to both the meaningful comparison between groups and individual voices. In addition, the focus is to examine the material from the relevant viewpoint of the study, in other words, the focus is on concentrating on finding the relevant information according to the theoretical basis or answering the research questions (Alasuutari 1995:40). In the present study, the data were analyzed by using the method of content analysis.

Content analysis is a basic method which can be used in all qualitative research (Tuomi and Sarajärvi 2009:91). Krippendorff defines content analysis as follows:

Content analysis is a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from texts (or other meaningful matter) to the contexts of their use. (Krippendorff 2004:18)

Content analysis aims to create a summarized and general description of the examined matter (Tuomi and Sarajärvi 2009:103). According to Krippendorff (2004:18), content analysis is a method which creates a better understanding and gives a deeper meaning on the matter examined.

Qualitative content analysis constitutes of classifying themes, searching patterns, interpreting and finally drawing conclusions and building a theory (Ellis and Barkhuizen 2005 as cited by Dörnyei 2007:246). According to Dörnyei (2007:254), classifying themes or coding is a central or even the

most important part in qualitative content analysis. Tuomi and Sarajärvi (2009:93) also point out that qualitative research is all about organizing data and classifying themes according to different topics. Qualitative categories used in qualitative content analysis are not set beforehand but the categories are developed from the analyzed data (Dörnyei 2007:245).

Dörnyei (1997:246) emphasizes that qualitative content analysis is concerned with finding the deeper meaning of the data. By applying content analysis, the qualitative data is organized and reported in order to draw conclusions (Grönfors 1982 as cited by Tuomi and Sarajärvi 2009:103). In addition, Tuomi and Sarajärvi (2009:108) point out that the data of the study describe the examined matter, while the purpose of the analysis is to create a verbal and clear description of the examined matter.

Since the qualitative interview data were analyzed by using the method of content analysis, the data were first familiarized with and then classified into themes. According to Krippendorff (2004:32), relevant texts can be classified in order to answer the research questions. Thus, the data in the present study were classified in order to answer the set research questions. The first theme includes the students' general opinion on communication skills. The second theme covers the teaching of communication skills at school, while third theme reports the possible experiences of real life communicative situations in English. The final two themes include thoughts on what skills need improvement and a general view on preparedness. In the next section, the findings of the study are presented.

6 FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to examine whether foreign language education in Finland prepares students to be active language users in real life communicative situations. In addition, the study focused on examining which aspects in language teaching enhance students' ability to communicate in English. Furthermore, the aim was to find out what kind of communicative situations the students have encountered and how they feel about these situations. In this section the findings from the interviews are reported and discussed further. The findings are reported from the students' perspective as the goal of this study was to describe the thoughts, opinions and feelings of the students.

6.1 Students' opinions on language skills

The current study pursues to present the thoughts, opinions and feelings of learners on foreign language teaching in Finland. Therefore, it was important to examine what is important in learning the English language from the perspective of the learners. In other words, the thesis examines what sort of skills learners regard to be important and what are the primary skills that must be learned. Next, these findings will be discussed further.

First of all, the value of learning English as a second language was recognized. The English language skills were seen as an important asset in the future. The data extracts below are presented in their original language Finnish and a rough English translation is presented below the original extract.

(1, Juha) se et se o kansainvälinen kieli [...] tai sitä puhutaa melkkee
kaikkiällä
that it is a global language [...] or that it is spoken almost everywhere

(2, Sami) sitä tarvii niin paljo kaikessa
you need it a lot in everything

(3, Jimi) pärjää paremmi maailmalla
you manage better out there

(4, Krisse) melkee kaikkiälläpä pärjää englannilla

you manage everywhere with English

(5, Iida) loppujen lopuks sä pärjää englannilla kaikista eniten ihan sama minne maahan meet ni siellä puhutaan aina
in the end you manage best with English skills it doesn't matter where you go they always speak English

(6, Eeva) ku osaa englantia edelleenki kieliä ni saa paljon helpommin töitä
when you have the English language skills and skills in other languages as well you are able to get a job more easily

(7, Tea) kyl sitä ain tarvii jossai tilanteis
yeah you always need it at some situations

The students recognized the importance of learning English because of its status as a global language. In addition, it was repeatedly emphasized in the interview that English is used as a lingua franca regardless of one's native language. Thus, the students acknowledged that they will manage with English almost anywhere in the world. Furthermore, Eeva mentioned that the English language skills are a great asset in the employment markets in the future. The students agreed that the knowledge of English is important and needed generally in everything one does.

The students were also encouraged to describe what specific skills are the most important and crucial ones in learning the language, as the following examples illustrate.

(8, Tea) aika tärkeet et jos sitä osais puhuuki
it's quite important that you know how to speak it

(9, Eeva) se et osaa kuitenkin puhua sillee niin ku kaikki perusjutut ja sellaset
that you know how to speak all the basic stuff and such

The students mentioned that it is important to gain good basic speaking skills. Thus, it is not enough to understand what is being said or possess excellent writing skills but speaking skills are essential when it comes to managing communicative situations.

Furthermore, speaking understandably was defined to be the most essential skill:

(10, Pete) sillai varmaa et toise ymmärtää vaa
just that other people understand

(11, Nea) se että tulee ymmärretyks
that you are being understood

(12, Iida) tärkeintä on se just et tulee ymmärretyks
the most important thing is that people understand you

It was emphasized in the interview that in the end the most important thing is that you are being understood. Thus, it is important to learn good speaking skills in order to manage communicative situations understandably. The students' opinion is certainly valid since the point is to learn the language and be able to use it.

It was emphasized in the interview that one does not have to know all the aspects of language perfectly in order to get one's meaning across:

(13, Nea) ei tarvii niin ku osata niin ku kaikkii niitä kielioppi juttuja vaa se et
sä tuut niin ku ymmärretyks ku sä yrität selittää jotain asiaa
you don't have to know all the grammar stuff but it's important that you are
understandable when you try to explain something

(14, Sami) ei sun tarvi niin ku kaikkee osata iha täydellisest et sut
ymmärretää
you don't have to know everything perfectly in order to be understood

Sami emphasized that in order to be comprehensible you do not have to speak impeccable English. In addition, Nea pointed out that learning all the grammar rules does not guarantee that you speak coherently.

Finally, the students clearly expressed the skills that they consider to be essential when learning a foreign language:

(15, Krisse) se on ehkä tärkeintä että osaa ylipäätänsä käyttää sitä kieltä että
ei ehkä se että sä osaat kirjottaa mut sä osaat vähän puhuu ja ymmärrät
it's the most important thing that you know how to use the language not
necessarily that you know how to write but the fact that you know how to
speak and you understand the language

(16, Sami) ni se että pärjää sillä kielellä
that you manage different situations with the language skills you got

As the examples 15 and 16 above show, in the end, it is vital that you are able to use the language you are learning. Of all the language skills – listening, speaking, writing and reading – listening and speaking were considered to be the most important. These two skills are constantly present

in communication and thus, the essential skills in order to manage different situations. As language is an essential part of communication, the primary goal of language teaching should be on practicing oral skills, in other words speaking and listening skills.

6.2 Communicative competence in teaching

One of the important factors in the current study was to examine the students' feelings and thoughts on how they have experienced English language teaching so far. In the interview, the students were asked what kind of language practices they have experienced in the English language classrooms. In addition, the students were asked to describe whether the tasks used in the classroom are helpful in actual communicative situations. The students were also asked to describe what kind of language practices would encourage them to be active language users in the real world. In addition, it was examined whether the English language lessons improve the students' confidence to participate in authentic communication situations.

6.2.1 Communication practices in language teaching

To start with the question of the communicative language practices used in English language teaching, the students mentioned tasks which were similar to each other. The students were also asked to describe their feelings and thoughts regarding these tasks.

Often the language practices are exercise handouts where the students practice their communication skills in pairs:

(17, Sami) on aika paljo sellasii monistei et joo peitä tää puoli ja sit siinä katotaa vaan sillai
there are quite a lot of handouts where the other side is covered and so on

(18, Juha) sit o sillai et toisel o englanniks ja toisel suomeks
and then it's like the other person has it in English and the other one in Finnish

(19, Kriisse) periaatteessa siin on sillee et niin ku oikeet vastaukset toisella parilla
basically the other pair has the correct answers

Commonly, the students mentioned the so called A/B exercise, where one student has handout A and the other one has handout B. There is usually a ready-made conversation in the handouts and each student has their own set of Finnish sentences in the conversation which he or she tries to translate into English. The other student always has the proper English translation and he or she is the one who is making sure that the sentences are formed in a right way and corrects if necessary. In other words, the students take turns to form proper sentences in English from the Finnish translation. Sometimes the sentences in the handouts do not formulate a proper conversation but are just random sentences. This particular task was used in both schools examined and thus, is a common exercise used in improving communication skills.

The students also expressed their thoughts and opinions on the A/B exercise:

(20, Jimi) ei kovin oo (motivoivaa) ku vähä sellasii niin ku ala-asteella
it's not that (motivating) since they are similar to the ones used in elementary school

(21, Juha) kai niist jottai piänt (hyötyä) on
I guess there are some (benefits) in them

(22, Pete) on hyötyä jos oikke keskittyy
there are benefits in them if you really concentrate

This particular task was not perceived as very advantageous by the interviewees. According to Jimi, A/B exercise is a communication task which was used a lot in the elementary school. In addition, Jimi reported that the exercise is not very motivating. This particular exercise might have demotivating aspects since the students might consider it to be a bit too childish. Or the reluctance might be due to the fact that if this exercise had been used already in the elementary school, the students are tired of doing the same exercise year after year. Even though A/B exercise was not considered very useful, there were some students who felt that the A/B exercise is useful in learning communication skills. However, the students showed doubt mentioning this by using phrases like "I guess". Also, it must be pointed out that some students respect teachers' expertise and believe that every task that is done in the English language classroom must be

useful since the teacher wants it to be done. In addition, Pete mentioned that the exercise is useful if one really concentrates to do it correctly. Concentration problems might be due to lack of motivation, difficulties or problems with the foreign language or lack of interest towards a particular task. In addition, students might have problems in concentration if they feel that the exercise is useless or not equivalent to their needs.

As the following examples illustrate, there are a few other problems regarding the A/B exercise.

(23, Eeva) ja sit se on just sellasta et jos siinä näkyy ne vastaukset ni sitte jos ei osaa ni sit jotkut ei jaksa ees yrittää vaan ne kattoo niin ku ne vastaukset and it's like if you can see the correct answers there then some don't even bother to try and they just look at the correct answers

(24, Iida) tai sit on just niin ku ei viitti neuvoa tai tavallaan et huomaa tuollaki et jos sanoo vähän jotain väärin ni sit sä oot niin ku sillee joo no ihan hyvin tai sillai et ku ei viitti olla nii sellanen kättysä ope siinä and I don't want to correct or if someone says something wrong I'm just like good because I don't want to be a grouchy teacher there

(25, Jimi) jos siinä kaverin kaa puhuu jotain ni....(26, Nea) se menee suomeks puhumiseksi if you talk about something with your friend...(26, Nea) you end up talking in Finnish

First of all, it was noticed that it is too easy to cheat or take the easy way out. Eeva also mentioned that some students do not bother to try if the exercise feels difficult since all the answers are easily available. This is a big problem since there is no point doing the exercise without even trying. Additionally, the students who really want to do the exercise properly might not get a chance since their pair is not trying. The student who would like to do the exercise properly might have to act as they are not interested in it in order to seem “cool”. Secondly, Iida mentioned in the interview that the students do not feel comfortable in acting as a teacher to another student. They do not want to correct their peers since they do not feel that it is their place to comment on other students' performance. This will wind up to the act that the students make errors that they do not even know about and they will not learn from their mistakes. However, saying everything correctly is not always the main point. It is important that the students learn to be active and comfortable in communicative situations and to achieve that does not require paying attention to every error. The students also pointed out that the

problem with pair work in general is that you usually work with your friend and often instead of speaking in English you start speaking in Finnish.

In addition to A/B exercise, the students mentioned rather similar tasks. The students also valued these tasks in a similar way as the A/B exercise.

(27, Iida) meil on yks tehtävä siin on tyyliin viis lausetta sä kysyt jonku kysymykse pari vastaa yes no
we have one exercise there are five sentences and you ask one and your partner replies yes no

(28, Iida) on niin ku valmiita jotain ympyröitä jos on sanoja ja muodostaa joka ympyrästä tavallaan ottaa yhen sanan et tulee kysymys
there are ready-made circles with words and you form you take one word from each circle so it forms a question

(29, Juha) jottai et pitää lukkee jostain puhekuplast
something like you have to read from a speech bubble

Other communicative tasks used in the English language classroom have a similar pattern. Tasks often offer ready-made sentences or words which are used in order to communicate with the foreign language. Again, these tasks are carried out with another student as a pair work. It can be noted that these exercises are fairly simple and do not take a long time to complete.

The students also considered the efficiency of these tasks:

(30, Krisse) no periaatteessa siin on sillee et niin ku oikeet vastaukset on toisella parilla
basically the other student has the correct answers

(31, Iida) on niistä jotain ehkä tavallaan sellanen pieni (hyöty) mut ku tavallaan ku ei saa ite käyttää aivoja siihe et sä päättäisit sen kysymyksen
there is a small benefit in them but you can't use your own brain to decide the question

The students hesitated with the effectiveness of the exercises with prepared sentences or words. There was even a clear negative reply when asked about the usefulness of these exercises. The students despised the fact that the answers were easily available and that the students were not able to decide what to say on their own. As it is noted from the examples above the students feel that they cannot use their own abilities or brains as Iida stated.

In addition to the most common communicative tasks discussed above, the students mentioned a few other exercises as the following examples illustrate.

(32, Siiri) joo meil annetaa sellasii monisteita sit toisen pitää suomentaa
we are given handouts where the other person needs to translate into Finnish

(33, Sara) no just jotkut ääntämisharjoitukset
some pronunciation exercises

(34, Juha) pelataa jotai pelei
we play some games

One of the communication tasks which have been carried out at school involved translating into Finnish. In addition, the students mentioned pronunciation exercises and different games. These particular exercises are not communicative per se but undoubtedly involve speaking in a foreign language even if the student is saying separate words. This kind of practice is also important since it gives a safe environment to try saying foreign words and sentences out loud before taking part in real life situations. Furthermore, this kind of practice can improve students' self-confidence and give them courage to take part in communicative situations in a foreign language.

As it has been discussed above, there are some communicative tasks which have been applied in the English language classrooms. However, as the following examples illustrate, it is clear that more attention should be paid into practicing communication skills in teaching the English language.

(35, Jimi) no ei oikee mitää (tehtäviä)
hardly any (exercises)

(36, Iida) ei oikeestaan paljoo (tehtäviä) et siel ei oo mitään niin ku kunnan puheharjoituksia
there aren't many (exercises) that there aren't any like proper speaking exercises

(37, Iida) ei meiän tunneilla ees puhuta sillee
there is not a lot of speaking during the lessons

When the students were asked about the communicative tasks they had experienced in the English language classrooms, they referred to the small amount of communicative tasks. The students mentioned that there are just a

few exercises or hardly any exercises which they considered to improve their communication skills. This is alarming since gaining communicative competence is one of the most important goals in learning a foreign language.

The students also called for more exercises where speaking skills are practiced:

(38, Iida) ku ei meillä harjotella ääntämään meil on vaan niin ku sanat tai jotain verbejä opetelkaa epäsäännölliset verbit ni ei niillä periaatteessa tee mitään tai siis tekee niillä mut ne ei niin ku siinä jos sä lähet ulkomaille ni et sä tai tavallaan sillee periaatteessa tärkeitä mut sit enemmän ehkä se niin ku puhe että opeteltais puhumaan sillee kunnolla et porukka uskaltaa puhua
we don't learn to pronounce because we just learn the words and irregular verbs and you don't need them or you do but when you travel abroad you don't basically they are important but speech is more important so we should learn to speak properly so that people would have courage to speak

The students expressed their willingness to learn communication skills in order to be able to actually speak in a foreign language in the real world situations as well as to gain confidence to be active language users. The students realized the importance of learning grammatical and lexical factors of the language but they also demanded more focus on the hands-on communication skills. And as the example above indicates, Iida's claim on practicing communication skills at school is essentially the matter of gaining confidence as a foreign language speaker.

Writing was considered to be the central aspect of language learning:

(39, Iida) tavallaan osataan kirjottaa mut ei puhua se että niin ku aina on kaikki juroina jossain ettei osaa puhua
basically we know how to write but not how to speak and everybody is always unsociable since they don't know how to speak

(40, Sami) me kirjetetaan enkussa iha hirveesti [...] ei sitä puhumista niin paljoo
we write in English a lot [...] there isn't much speaking

As the examples above indicate, English language learning includes a lot of writing. As Iida pointed out the students are somewhat good in writing but lack ability or confidence in speaking and thus are unsociable in communicative situations in English. According to the interviewees, there is a great demand for more communicative English language learning.

To summarize, all the communicative tasks applied in the English language classrooms were carried out in pairs. The most commonly used exercises were handouts with ready-made sentences or words such as the A/B exercise. The interviewees also mentioned other tasks which include pronunciation, games and translating. The students were doubtful with the effectiveness of all the tasks mentioned. There were quite a few problems regarding the tasks for example, lack of motivation and the easiness to cheat. The biggest and the most significant problem was that the students felt like they were not able to decide what to say and use their own brains in these exercises. According to the students, learning communication skills in general is not the main goal of learning in today's English language education. The students feel that the main focus is on writing and there is a clear demand on practicing more communication skills. The students point out that they are quite capable of writing the English language but feel that they are poor speakers and thus, consider themselves as unsociable in communicative situations in English.

6.2.2 Suggestions for practicing communication skills

In order to find out what kind of tasks would encourage students to be active language users, the students were asked to describe exercises which would enhance their communication skills and build their confidence as foreign language speakers. The students' suggestions were simple but effective tasks for learning to communicate with the foreign language. In addition, some of the suggestions should be self-evident in foreign language teaching nowadays.

One of the communicative tasks which was mentioned frequently in the interview was role-playing:

(41, Tea) pitää kehittää joku tilanne niin ku et jokasel on joku oma rooli ja sit pitää niin ku puhuu
we need to create a situation where everybody has their own role and then you need to speak

(42, Sami) opetellaan vaikka niin ku ostamaan ruokaa niin ku sillee harjotellaan sitä iha sillee niin ku et opettaja on kassalla
we would learn to buy food and we would practice it so that the teacher would be a cashier

The students suggested that realistic everyday situations would be created in the classroom and every student would have their own role in it. This kind of practice would give students a chance to speak English in situations which they are likely to experience in real life. In addition to the realistic nature of this particular task, it has other advantages as well. One of the advantages is that students are able to speak English under a role. It is typical for young students to be a bit insecure and afraid of making a fool of themselves. Speaking a foreign language can make students feel uncomfortable and they are afraid of making mistakes. However, role-playing gives students a chance to act somebody else and gives them a safe place to make mistakes, try the foreign language, gain confidence and have fun. When everybody is involved and has his/her own role, it is easier to take part in a new situation. Other advantages are that students are able to actually take part in the task and use their own imagination and skills. The students also gain confidence to take part in the authentic situations later on when they already have some hands-on practice.

In addition to role-playing, the students requested more opportunities to speak English as the following examples show.

(43, Sami) jutellaan jostain aiheesta tyylisiin vaik jotain viikonlopusta
just talk about some topic for example something about the weekend

(44, Iida) no annettas tyylisiin joku aihe mistä keskusteltais
we would get a topic to discuss about

(45, Pete) et puheltais vaa jottai englantii semmassii arkissii asioi miätitäs
siäl ja puhutaa englantii
just talked about something in English just talk about normal everyday things
in English

The students mentioned that they would like to have free discussions in English on a given topic. Discussion topics could vary and be concerned with different everyday matters for example weekends, vacations, music and sports. The main point is that students are given an opportunity to speak freely on topics which they are interested in and discuss matters they know about. This kind of practice would give students the opportunity to gain experience in having a discussion in English and find a way to express their

opinions and thoughts. This would also improve their confidence as English speakers.

The students also pointed out that ordinary games can be a fun and educational way of learning communication skills:

(46, Iida) jotain niin ku leikkejä jotain hirsipuu se on hauskaa mut samalla sä opit ja osaat ääntää ku niit ku koitat mongertaa jotain sanoja siinä
some games like hangman it is fun but at the same time you learn and you know how to pronounce when you try to say those words

(47, Eeva) jotain tyyliin Aliasta niin ku enkuks missä pitää selittää niin ku niistä jutuista tai mikä siinä on siinä kuvassa ni siinä tulee sitä puhumisen ja selittämisen taitoa
something like Alias in English where you have to explain the words in English or what is in the picture so there you gain the skills of speaking and explaining

The suggested communication tasks also included well-known games which can be played in English and are easily arranged and brief. As the examples above illustrate, certain games can improve students speaking skills in general. Most importantly students learn to explain words in another way which is important if they do not know the exact word.

The effectiveness of pair work and group work was also discussed in the interviews:

(48, Kriise) sellasii et niin ku ryhmässä pitäs tehdä et siinä olis montaki ihmist eikä vaan ne kaks
tasks which are done in a group so there are more people and not just two

(49, Iida) ois jotain justii ryhmässä jotain puhuttas siinä ni se ois parempi we would have something in a group and we would talk about something that would be better

(50, Tea) jotain ryhmätöit vois ol
there could be some group work

As the examples above illustrate, the students prefer group work over pair work when practicing communication skills. This can be due to the problems discussed earlier in this chapter. One of the problems is that pair work is often done carelessly or students will not do the task at all. Since there are more people in a group, there is more pressure to actually carry out the task. In addition, since there are more people in a group, there are also

different kinds of personalities who are in different levels in language skills and thus might give a safe and free environment to take part in a discussion.

Teacher's language choice in the English language classroom produced a lot of thoughts and opinions among the interviewees as the following examples illustrate.

(51, Jimi) ala-asteella englannin opettajaki puhu englantia mutta nytte enkun ope puhuu suomea meille
in elementary school teacher spoke English but now English teacher speaks Finnish to us

(52, Sami) koko ajan suomee et tekkää tämä ja tekkää tuo
Finnish all the time do this and do that

(53, Jimi) siitä oppi paljo paremmi ku piti koko ajan kuunnella englantia opettajalta
I learnt better when I had to listen to the teacher who spoke English

(54, Sami) puhutaa koko aja englantia
if English would be spoken all the time

(55, Nea) ja sit jos ei ymmärrä ni sit kysyis et mitä toi sitte tarkoittaa ja siitä niin ku oppis sitte
and if you don't understand you can ask that what does that mean and then you learn

The students pointed out that it is very important that the teacher speaks English during the lessons. One way of learning communication skills is that the students can listen to the spoken language and comprehend what is being said. Teacher gives an example of how the language is spoken and at the same time encourages students to speak the language. Nea mentioned that English should be spoken most of the time and students could ask for Finnish translation when needed. As the examples above illustrate, there are English language teachers who do not speak English during the lessons. The students rightfully criticized this matter as it does not encourage students to speak English.

Important benefits in practicing speaking skills frequently were mentioned in the interviews:

(56, Krisse) sillee sä joudut käyttää sitä kieltä nii siinäki tulee varmaan sillee vähän niin ku sä oot tehny sitä useemmin ni sit se vähän alkaa helpottaa
when you have to use the language then you have done it more often and it starts to get easier

(57, Iida) tavallaan oppii puhumaan kieltä eikä enää jännitä niitä tilanteita sen takia se ois hyvä että ois ees vähän tai alottas ees pikkuryhmistä ja sit kasvattas niitä et se olis helpompi sillai jotenki
you learn to speak the language and you don't get nervous when you are in those situations so it would be good to start with small groups and then it would get easier

The students mentioned that it is important that they are given opportunities to speak English at school in order to gain confidence as an English language speaker. It is clear that the skill to actually speak the language, to communicate, only improves with experience. As Krisse pointed out, when the language is spoken frequently it gets easier and one gains confidence to speak even more. A confident speaker does not avoid communicative situations and does not feel uncomfortable in a communicative encountering.

To conclude, the students introduced several tasks which they considered to be effective in improving speaking skills.

(58, Iida) ei ainoastaan niitä kuivia paritehtäviä ja valmiit sanat ja tyyliin sulla on annettu paperi valmiiksi jossa ne kysymykset on ja sä vaan sanot ne parille ja sil on vaan valmiit vastaukset niihi et siinä ei niin ku tavallaa ite saa muodostaa kunnolla niitä kysymyksiä ni se pitäs tavallaan opetella koska siitä tulee taas vaikeempi kynnyks sitte mennä tai alkaa puhumaan kellekään koska ei osaa tavallaa sitte tehdä niitä kysymyksiä tai puhua
so not only those boring pair work exercises where you have the ready-made words and basically you have been given a handout where the questions are ready and then you just say them to your partner and she/he has the ready-made answers to them and basically you never learn to form sentences on your own and it should be learnt because if not it is harder to start speaking

As the example above sums up, the students prefer communicative tasks where they are able to use their own language skills and manage the communicative situation by themselves instead of exercises with ready-made sentences and completed answers. The students suggested that role-playing, free discussions in English on a given topic, games such as hangman and Alias are good ways to learn speaking skills and gain confidence as an English language speaker. In addition, working in a group was mentioned to be more beneficial than pair work since there are more people involved in a conversation. The students also emphasized the importance of the fact that the English language teacher speaks the target language during the lessons. This should be self-evident nowadays when English language teaching is more communication centered but according to

this study there are still some delinquencies. To conclude, the students call for more opportunities to speak English in order to get accustomed to speaking in a foreign language.

6.2.3 The role of teaching in becoming a language user

So far, learning to communicate in a foreign language at school has been discussed. In the interview the students were also asked whether the English language lessons as such improve their confidence to participate in communicative situations in real life.

(59, Pete) emmä oikke tiä kyl kai se hiuka
I don't really know I guess it does a little bit

(60, Sami) no kyl ne nyt ehkä vähä
well yeah they do a little bit

(61, Iida) no ehkä ihan vähä
well maybe just a little

According to the examples 59, 60 and 61 above, the English language lessons as such minimally improve the students' confidence to take part in communicative situations. This fact is not surprising on the basis of the findings presented in previous chapters. Lack of sufficient and motivating communication practices and the scarcity of actually practicing communication skills are justified reasons for not gaining confidence in speaking a foreign language.

However, the value of attending the English language lessons was also expressed in the interviews:

(62, Jimi) kyllä nyt ehkä vähän jos et sä ois ikinä opiskellu englantia
yes some if you had not studied English at all

(63, Siiri) et jos ei olis koulus käyty ni emmä ainakaa niit osais sillai
if I had not studied English at school, I wouldn't know those things

Jimi and Siiri pointed out that without learning English at school, they would not have any knowledge of the language and therefore they would not have confidence at all. After studying English at school, the students

recognize the language, understand words and phrases and thus, they gain confidence.

Attending the English language lessons were also seen as an effective way of learning a language:

(64, Tea) on niist tunneist ain hyötyy et kyl määki melkee joka tunti opin jotain uut
the English language lessons are valuable because I learn something new almost in every lesson

Tea reported that she learns something new almost every lesson which indicates that her confidence will gradually improve. However, it is unclear from the example number 64 above, whether the lessons are beneficial as gaining more knowledge of the language or beneficial as gaining confidence as a foreign language speaker.

The students proposed that practicing speaking skills should be done regularly in order to be effective:

(65, Iida) meilläki on jotain tyylin vuoden sisään ollu jotain kaks jotain esitystä et sä oot puhunu jossain ryhmässä mut ei siinä oikee tai tavallaan niin ku ei meillä tunneilla normisti oo
we have had two presentations within a year where you had to speak in a group but it doesn't really or we don't usually have that kind of situations during the English lessons

(66, Krisse) sen huomaa siitä ku meilläki nyt tulee joku esitelmä ni on vähä sillee et mitenköhän se nyt menee ku mennää sinne eteen kyl se siitä lähtee mutta nii ku ei oo hirveesti joutunu semmosiin tilanteisii et pitäs olla paljo enemmä
you can notice that now we have to do a presentation and you are wondering like how it goes because you have to go in front of the class it will go fine but we haven't experienced those kinds of situations so we should have that more often

(67, Nea) että ei me puhuta tunnilla englantia tyylin ollenkaan et jos me puhuttas pelkästään englantia englannin tunnilla ni sillo se ois niin ku enemmä
we don't speak English almost at all so if we spoke English during English lessons then it would (improve) more

It was pointed out in the interview that if the students were given more opportunities to actually speak and practice speaking during the English language lessons, they would feel more confident about speaking the language. Iida and Krisse mentioned that they practice speaking by having a

presentation to other students. However, they find it a bit ineffective since those kinds of tasks are rare and are not a part of normal English language learning in schools. According to the students, speaking should be a big part of every English language lesson and not just an infrequent practice which feels distressing. In addition, Nea pointed out that if English was spoken during the English language lessons, it would improve students' confidence as a speaker.

To summarize, all in all the interviewees find that the English language lessons do not considerably improve their confidence to participate in communicative situations in real life. The English language lessons were seen to improve students' basic language skills and thus, some confidence is also gained from it. The students agreed that if speaking was a part of every English language lesson, they would gain more confidence from the lessons.

6.3 Communicating in English in the real world

One of the important factors in the present study was to examine the students' preparedness in the real life language use situations. Therefore, it was important to study what kind of real life language use situations the students had encountered on their free time so far. In addition, the students were asked to describe the feelings and thoughts they had in the situation.

6.3.1 Communicative situations in Finland

The students were asked about the communicative situations they had possibly encountered in Finland. It is significant to notice how often the students had encountered communicative situations in English. The interviewees were relatively young, aged 15-16 years. Despite their young age they had all been approached with a question in a foreign language and thus, they were expected to have the ability to speak English. This is due to the good reputation of Finns having good foreign language skills and thus, education. All the students from the two groups living in a largest city in central Finland had encountered situations where they needed to use English.

Among the interviewees, one student had gained experience in speaking English for a longer period of time:

(68, Iida) mä puhuin vuoden kotona englantia tai ku meille tuli niin ku isäpuoli Belgiasta ni mä puhuin
I spoke English for a year at home since we had a stepfather from Belgium so I spoke

Usually, the students were approached by a person who spoke a foreign language and the students were in a situation where they needed to use their language skills. In addition, as the example above illustrates, one student, Iida, mentioned that she used her English language skills everyday for a year at home.

The language use situations that the students had encountered were somewhat similar:

(69, Eeva) jos joku on tullu kysyy just jotain niin ku ohjeita niin ku reittiohjeita ja tämmöstä
if somebody has asked something like directions

(70, Krisse) no mullekin on varmaan tullu että joku et joku on kysyny jotain tietä jonnekin
well I guess somebody has come to me and asked directions to somewhere

(71, Nea) no on tullu jotku ulkomaalaiset kysymään et millä bussilla pääsee vaikka Käpylään tai mistä mennään johonki
yes some foreigners have asked which bus goes to let's say to Käpylä or how do you get to somewhere

The language use situations that the students mentioned were always situations where students were asked something in a foreign language. Iida was an exception since she used English to communicate with a family member but she also mentioned a situation where she was approached with a question in English. Most of the students had encountered language use situations which were related to asking for the way around the city.

Similarly, the students had been asked for a location of a certain place:

(72, Iida) Helsingissä on tultu kysymään jotain et hei tiiäksää mis on joku Stocka
In Helsinki I have been asked where Stocka is

(73, Sami) joku on tullu kysymään jotain kauppaa

somebody has asked where the store is

In addition to asking directions, some of the students had encountered situations where a particular place in the city was inquired.

In addition to encountering communicative situations in English, the students reported experiencing inquiries also in other languages:

(74, Sami) ja sit se tuli solkottaa mulle jotain saksaa tai jotain ja mä sanoin että sit se puhu englantia ni se hoitu paremmin sillä ku sitä osaa melkee kaikki and then it came to me and spoke German or something and then I said that and then he spoke English so it went a lot better because almost everybody speaks English

The interviewees mentioned that they prefer speaking in English even though they are spoken to in another language. Sami mentioned a situation where he had been asked a question using a language other than English. He referred to a situation where a person asked him a question in German. He chose to speak English in the situation. According to Sami, the situation went on better since English is the language almost everyone understands and speaks.

As the following example illustrates, sometimes the situations included communication blockage.

(75, Jimi) se osas kysyä että mistä pääsee keskustaan mutta se ei ymmärtäny mun vastausta ollenkaan se ei osannu englantii muuta ku vaan sen kysymyksen he knew how to ask directions to the center but he did not understand my answer at all he could not speak English other than that one question

One of the students, Jimi, recalled a situation where he was asked a question in English but his answer in English was not understood since the person did not speak English more than that question. However, it is unclear whether the misunderstanding is due to the student's English language skills or the other person's skills. It is important to notice the student's self-confidence as an English language speaker.

The students living in the countryside, however, were not as straightforward with the question. One of the girls did not recall a situation where she would

have used English. One of the boys did not say anything when this question was discussed.

However, there were experiences of communicative situations among the students living in the countryside:

(76, Tea) ni me oltiin toi ton Siirin kans ni tuol siäl Tampereel ja sit ku me oltii siäl shoppailemas ni siäl me törmättii sellasee parturiin mikä oli ulkomaalaine ja sit toi Siiri pääs siihe niinko koekaniiniks ja se ei osannu sit yhtää Suomee

well we were with Siiri in Tampere and when we were there shopping we bumped into this hairdresser who was a foreigner and then Siiri went there so she could do her hair and the hairdresser did not speak Finnish at all

Two of the girls, Tea and Siiri, mentioned a situation where they had used the English language but it was not in their home town but in a larger city. It is significant that the girls decided to voluntarily take part in this social and communicative situation even though they needed to communicate in a foreign language. The example above indicates that the girls were willing to try speaking in a foreign language and were confident that they would manage the situation. It is crucial that students are not afraid of the situations but rather take part and try to manage the situation.

In addition, the students also reported encountering communicative situations locally:

(77, Juha) kotipaikas polakeil. no emmä tiä yleensä kysyy reittii
at my home town with Polish people I don't know they usually ask for directions to somewhere

Two boys mentioned encountering some situations where the English language was needed in their home town. At the moment, their home town is also populated with Polish workers and the boys had encountered communicative situations with them. Usually, the situations were associated with asking for instructions to get around in town. In addition to this, the boys mentioned asking some inappropriate questions from the workers.

6.3.2 Communicative situations abroad

In addition to the communicative situations in Finland, the students were asked to describe the communicative situations they might have encountered abroad.

(78, Nea) no me oltiin Mauritiuksella ni siellä kaikki puhu englantia
we were in Mauritius so everybody spoke English there

(79, Sami) Pariisissa ja Turkki
Paris and Turkey

(80, Iida) no perus jossain Ruotsissa
well just in Sweden

Five of the students living in the larger city reported that they had used their English language skills abroad. One of the students did not directly reply to this question.

The interviewees acknowledged the value of having English skills abroad:

(81, Nea) siellä kaikki puhu englantia sit jos halus jotain ni piti vaan puhua
englantia sitte siellä sai kavereita ku puhu
everybody spoke English there so if you wanted something you needed to
speak English and then you made friends when you spoke

(82, Sami) multa on tultu Pariisissa kysymää et mistä pääsee jonneki tietulle
aukiolle ja mä olin et öö et en mä nyt iha oikee et mä en oo pariisilaine ja sit
Turkissa tota me oltiin niin ku mun äidin kummitytön häissä ni sen mies oli
turkkilaine ja sen kaa mä juttelin aika paljon
when I was in Paris somebody asked me instructions to some square and I
was like hmm I'm not from Paris and then in Turkey we were at my mom's
goddaughter's wedding and her husband was a Turk and I talked with him
quite a lot

One of the students, Nea, recognized the fact that, while she was in Mauritius she needed to use her English language skills in order to manage and make friends. Other student, Sami, mentioned a situation where he was asked a question in English and he needed to reply. In addition, he had experienced a situation where his family member got married abroad with a man who did not speak Finnish and English was used in order to communicate.

English skills were considered to be better than skills in other languages which are learned during Finnish basic education:

(83, Iida) Ruotsissa ku ruotsi on vähän huonommassa jamassa
in Sweden since my Swedish skills are a bit worse

According to the interviews the students felt more confident to use their English language skills than other language skills they might have acquired. Iida pointed out that he spoke English in Sweden since she felt that her English language skills are better than Swedish skills.

It was pointed out that it was possible to manage communicative situations abroad without using English skills:

(84, Eeva) ei mulla ollu niin ku sillee et mä jouduin itse asiassa hirveesti
puhumaan ku siellä oli aika paljon just sellasia tyyppejä jotka puhu myös
suomeksi
I didn't have to speak English because there were a lot of people who also
spoke Finnish

(85, Krisse) en mä tiää ooks mää mitenkää no oon mä jotain käyttäny sillee
sitä kieltä
I don't know if I have really used the language

Eeva and Krisse mentioned that they did not have to use their English language skills abroad almost at all either because there were people who spoke Finnish or because they had not used English a lot and did not recognize the fact that they had been using their English language skills. It is significant to notice that some of the students were not really enthusiastic to use their language skills but rather survived in their mother tongue.

Some students did not have many experiences in travelling abroad:

(86, Tea) no laival vaa
only in the cruise ship

(87, Mika) mä olen ollu Italias koulun reissul ni siäl tuli puhuttuu englantii
koko aja
I have been in Italy on a school trip and there I spoke English all the time

Only three of the students living in the smaller town mentioned that they have used the English language abroad. Accordingly, three students had never used English abroad. One of the students had never been abroad, one

had been in a store in Sweden but he had not used his language skills at all and one had used his Swedish language skills instead of English. One of the students, Tea, mentioned a situation where a person had lost her child in a cruise ship and the students were asked for help. Mika had been on a school trip in Italy and mentioned that English was spoken during the whole trip.

6.3.3 Experiencing communicative situations in English

The students were also asked about the feelings they experienced during the communicative situations in the English language. Most of the feelings expressed can be regarded as positive:

(88, Iida) mut sit loppujen lopuks ni mä vaan selitin jotain vaikka en tienny mitä selitin
but then I just spoke something even though I did not know what I was saying

(89, Krisse) on se vähä aluksi sillee että no mitä mä nyt sanoisin tähän ja sit rupee vaan selittää hirveesti kaikkee
at first it is a bit like what should I say but then you just start explaining a lot

(90, Nea) joo no eka tuli jäätyminen ja sitte on sillee miettiny mitä pitää sanoa ja sitte kyllä se tulee
well first I froze and when I have thought what to say then I'm able to speak

In the communicative situations in Finland the students often felt surprised since the situation was unexpected. The students mentioned that they needed some time to think what to say but then started speaking English and spoke until they got their meaning across.

Negative feelings were rarely experienced in communicative situations in English:

(91, Eeva) ei kyllä mun mielestä oo kiva tilanne on sellanen epämiellyttävä eikä tiiä mitä sanois
I don't think it is a very nice situation it is unpleasant and I don't know what to say

Only one of the interviewees, Eeva, expressed clearly that she did not find the communicative situation in English pleasant.

The findings indicate that the students were most often confident enough to take part in the situations:

(92, Iida) nii tai ei se oo sillai et kävelee vaan ohi jos joku alkaa höpöttää englantia
it is not like you just walk away if someone starts to speak to you in English

(93, Krisse) sitte vaa käsillä puolet et ei tuu heti mieleen että mitä sanois mut sit vaan yrittää hirveesti ni kyllä se siitä sitte kuitenkin
then you just use hand gestures if you don't know what to say you just try hard and it will be okay

(94, Juha) puhuu vaa jottai kyl ne siit sit ymmärtää
you just speak something they will eventually understand

It was apparent that the students always tried to communicate with the English language even if they could not find the right words. Other means were used such as body language. The students clearly wanted to manage the situation rather than walk away. Thus, the students appear to have courage and confidence to communicate in the foreign language. Interestingly, this fact certainly contradicts with the students' general opinion that English language teaching does not provide enough sufficient support on the development of communication skills. This contradiction can be due to the aspects of adolescence or even be a part of the aspects of Finnish culture where unnecessary modesty and self-criticism are sometimes very common. In other words, the students feel that they do not have the skills needed even though when the chips are down they manage just fine.

However, some of the students reported that if possible they would not participate in the situations as the following example illustrates.

(95, Juha) mä anna muitte puhuu ketä ossaa
I let others speak the ones who know how to speak

Juha mentioned that he let the others in a group speak since they spoke better English than him. In other words, he did not believe that he has enough skills to participate in the situation.

It was acknowledged in the interviews that speaking got more fluent after using it continuously:

(96, Sami) ku se oli aika luontevaa ku sitä puhui kaks viikkoo niin ku putkee
it was quite natural after speaking the language for two weeks straight

(97, Iida) se oli niin ku ihan normaalia tavallaan tai siihen tottu sitte eka pari
viikkoo oli vähän sillee tangerteli
it was quite normal or you got used to it or first two weeks was harder

Sami reported that speaking in the foreign language got easier and even natural when he spent a longer period of time abroad. In addition, speaking English became normal after speaking it at home for two weeks. That was the case with Iida.

In addition, speaking English abroad was considered to be easier since usually that is the main language used and thus, communicative situations in English are expected:

(98, Jimi) on (helpompaa) tai varsinki jos on ollu vähä aikaa ulkomailla ja on
puhunu vähän aikaa englantia pelkästään ni sitte se menee paljo helpommi ku
jos tulee yhtäkkiä sellane tilanne et pitää ruveta englantia puhumaan
it is easier or at least when you have spent some time abroad and you have
spoken just English it is easier than when suddenly you have to start speaking
English

Jimi pointed out that when a person has spent a longer period of time abroad it is easier to speak English since it is a language a person speaks every day. Whereas, in Finland, it is harder to start speaking English since the communicative situation where English is required, is more sudden and unexpected.

In addition, other reasons for why speaking English was considered to be easier abroad were provided in the interviews:

(99, Nea) helpompaa koska nekään ei puhu täydellistä englantia
easier since even they don't speak perfect English

(100, Siiri) mun mielest se oli niin ku iha kiva ku se kuitenkin ymmärs sillee et
me ei osata puhuu kauhee hyvi ja se oli semmone hauska
I think it was nice since she understood that we don't speak English that well

The students pointed out that speaking English abroad is easier since often English is spoken everywhere and one can hear it and gets used to it. One of the students, Nea, mentioned that speaking English abroad was easier since she had noticed that the other people there did not speak perfect English

either. In addition, Siiri pointed out that the situation was nice because the person they were talking to understood that their English speaking skills were not very fluent and she was still nice to them.

Finally, it was recognized that it is inevitable to use English abroad:

(101, Krisse) no joo varmaan (helpompaa) tulee vähän semmone et nyt mun on vähän pakko että sit se menee siihe
well yeah I guess it's (easier) it feels like now I really have to start speaking like that's how it goes

Speaking English abroad was viewed easier since it was regarded as a necessity. Krisse mentioned that it is easier since she did not have any other choice but to use the English language.

To sum up, most of the students had encountered situations in Finland where they had used their English language skills. Most of the encounters occurred in larger cities. In addition, some of the students reported that they had also used their English language skills abroad. Encountering communicative situations in English abroad was considered to be easier than in Finland since it was more expected. Furthermore, the students pointed out that speaking in English became more natural after using the language and hearing the language continuously. Interestingly, the interviews also indicated that the students were not afraid of communicating in English. The students mentioned that they needed time to figure out what to say but always tried to get the message across, either by using words and sentences or other means such as gestures. Most of the students viewed the communicative situations in English as positive. It is significant to notice that even the young people in Finland are expected to have good English skills.

6.4 Students' preparedness to communicate in English

Generally, students study English as a foreign language for seven years during basic education in Finland. As it is mentioned earlier, the Finnish National Core Curriculum states that the aim of foreign language education is to learn the language and be able to actually use it in order to manage in

different communicative situations. The current study examined whether the foreign language education in Finland meets its aims and thus, prepares students to be active language users in the real world situations.

6.4.1 Managing communicative situations in English

There are many different kinds of situations which require communicating through spoken language. The interviewees were asked whether they felt they could manage with their current speaking skills in these different communicative situations. The students were also encouraged to describe situations that they could manage easily and situations where they felt that they could not carry out. In addition, the students were asked to describe their feelings in those situations. Furthermore, the students considered other ways of communicating besides speaking.

To start with the question whether the students felt that they could manage different situations in English, there were some differences among the interviewees. Some of the interviewees reported that they have difficulties in comprehension:

(102, Pete) kyl siin vois vähä ruvet pää punottamaan ku ei varmaa oikke ymmärtäis kyl mä ruokkaa varmaan ossaisi tilat
I think it would be really hard because I don't really understand I think I could order food

(103, Juha) no en tiä emmä oikke ymmär mitä ne puhuu
I don't know I really don't understand what they are saying

Understanding the spoken language was mentioned to be one of the biggest problems in managing a communicative situation in English. It is important to notice that practicing listening skills is a very important part of communication. Pete and Juha mentioned that understanding the language was more difficult than actually speaking it.

However, as mentioned above, there were some differences among the students as the following example shows.

(104, Sara) pärjäis ku ymmärtää kumminki ain et yleensä et mitä toine niin ku sanoo mut välillä se vastaamine o semmost et ei oikee osaa niinko muodostaa jottai sanoi tai niinko muist
I think I would manage because I understand almost always what the other person is saying but sometimes I have problems in replying because I don't know how to form words or I don't remember

It was also reported that understanding the spoken language was easy but sometimes replying in the foreign language was considered to be difficult. Sara pointed out that the most difficult part in producing spoken language is to form appropriate sentences with appropriate words. In addition, Sara mentioned that remembering the right words was difficult.

It was pointed out in the interview that managing a situation in a foreign language depends on the nature of the situation:

(105, Eeva) ehkä jollain yksinkertasilla jutuilla ja tälläsillä mut en mä mitään sellasia vaikeempia keskusteluita
maybe I would manage simple things but not like any difficult conversations

(106, Nea) ei kaikissa mutta no emmä nyt kaikkee ymmärrä ja osaa kaikkee vastaa ni mä vähä asiasta riippuen
not all situations but I don't understand everything and I don't know how to reply in every situation it's depends on the situation

(107, Iida) varmaan joku kunnan keskustelu tai ei niin ku mikään normi et istutaan pöydässä et kyl siinä pystyy olee vielä mukana mut joku tärkeä joku vastaava ni ei siinä ehkä oikee tai sit on vähä sillee
probably some real conversation or not like normal kitchen table conversation like you can manage that but something similar but more important then I could not manage

(108, Eeva) sellanen missä niin ku joku aihe mistä ei kunnolla tiä tai ei niin ku tiedä niitä englannin kielisiä sanoja ni sit se on aika vaikee
a conversation on a topic that you don't really know about or you don't know the English words that would be hard

The students mentioned that they would not manage all the communicative situations in a foreign language. Longer and more formal conversations were regarded as difficult and even impossible to manage. In addition, the students mentioned that they would not manage a conversation on a topic that they did not know about and were not familiar with the words related to it. On the other hand, the students reported that they would be able to manage simple, everyday communication in English, such as going to the store, restaurant conversation, and other daily communication situations.

On the other hand, it was claimed in the interview that there is not enough practice on communication skills in school to manage in real life communication situations:

(109, Iida) no en mä varmaan pärjäis sillä mikä koulun kautta on opetettu mut just se vuosi tavallaan ni sen jälkeen tai nii ku että se auttoi sit et jos puhui sitä ni sit osaa yhittää sanoja että tavallaan oppi sanoja enemmän puhumalla
I don't think I would manage with the skills learnt in school but after the year like it helped that when I spoke I kind of learnt to connect words or I learnt more words by speaking the language

Iida who had experienced speaking English at home for a year expressed that during the year she learnt more communication skills than in school. She learnt more words by actually speaking the language and how to connect learnt words into sentences.

However, the findings from the interviews indicate that language teaching at school provides the students with capabilities to manage communicative situations:

(110, Mika) kyl maar iha pärjäis
I think I would manage

(111, Sara) kyl mä ainaki uskoisi
I believe so

(112, Tea) kyl aika hyvi onnistuis joo
I think I would manage pretty well

(113, Siiri) no kai ny jotenki
I guess somehow

In general, the students reported that they would manage different English speaking situations with their current communication skills, by some means at least. This fact indicates that the students have gained at least some confidence as English language speakers during their studies. The students believed that they have enough communication skills to be able to understand messages in a foreign language and to be able to get their own messages through. These communication skills include listening skills in order to understand messages, speaking skills and other nonverbal communication skills such as gestures, facial expressions and body language.

The students were also asked to describe their feelings when they have to take part in a communicative situation in English.

(114, Iida) varmaan sillee yrittämällä tai siis ekahan on aina tavallaan jos pitää puhua ni vähän sellanen jännittää mut sit ku sä oot puhunu vähän aikaa ni sit se on sillee et aivan sama muuta ku vaan höpöttää
I guess I just keep trying or first it's like if you need to speak you are a bit nervous but when you have spoken a little bit then it's like whatever and I keep speaking

(115, Krisse) no varmaan kokeilemalla vaan kyllä se siitä sitten luonistuu jotenkin
well just keep trying to speak and it will work out

(116, Pete) ei mua mittää arvelut
I'm not afraid

(117, Tea) kyl se ny hiuka ain jännittää
it always makes me a bit nervous

Even though the students often experienced nervousness and even uncomfortable feelings, they believed that they would manage the situation if they kept trying hard enough. Also, some of the students felt comfortable to take part in the communicative situations even though their language skills were not very strong. It is significant that the young and inexperienced language users are confident enough to take part in communicative situations since that is how they keep learning and developing their language skills.

The students emphasized that there are other means to get the message through besides speaking. However, it was also mentioned in the interview that there have been situations where the communication has been totally blocked and the student has decided to walk away. Often, this is the case when the students have been unable to understand what the other person is trying to communicate. Usually, the person has been a non-native English speaker. Nonetheless, commonly, the students have tried to get the message through either by speaking the language or by using other means of communication.

In case of a communication block, the students introduced various other means of getting one's meaning through:

(118, Siiri) käsil ja yrittää elehtii jotenki
with hands and you try to make gestures somehow

(119, Pete) kyl mä sen jotenki huiitoo osaisi tai piirtää
I could somehow make gestures or draw

(120, Juha) no varmaa viittomal tai sit jotenki piirtämäl
probably by making gestures and somehow drawing

(121, Sami) no vaik elehtii tai piirtää
well you can make gestures or draw

The most common way of getting one's message through was to use hands in order to make gestures. In other words, using body language is considered to be the most effective way of communication after actually speaking the language. It is true that the combination of spoken language and body language is an effective way to communicate. Also, it is important to notice the students' capability to find different ways of communication and actually use them to manage the situation. In addition to using gestures, the students mentioned that drawing can be an effective way to communicate if actual words do not spring to mind.

To summarize, in general the students felt that they would somehow manage most of the communicative situations in English. The students reported that they would manage simple, everyday communicative situations like going to the store and restaurant, somewhat easily. However, the students perceived deeper and more formal conversations very difficult and unmanageable. In addition, conversations about unfamiliar topics were regarded as impossible to get by. The students' opinions differed slightly on the matter of understanding spoken language and producing spoken language. Some reported that the biggest communication problem was to understand what is being said, while others had difficulties in speaking the language. However, almost always the students were not afraid to try to communicate hence the problems. The students emphasized that there are other means of getting one's meaning across such as body language, gestures and even drawing.

6.4.2 Improving communication skills

Undoubtedly, learning a foreign language is a process which continues throughout one's lifetime. However, the aims are set to define the proficiency the learners should have at the end of their basic education. In the interview, the students were asked to specify what skills they would like or need to improve after learning the language for seven years in school. The students' opinions and thoughts on this matter can be seen as a resource as they propose which skills are not practiced adequately.

It was pointed out in the interviews that there is a need to improve one's language skills in general:

(122, Eeva) ei mulla ainakaan varmaan mitään tiettyä aluetta oo
I don't have any specific skills

Eeva mentioned that she did not have any specific skills which needed to be improved. Basically, she wanted to improve her language skills in every respect.

Some of the students referred to specific language skills which needed improvement:

(123, Siiri) varmaan se lausuminen
I guess pronunciation

(124, Tea) no kyl se toi lausumine on jottai sanoi vähä pitäs lissää oppii
well it's pronunciation and some more words need to be learnt

(125, Jimi) nii laajentaa sanavarastoo
learn more words

(126, Nea) semmosel niin ku et siitä saa selvää ettei semmosta sönkötystä
like the way that it's understandable and not just sputter

One of the aspects of the language skills which the students wanted to improve was pronunciation. According to the students, improving pronunciation skills and thus, having better pronunciation enhances them to be more comprehensible. This fact indicates that there is a need to practice more pronunciation skills already in school. Pronunciation is a crucial part of communication in English and thus, a crucial part of everyday language

skills. Moreover, Tea and Jimi reported that they would like to broaden their knowledge of vocabulary. This is also an important part of communication since it enables learners to participate in longer conversations.

The interviews indicated clearly the skills in which the students felt the need for improvement:

(127, Sami) puhumista ja ymmärtämistä
speaking and understanding what is being said

(128, Mika) puhuu varmaa
I guess speaking

(129, Pete) ja sillai et ymmärtää vähä
and so that you understand a little

(130, Iida) osaa suurin piirtein perusasiast et pitäs osata vaan niin ku puhua tai silleen niin ku tehä ite niitä lauseita
I know the basics more or less so I should learn to speak or like learn to form sentences on my own

Most often the students reported that they needed improvement in their speaking skills. In addition, they often mentioned that they needed to improve their comprehension skills. Iida also reported that the basics are more or less learned but more practical skills such as communication skills need to be improved. Speaking skills and comprehension skills are usually related to communication skills. Thus, the students were interested in improving their communication skills in general. This fact indicates that more time and effort should be spend on practicing communication skills in the English language lessons.

It was mentioned in the interviews that some language skills are practiced more than the others:

(131, Sami) kirjottaa osaa iha tarpeeks hyvi
I can write well enough

(132, Jimi) ni enemmän semmosta niin ku käytännöstä semmosta niin ku sanoja ja niin ku jostain puhumista ku jotain pikkutarkkoja kielioppiasioita
more like practical like words and speaking about something than detailed grammar rules

(133, Juha) ei kai se kirjottaminenkaa oo niin tärkeää et kai sit jos osaa puhuu ni osaa kirjaltaaki
I guess writing isn't so important like if you can speak you can also write

The students pointed out that they have gained enough practice in writing. Juha also claimed that if you can speak, you are also able to write hence speaking skills needed to be improved. All the arguments which were presented can be due to the fact that foreign language teaching in Finland still mostly concentrates on writing skills. However, it should be noticed that the interviewees are very young and lack communication experiences in English. Nevertheless, the students clearly argued that there is a need to practice daily communication skills rather than detailed grammar rules.

The findings from the interview indicate that speaking skills are considered to be the most important skills in language learning:

(134, Sami) nii et ne lauseet ei oo semmosii niin ku semmosii kolmen sanan mittasia vaan että pystyy oikeesti niin ku keskustelemaan sillai niin ku pitkästi
so that the sentences are not only like three words long but you are really able to discuss long conversations

In conclusion, as example 134 above illustrates, the students would like to enhance their speaking skills in order to participate in meaningful conversations in English. Essentially, all the interviewees agreed that they still needed a lot of practice in their communication skills after basic education.

6.4.3 Into the real world

In the interview the students were asked whether they felt prepared to use the English language after their basic education. The students were encouraged to give an overall view of how prepared they feel after learning English in school.

As the following examples illustrate, all the given answers are regarded as positive.

(135, Siiri) joo
yes

(136, Pete) kyl mä luulisi
I think so

(137, Juha) on kai
I guess

(138, Sami) kyllä se varmaan
I think so

All the interviewees agreed that foreign language education in Finland on the whole prepares students to use English in real life. However, some of the students indicated doubtfulness in their choice of words, like using phrases “I guess” and “I think so”. This possible doubtfulness can be due to the fact that the students did not want to criticize teaching at school. Another reason for indicating possible doubtfulness is that some of the students did not have many experiences in using English in the real life situations. Thus, they were not completely sure of their preparedness and skills. However, one of the aspects in being prepared is to acquire enough self-confidence as a foreign language speaker so they feel prepared to deal with any kind of situation in the foreign language. Furthermore, preparedness includes the important skill of learning to learn, which is also one of the objectives set by the Finnish National Core Curriculum. CEF (2001:106) also acknowledges the ability to learn and states that this ability prepares the learner to use language more effectively and independently. Therefore, it can be considered that some of the students did not feel that they were prepared enough.

Even though the students in general felt that Finnish foreign language education prepares them to use the language in real life, the following examples indicate otherwise.

(139, Iida) mutta on sillee justiin et on tyytyväinen siihen mut ois ollu mukavampi jos ois ollu enemmän puhetta ni sit tai niin ku puuhearjoituksia ja oikeesti osais puhua
but even though I'm happy with English teaching, it would have been better if there had been more speaking or more communicative practices so you could really speak

(140, Nea) ymmärtää vaan tiettyjä sanoja
you understand just some words

(141, Jimi) mut se vois olla aika hankalaa jos menee johonki toiseen maahan niin ku menee vaikka johonki jossa puhutaa pelkästään englantia menee sinne kouluun ni siellä saattaa eka olla vähä sillee ettei ymmärrä siitä opetuksesta mitään

but it might be a bit difficult if you go to another country like if you go somewhere where they speak only English you go to school there so it might be like you don't understand anything about the teaching there

According to the interview, there is a need to actually learn to speak the language. English language teaching should include more communicative practices in order to enhance students' ability to speak the language in authentic situations. Also, understanding complete sentences and thus, longer conversations in the spoken language was regarded difficult. As example number 141 illustrates, Jimi does not feel to be prepared to participate in a communicative situation in an English speaking country or at least it is considered to be very difficult in the beginning. Therefore, in order to prepare students to participate in conversations in the foreign language, language education needs to involve more practice on speaking and comprehension skills. Hence, more attention should be paid to communicational aspects of the language such as speaking and listening comprehension.

Irrespective of the fact that there are some deficiencies in the students' practical and communicative preparedness, teaching theoretical aspects of the language is appreciated:

(142, Iida) no ainaki noi perusasiat on opetettu iha hyvin tai justiin ysiluokka
ollaan kerrattu ihan hirveesti
well at least the basics are taught well and there has been a lot of recap during
the ninth grade

(143, Krisse) joo kyl ne niin ku perusasiat on iha hyvi opetettu
yes basics are taught well

It was mentioned in the interview that foreign language teaching in Finland covers the basics of the English language well. The students felt that they have gained the basic language knowledge during their basic education. In addition, Iida pointed out that ninth grade practically constitutes of recapitulation.

The significance of getting appropriate support in learning is crucial in order to keep up:

(144, Eeva) jos ois päässy aikasemmin sinne niin ku pienempään ryhmään ni vois olla sillee vähän kehittyneempi enkussa ja sillee mutta no kyllä ihan hyvin sillee ja varsinkin nyt ku on siellä pienemmässä ryhmässä ni on tullu sillee niin ku paljon enemmän opittua
if I had had the chance to learn English in a smaller group earlier I could have learned more English but it has prepared me okay especially now when I'm in the smaller group I have learned a lot more

As the example above indicates, receiving support early enough is important so the students can develop their skills in a manner which best suits them. It is clear that every language learner is different and this needs to be taken into account in language teaching. Furthermore, as CEF (2001:142) states, individual differences and needs must be considered in foreign language education.

To sum up, the overall opinion of the students was that Finnish foreign language education prepares them to use the language in authentic situations. However, there are some aspects which indicate that the students lack the ability to actually speak the language and the students are not prepared to communicate in English outside classrooms. Consequently, foreign language education should pay more attention to teaching communicative skills, such as speaking and listening skills. This fact has been stated in theory and it is the aim of foreign language teaching in the Finnish National Core Curriculum. However, this should also be put into practice more effectively. According to the interviews, the basics of the language, grammar and structures to be more specific, are taught well but the students call for more communicative practices. Also, the importance of appropriate support in learning was emphasized.

7 DISCUSSION

The overall purpose of the present study was to examine whether foreign language teaching in Finnish basic education prepares learners to be active language users in the real life situations in the opinion of the learners themselves. Furthermore, the study aimed to examine the aspects which enhance the learners' ability to communicate in English. Finally, the study investigated the learners' experiences so far on communicative situations in the foreign language. In the previous section, the findings from four semi-structured group interviews were introduced. Next, the findings are discussed further taking into account the theoretical considerations discussed in the previous sections of the present study.

The theoretical part of the present study introduced three models of communicative competence. All three models included language competence (grammatical competence in Canale and Swain's model). Language competence is concerned with the knowledge of language itself. The findings of the present study showed that the focus in English language teaching in school is mainly on this particular competence since grammatical aspects and linguistic structures appeared to be a central part of teaching. In addition to language competence, Bachman's model as well as Canale and Swain's model included strategic competence, which can be defined as the ability or strategies which put language competence into practice. According to Canale and Swain (1980:30), these strategies can be both verbal and non-verbal. According to the findings of the present study, the students appeared to have capabilities to find different ways of communication (e.g. gestures) and use them in order to manage the communicative situations. Thus, the students also seemed to have some knowledge and skills of strategic competence. All in all, the findings suggest that English language teaching provides the learners some knowledge and skills of the competences which are a part of communicative competence.

As the previous sections of this study suggest, the communicative perspective in foreign language education is not a very new concept. Furthermore, the ability to actually use the English language in communicative purposes is both a well-founded and solid aim of foreign language education (Hedge 2000:44). Foreign language education in Finland has also accepted the goal of communicative language ability and views foreign language teaching from the communicative perspective. However, the findings of the present study suggested that more attention should be paid to teaching and learning communication skills and acquiring language use ability during basic education.

One of the research objects was to examine the aspects which enhance the students' ability to use the English language in authentic situations. It was apparent that the students had a positive view on learning to communicate. In line with the findings of Aro (2006:91-100), the students were aware of the importance and necessity of being able to communicate with the English language in the future. Furthermore, the position of English as a global language was also acknowledged. Thus, the students were highly motivated to learn the needed skills. Furthermore, the students acknowledged the importance of communication skills, specifically speaking and listening comprehension skills. This fact was also acknowledged in the study by Mäkelä (2005:109-114). The majority of the students agreed that the most important aspect of foreign language learning is the fact that one is able to use the language understandably (compare POPS 2004:136).

However, according to the students, the English language lessons at present minimally improve their confidence to participate in communicative situations in English. This fact is due to lack of effective and meaningful communication practices and the small number of practices. Nevertheless, the students viewed that without the foreign language teaching in school, they would not have any confidence. The students appreciated foreign language teaching in school for gaining good basic skills (mainly written), which creates a good basic confidence. In addition, there are some exercises used in the English language classrooms which the students considered to be effective if the exercises were done regularly as a part of everyday English

language lessons. Thus, the students expressed a need to be able to actually use the language in different communicative situations. As it has been discussed in the previous sections of this study, foreign language education and teaching must provide the knowledge and proficiency the learners need in the future.

The students were doubtful of the efficiency of practicing communication in the English language classrooms. The students criticized that the exercise types did not give room for independent thinking and decision making. The students felt that they did not have to use their brains at all since the exercises were often ready-made. Mäkelä (2005:156) also acknowledged this problem in his study. This has a strong effect on motivation and performance. In addition, the findings suggest that there is not enough variation in the exercises used in the English language classrooms. The tasks are almost always carried out in pairs and the exercises have a similar pattern. Furthermore, the findings suggest that practicing communication skills is rather an exception than a common aspect in the English language classrooms. Moreover, the participants repeatedly referred to the small amount of communicative tasks in the English language learning.

The findings of the present study presented alternative suggestions for practicing communication skills which resemble the observations made by Mäkelä (2005:154-155). The learners seem to prefer more meaningful, practical and realistic tasks such as role-playing and free discussions. Unexpectedly, the findings suggest that there is a lack of target language use by the language teachers. Interestingly, this fact is also contrary to the results of the study by Harjanne and Tella (2011:108-109), in which language teachers reported using the target language during the lessons quite a lot. All in all, the findings indicate that there is a need for more opportunities to speak English in order to gain more experience and confidence in speaking a foreign language.

When taking into account the findings discussed above, it is not surprising that the English language lessons' role in becoming a language user is regarded to be somewhat minimal. There is a clear lack of efficient and

motivating communicative tasks in addition to the minimal amount of tasks carried out during the lessons. According to the findings, the English language lessons improve the basic skills of the learners which can be regarded as positive, even though the focus is on written skills rather than speaking and actually communicating.

The students' previous experiences in foreign language use situations were also examined in the present study. Almost all of the students reported that they had been in situations in Finland where their English language skills were needed. Furthermore, some had experienced similar situations abroad. This fact indicates that there is a need for acquiring good speaking and listening comprehension skills. Furthermore, this fact also indicates that even the young Finns are expected to have good English language skills and the ability to communicate in English. The findings also indicate that an increase in the amount of communicative practices would be extremely beneficial since it was acknowledged that speaking the foreign language became easier and even natural when it was used often or continuously. Even though the students reported some deficiencies in the communicative part of the Finnish foreign language education, the students generally appeared to be confident foreign language users. The findings showed that the students always tried to manage the communicative situation with their English language skills and with the help of other means such as gestures. Thus, even the young language learners are able to manage communicative situations in a foreign language when they are given a chance. This should be taken into account when designing communicative exercises for foreign language teaching in order to provide exercises which are not too easy or meaningless. In addition, the students in general had a positive attitude towards communicative situations in English even though the students reported having uneasy feelings in the situations.

The findings showed that the language learners generally feel that they are able to manage most of the communicative situations in English. These situations include mainly simple, everyday communicative situations. However, more formal and longer conversations on an unfamiliar topic were regarded as difficult. According to the findings, the learners had difficulties

in both understanding what is being said and speaking the language. Surprisingly, this fact did not affect the learners' willingness to communicate in a foreign language. However, it is an important reason why the learners are eager to learn speaking and listening comprehension skills.

The present study aimed to find out whether foreign language teaching in Finland prepares language learners to be active language users in the real world from the perspective of a selected group of language learners. The general opinion of the students was that English language education prepares learners to be active language users in the real world. However, the findings indicated that there are several inconsistencies in the students' overall opinions. These inconsistencies suggest that the learners are not as prepared as they appear to be. Firstly, the students strongly agreed that in foreign language teaching the focus is more on writing and grammatical aspects of the language rather than learning communication skills, specifically practicing speaking and listening comprehension skills. In addition, the students expressed their dissatisfaction in the quality and effectiveness of the communicative practices used in English language teaching. The students regarded the exercises to be meaningless since the tasks included ready-made exercises where the students are unable to "use their brains". The students reported most of the communication exercises used in the classrooms as demotivating. Secondly, the students highlighted the importance of target language use in the foreign language classrooms. Quite unexpectedly, the students reported that the teacher often prefers to use Finnish rather than the target language during the lesson. Thirdly, the students expressed the need to increase the number of communicative tasks in the foreign language classrooms. In addition, the students requested more opportunities to speak the language. Fourthly, the overall opinion of the students was that the English language lessons do not significantly improve their confidence in participating in communicative situations in real life. This is due to the fact that speaking does not have a strong role in the English language classrooms. Finally, the students reported that they have some difficulties either in understanding what is being said or speaking the language. In addition, the students agreed that they would like to enhance their speaking skills in order to participate more actively in meaningful

conversations in English. Thus, there are internal contradictions in the students' opinions in that they say, on the one hand, that English language education prepares them to be active language users and on the other hand, they bring forth various aspects which suggest that they are not prepared.

The theoretical part of this study also presented the aims and objectives which are set in the Finnish National Core Curriculum and the European Framework. CEF (2001:9) states that foreign language education must provide the means needed in order to perform in communicative situations. Thus, CEF promotes the action-oriented approach where the learners are regarded as future language users. Likewise, FNCC (POPS 2004:136) emphasizes the importance of providing the ability to communicate with the foreign language in various social settings. The findings suggest that these aims and objectives are met to some extent since the participants appeared to be prepared to manage most of the communicative situations at least somehow. However, as the participants highly valued the ability to speak and understand the language as well as the ability to communicate fluently, the participants expressed their dissatisfaction in their communication skills and the minimal amount of practice on communication skills in school. The participants demanded more practice on the skills they regarded as important and necessary in the future. Most of the participants did not regard their communication skills to be fluent or automatic but rather challenging and even troublesome. This fact appears to be against the paradigm presented by CEF which emphasizes both the skills and know-how or in other words the way of functioning almost automatically.

According to the FNCC, the objectives of foreign language teaching at the grades 1-2 and 3-6 are mainly communicational and practical while at the grades 7-9 there is a shift to more grammatical and written form. This shift was also acknowledged in the findings of the present study. It is questionable whether this shift, at least as radically as the findings suggest, is necessary or even beneficial from the perspective of the learners. It would appear that a more considerate tendency, where all four skills are practiced more evenly, would serve the purpose a lot better. There seems not to be a good justification for concentrating only on the written form and neglecting

the important skills of speaking and listening comprehension. However, there is a lot of research available which argue for gaining communicative competence, specifically gaining the ability to speak and understand the foreign language. Moreover, it appears to be the shared view of the learners and even the general opinion of the public. CEF (2001:17) also emphasizes that the individual differences need to be taken into account in foreign language teaching. Thus, teaching should be versatile and provide different teaching methods in order to consider the needs of every language learner.

As it was discussed earlier in section 3, according to the Finnish proficiency scale, students should master the level A2.2 in speaking and writing by the end of the grade 9 in order to get grade 8. In addition, the students should reach an even higher level (B1.1) in listening and reading comprehension. It is somewhat surprising that the ability to actually use the language is an acknowledged goal in CEF, FNCC and in many theoretical writings but yet the aimed proficiency level is actually lower in functional skills than in comprehension skills. In addition, in the proficiency scale level B1.1 in speaking indicates that one is able to manage common everyday situations and informal conversation. Thus, the description of level B1.1 is closer to the everyday ability which is needed in the real world communicative situations. It appears that the aims of the FNCC should be updated to promote more communicative approach by raising the bar in speaking skills. This would also encourage teachers to put the communicative approach into practice. If the aim of foreign language education is to provide teaching which meets the needs of the learners, a practical shift from written form to a more communicative and oral practice is necessary.

On the whole, the findings suggest that more attention should be paid into teaching communication skills, speaking and listening comprehension skills in particular. Thus, the results indicate that the communicative approach might be acknowledged in theory but in practice there is a lack of efficient implementation. Furthermore, according to the findings, the aims and goals which are set by FNCC and CEF are not completely met in practice. A clear need and wish for more meaningful hands-on practice on communication skills is presented by the language learners.

8 CONCLUSION

Byram et al. (2013:251) make an important point in recognizing the rather complicated relationship between theory and practice also in the field of education. There is a constant debate between the theorists and the practitioners on whether theory meets practice and vice versa (Byram et al. 2013:251). The main goal of the present study was to investigate whether theory meets practice in the English language classrooms today from the perspective of the language learners.

The aim of the present study was to examine whether English language teaching in Finnish basic education prepares learners to be active language users in the real life communicative situations. Even though there is not any research done on this topic specifically, similar findings can be found in the studies by Mäkelä 2005, Aro 2006 and Muñoz 2013. There were several important aspects which emerged from the findings of the present study. One of the fundamental aspects is that the language learners are aware of the importance of the skills which are needed in order to actually use the English language. Thus, speaking and listening comprehension skills are regarded to be the most important skills. The findings also indicate that there is a clear need for good communication skills, more specifically speaking and listening comprehension skills. Despite the participants' young age they had experienced several situations where oral communication skills were needed. Furthermore, somewhat surprisingly, the participants manage successfully in most of the everyday situations and are not afraid to participate in the situations when necessary. The language learners question the efficiency of the commonly used communication practices and point out various problems regarding these practices. Alternatively, the language learners call for more meaningful opportunities to actually use the language in the classroom. In addition, the language learners request that the amount of practicing speaking and listening comprehension should be increased. The nature of the practice should concern more real life situations and give the learners opportunities to use the skills they already have and to manage the situations by themselves. In addition, the use of the target language by the teacher and the learners during the English language lessons is

emphasized by the language learners. Finally and most significantly, the language learners state that from their perspective, learning communication skills is not the main goal of foreign language education today. Thus, the language learners view that the main focus is on practicing writing skills. The language learners call for more practice on the actual usage of language and emphasize that speaking practices should be a part of every English language lesson.

The present study aimed to find out the thoughts, opinions and experiences of the language learners on the examined matter. A qualitative method was considered to be an effective approach when the goal was to investigate the views of the participants on the real life matters. Thus, it served the purpose of the present study well. Semi-structured interviews were chosen as the data collection method since participants were encouraged to share their thoughts and express their views freely on the selected themes. The qualitative semi-structured interviews also turned out to be an effective method since the interviews provided important and new insights on the examined matter. Furthermore, the group interviews were considered to be suitable since the aim was to keep the atmosphere relaxed and the participants were adolescents which is a somewhat delicate age. The interview situation was successfully informal and relaxed and the participants performed well in groups and the “voice” of the participants was brought forth in the data.

However, there is naturally scope for improvement in the present study. Firstly, the methodological approach set some limitations to the study. By applying both qualitative and quantitative approach, that is a mixed methods approach, in the present study, it could have been possible to get a more general view of the language learners’ perspectives in addition to deeper insights provided by the qualitative interviews. Secondly, the qualitative interview data was limited only to two groups from two different schools. In order to get a more generalized view and gain more insights into the examined matter, a study should be a much larger scale including more participants from schools all over Finland. This would also increase the reliability of the study. Thirdly, the schools’ and the participants’

backgrounds (such as socio-economic background) were not considered in the findings. However, the study included two schools situated in totally different locations in order to get views from the learners living in a larger city and in the countryside. It could have been beneficial to include the participants' individual background in the study since the background has an influence on thoughts, opinions and how individuals experience different situations. In addition, the study did not consider the participants' proficiency level, schools success or motivation when viewing the findings. However, some aspects from the interviews indicate that the group of participants was very versatile and included both high-achieving and low-achieving learners. All in all, the qualitative interview data provided important insights on the matter surprisingly well.

The findings of the present study can by no means be generalized to all 9th grade students in Finland. However, the findings offer valuable insight into English language education today and the proficiency that language learners' need in the world today and in the future. The findings also present important and maybe even helpful information for teachers in order to improve foreign language teaching or to be perhaps a bit more inventive in teaching communication skills.

There are not many studies available which concentrate on how the prevalent ideology of communicative language teaching and learning is implemented in the English language classrooms today from the perspectives of the Finnish basic education graduates. The present study aimed to shed some light on the matter but there is a need for more research on the topic. For future research, a much larger scale study on the matter would provide a much more comprehensive view. In addition, a larger sample size would also add reliability and validity. It would also be interesting to carry out a mixed methods approach on the topic in order to gain a more generalized view in addition to deeper individual insights. Furthermore, the future research could be carried out as a longitudinal study in order to investigate how learners' communicational skills develop during the basic education on the perspective of the learners and teachers. In addition, it would be interesting to study learners' experiences a few years

after the basic education when learners would have gained more experiences on different language use situations in English. This would provide even more comprehensive insights on the matter. It is also important that all the problems and defects mentioned above are taken into account in the future research.

In conclusion, the present study aimed to illustrate how theories are implemented and set goals are met in the real life English language classrooms from the perspectives of the learners themselves. Young Finns have long realized the importance of the ability to actually use the language (Aro 2006:95). In addition, this fact has been realized in research. Thus, it is time that more attention is paid to the actual language use in real life foreign language classrooms everyday in order to make sure that the stereotypically silent Finns are not that silent anymore.

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APPENDIX 1. Interview frame

Haastattelukehys

Lämmittelykysymykset

Pidättekö englannin kielen opiskelusta? Miksi pidätte/miksi ette pidä?

Minkälaiset asiat ovat teidän mielestänne tärkeitä englannin kielen opiskelussa? Onko esimerkiksi tärkeää kirjoittaa englannin kieltä virheettömästi, tulla ymmärretyksi englannin kielellä puhuessa jne.?

Miettikää viimeistä englannin kielen numeroa todistuksessanne. Vastaako se teidän mielestä teidän oikeaa englannin kielen taitoa? Miksi/miksi ei?

Englannin kielen puhuminen koulun ulkopuolella

Oletteko olleet Suomessa tilanteissa, joissa olette päässeet käyttämään englannin kieltä? Millaisissa tilanteissa olette olleet?

Miltä se tilanne tuntui? Jännittikö teitä, oliko mukavaa jne.?

Miksi teistä tuntui siltä/Miksi teistä ei tuntunut siltä?

Oletteko olleet ulkomailla tilanteissa, joissa olette päässeet käyttämään englannin kieltä?

Tuntuiko se erilaiselta kuin Suomessa vai miltä se tuntui?

Koetteko, että pärjäisitte nykyisellä kielitaidollanne erilaisissa puhetilanteissa? Esimerkiksi kaupassa, ravintolassa jne.? Miksi/miksi ette?

Olisiko joku tilanne, jossa koette, että ette pärjäisi? Miksi ette?

Miltä tuntuisi mennä/olla tilanteessa, jossa arveluttaa että pärjääkö? Miksi?

Mitä keinoja voisi olla, jotta selviäisitte sellaisessa tilanteessa?

Kaikkihan tekee virheitä. Miltä teistä tuntuu tehdä virheitä kun puhutte englannin kielellä? Jännittääkö/pelottaako vai onko se osa puhetta, virheitä oppii, kunhan tulee ymmärretyksi? Miksi?

Mitä on koulussa tehty?

Millaisia tehtäviä tai tilanteita teillä on koulussa ollut, joista koette olevan apua oikeissa puhetilanteissa? Olivatko ne hyödyllisiä? Miksi/miksi ei?

Lisäävätkö oppitunnit varmuutta mennä mukaan aitoihin puhetilanteisiin?

Millaiset tehtävät /tilanteet oppitunnilla auttaisi, jotta olisitte rohkeita kielenkäyttäjiä oikeissa tilanteissa?

Tulevaisuus

Nyt kun teillä on perusopetus päättymässä niin onko teille tärkeää ja onko teillä kiinnostusta/halua kehittää kielitaitoanne lisää jatkossa/omalla ajalla?

Jos on, miten voisitte kehittää ja mitä kielitaidon osaa haluaisitte kehittää enemmän? Jos ei, miksi?

Olisiko teillä rohkeutta ja kiinnostusta lähteä ulkomaille pidemmäksi aikaa esim. kielimatkalle, vaihto-oppilaaksi, harjoitteluun tai töihin? Miksi/miksi ei?

Koetteko, että teillä on nyt perusopetuksen jälkeen valmiuksia käyttää englannin kieltä ja aiotteko käyttää?