

**THE REALIZATION OF EFL TEACHING IN FINLAND FOR PUPILS
WITH AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDERS:
A case study**

Bachelor's Thesis
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<p>Tiivistelmä – Abstract</p> <p>Vaikka autismia ja autistien opettamista on tutkittu laajalti, puuttuu tietoa erityisesti englannin opetuksen toteuttamisesta autismin kirjoon kuuluville oppilaille. Autismi on neurobiologinen kehitykseen liittyvä häiriö, joka voi kehittyä ennen syntymää, sen aikana tai sen jälkeen. Vaikka autismin kirjo on erittäin laaja ja sen oireet hyvinkin yksilöllisiä, on myös havaittu joitakin yhtäläisyyksiä autistien välillä, kuten kuuloherkkyyttä, impulsiivista käytöstä, puutteita sosiaalisissa taidoissa ja kanssakäymisessä, kapeita mielenkiinnonkohteita sekä toistuvia maneereita puheessa ja toiminnassa.</p> <p>Tutkielman tarkoituksena on selvittää, miten englannin opetus toteutetaan autismin kirjoon kuuluville oppilaille Suomessa, mitä metodeja ja materiaaleja opettajat siihen käyttävät, ja miten englannin opetusta autisteille voisi kehittää tulevaisuudessa. Aineistoa kerättiin observoimalla ja haastatteleamalla kahta opettajaa. Kyseiset puoliavoimet teemahaastattelut nauhoitettiin ja analysoitiin lähdekirjallisuutta hyödyntäen. Tutkimus toteutettiin tapaustutkimuksena.</p> <p>Tulokset osoittavat, että englantia opetetaan autismin kirjoon kuuluville oppilaille joko heidän omassa erityisluokassaan ja/tai integraatiotunneilla yleisopetuksen puolella. Haastatellut opettajat näkivät integraation positiivisena asiana, jolla pystyttiin tukemaan oppimista sekä sosiaalista ja emotionaalista kehitystä tehokkaasti. Englannin kielessä keskityttiin ensisijaisesti suullisen ja käytännön kielitaidon kehittämiseen, eikä kirjallisille kokeille annettu paljoa painoarvoa. Opetusta tuettiin kuvilla, tukiviittomilla, internet-tehtävillä ja muilla apuvälineillä. Koulunkäyntiavustajien rooli nostettiin erittäin tärkeäksi. Materiaali- ja henkilöstöressurssien riittävydestä huolimatta toivottiin lisäkoulutusta autististen oppilaiden kanssa työskenteleville.</p> <p>Vaikka tulokset eivät ole yleistettävissä suppean otannan vuoksi, antavat ne kuitenkin viitettä englannin opetuksen toteutuksesta ja sen tilasta autismin kirjoon kuuluville oppilaille nykypäivän Suomessa.</p>	
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1 INTRODUCTION

English as a foreign language (EFL) has been researched in an array of ways and contexts, both in general as well as in special education. Extensive studies have been conducted on autism and autism-related phenomena in distinct scientific fields. Nevertheless, specific research in autism seems to be lacking particularly in EFL settings. This research paper endeavors to shed light on the issue in order to introduce the phenomenon, gain insights into EFL education for pupils with autism spectrum disorders (abbreviated ASD) in Finland, provide future EFL teachers with practical advice, and clear the path for further research.

There are certain reasons for choosing the theme in question. Even though there are many studies of autism in various educational contexts, previous research has mainly concentrated on studying autism and learning and teaching in general and, therefore, research specifically into autism and teaching a particular subject, for instance, a foreign language, is scarce. Hence, it is essential to study the phenomenon and I focused on English language learning and teaching. Moreover, such previous studies in the Finnish educational context are lacking and therefore background information from previous studies and theses is minimal. There is thus a need to survey the way English education is realized in Finland for pupils with ASD. One way of approaching this issue is through a case study which provides first-hand information and experiences to study the matter by the means of observations and interviews.

The research questions and the case study aim at finding out some general aspects of English learning and teaching for pupils with ASD with a focus on the various ways in which English instruction is realized for pupils with ASD, and the different issues it entails. After gaining initial insights into the topic, it may be easier to conduct further research, extend the scope of the study, focus on more precise and distinctive features, and even share ideas in order to develop English instruction for pupils with ASD in Finland. In general, the study raises awareness of the issue.

Personally, I have been involved in helping pupils with ASD as a school assistant as well as working part-time as a personal assistant for a person with

autism. In addition, I have an interest in the field of special education, which I may want to study in the future. Hence, personal reasons and work experience inspired me to choose the topic and motivated me to conduct the study.

2 AUTISM AND INSTRUCTION

Certain general aspects, such as causes and symptoms, regarding autism spectrum disorders and teaching people with ASD will be presented below.

2.1 Autism spectrum disorders and their diverse causes and symptoms

Autism is not merely one specific disorder; instead, despite some common characteristics, there is substantial variation in the symptoms of autism, and related conditions also exist. Hence, it is possible to speak about autism spectrum disorders which share some features with one another but also have distinctive traits. Certain criteria are used when delineating a type of autism: Chez (2008:32), for example, presents three major categories through which an ASD can be diagnosed if certain items from each category are met: socialization, impaired communication and repetitive/stereotypic behaviors. In brief, there are many disorders related to autism and variation exists in the extent of the effects of an autism spectrum disorder. These disorders will be discussed in the present chapter.

According to Janzen (1996:5) and Frith (2008:52), autism can be classified as a neurodevelopmental disorder which affects one's information processing. It can be noticed and analyzed by observing a person's behavioral traits. Behavior may, however, alter depending on the situation and other people involved. Some people with autism are intellectually very capable while others may be mentally disabled. People with autism have a distinctive way of relating to others and the surroundings, and their thinking differs from that of other children. Furthermore, there is variation in oral communication: some individuals with autism cannot speak and others may

be very talkative and accurate in their speech. Nonetheless, language impairments exist among people diagnosed with autism. (Janzen 1996:5.) Janzen (1996:7) points out that also other disorders, such as Down syndrome and tuberous sclerosis, are commonly connected with autism. Thus, there are some typical characteristic that individuals with autism generally share.

Janzen (1996:6) explains that autism does not have only one cause but, in general, atypical changes in the development of the central nervous system may result in autism. These changes may happen early on during the development of the fetus, or at the time of birth, or after it. (Janzen 1996:6.) Frith (2008:52) underlines that “the gene fault gives a predisposition to become autistic” while other factors determine its symptoms and onset. In addition, according to a study conducted by Thorlund Parner (2012:1) there seems to be a link between parental age and autism with mothers younger than 35 years having an increased risk of giving birth to an autistic child. Janzen (1996:7) estimates that approximately “15 to 20 individuals in every 10,000 births will develop autism”. Janzen (1996:6) goes on to say that autism “is four times more common in males” than in females. According to Frith (2008:39), the number of diagnosed cases of autism has increased by 172 per cent since the 1990s. Debbaudt (2002:16) similarly points out a steep upsurge in the diagnosed cases of autism. Janzen (1996:6), on the other hand, claims that autism is a rather rare condition. All in all, there can be various causes for autism, and in spite of the rarity of the condition, studies show a notable rise in the number of ASD diagnoses in the past two decades.

Janzen (1996:8, 9) lists some symptoms of autism in an infant (see Table 1 below). Individual differences, which may be manifold in the case of autism, must be borne in mind. Additionally, no child shows every single one of the symptoms and also their level of severity may vary.

Table 1. Symptoms of autism in an infant

Language/ Communication	Relating to people/ the environment	Responses to Sensory Stimuli	Developmental Discrepancies
Rarely initiates communication	Is unresponsive	Is oversensitive to sound	Skills are either very good or very delayed
May have little or no speech, or may be quite verbal	Eye contact is limited/fleeting	Flicks fingers before eyes	Learner's skills out of normal sequence
Repeats or echoes words and phrases (echolalia)	Seems content when left alone	Pulls away when touched	Is very good with puzzles, pegs, etc., but is very poor at following directions
Seems not to understand word meanings	Does not play turn-taking games	Strongly avoids certain clothes, foods, etc.	Echoed speech is fluent, while self-generated speech is dysfluent
Understands and uses words literally	Play is repetitive	Is very inactive or very active	Can do things sometimes, but not at other times
	Is upset by or resists changes	May whirl, spin, bang head, bite wrist	
	Develops rigid routines		
	Exhibits strong and inflexible interests		

Moreover, Frith (2008:8, 9, 11) divides autism into three core symptoms: deficiency in reciprocal interactions (in particular in engagement with peers), problems in communication and use of language, and repetitive behavior and limited interests. In general, the symptoms of autism are assorted and there are several individual peculiarities in the effects and the degree of the condition. Thus, Frith (2008:8) suggests that clinical knowledge is necessary in order to present a solid diagnosis.

2.2 Teaching children with autism

With regard to instructing children with autism, Janzen (1996:19) explains that it is useful to have an understanding of the condition, be acquainted with their ways of processing information, and benefit from previous experience in order to notice the cause of a number of learning difficulties. Some aspects concerning autism and teaching will be elaborated below.

Firstly, it is crucial to provide pupils with ASD a positive context in which teaching and learning can take place efficiently. Stone (2004:69) lists the subsequent factors that enable an autistic-friendly atmosphere and environment to be achieved:

- a safe physical place geared towards mutual exploration
- our attentiveness to our child's needs
- our understanding of autistic learning
- our unconditional love for the child
- our ability to speak literally
- no rules imposed by social convention
- our calmness – self-induced

In brief, making the physical, social and emotional environment and atmosphere safe in addition to being aware of and acting according to certain general guidelines are the foundation of every type of learning, and this stands out in the case of autism.

Secondly, as the degree of functioning is varied, it is essential to provide each pupil with ASD a personal education plan designed to support his/her needs in the most effective way possible. In Finnish schools, an Individual Plan Relative to Arrangement of Instruction (Henkilöhtainen opetuksen järjestämistä koskeva suunnitelma, HOJKS, in Finnish) is tailored, in cooperation with the teacher and the guardians, for pupils in need of special support. The plan is developed for each school subject in which special support is needed. In the case of severely disabled pupils, the plan is designed for the pupil's sphere of operations. Hence, the pupil's special education teacher and class teacher or subject teacher have primary responsibility in the process of formulating and observing the plan and its realization. Pedagogical assessment and the syllabus are utilized in the making of the plan, which can also be modified as per possible changes in the pupil's needs and his/her educational goals. (HOJKS 2011.) Instruction is, therefore, tailored according to the pupil's level and skills. For instance, in the school in which the study was conducted, some lower secondary school pupils with ASD were using primary school books in their English studies. All in all, HOJKS is a widely-used tool in Finnish schools to support pupils with special needs in certain subjects or spheres of operation in order to enhance their learning.

3 THE PRESENT STUDY

The research questions, data collection, participants and methods of analysis of the present study will be discussed in this chapter.

3.1 The research questions

The present study, which was conducted as a case study, endeavors to find out information concerning the following topics:

1. How is EFL teaching realized in autism education and integration lessons for children with Autism spectrum disorders in Finnish schools?
2. What teaching methods and materials are used and what do the teachers consider workable?
3. How could EFL instruction for autistic pupils be developed?

I had an alternative sub question in mind but while carrying out the study I realized that it would not be possible to collect enough data in order to study the aspect.

3.2 The data collection and participants

The data was collected primarily by the means of interviews, observations and notes. Principal themes were chosen based on previous knowledge and experience of teaching pupils with ASD. Hence, a semi-structured interview, which does not use a rigid list and order of questions, was employed in order to bring about flexibility albeit still maintaining certain chief topics to discuss. (Dufva 2011:133.) The main interviewees consisted of a teacher of an autism class and an English subject teacher in general education (*yleisopetus*, in Finnish). In addition, a school assistant in autism education and four pupils with autism were interviewed. Seven of the interviews were audio recorded and they are the main source of information. The data of two interviews was collected solely with the help of written notes.

Observations were made in two English lessons (grades 6 to 8) in autism education and three English lessons (grades 8 or 9) in general education into which a pupil from autism education was integrated. In general education, the integrated year 9 pupil with ASD was accompanied by a school assistant whereas the year 8 pupil with ASD did not have an accompanying assistant. The English lessons in autism education involved school assistants in addition to the special education teacher.

Initially, I wanted to focus on older pupils since, due to my work experience, I knew that they were the ones that were involved in English instruction both in autism education as well as in integration lessons in English classes of general education. Moreover, I believed that older pupils would be a more interesting and fruitful target group as their English skills are expected to be better, their English education more extensive and their participation in interviews more active than compared to younger learners. Thus, sufficient amount of data to answer the research questions could be collected. I had also met and been with some of the pupils prior to the study, which facilitated the planning and carrying out of the study. In brief, I thought that older pupils would form a more adequate group for the study and the collection of data.

Due to the excessive amount of collected data and the limitations of the present thesis, I ultimately was forced to narrow down the research area. Since I was planning to discuss a similar theme in the Master's thesis, it was natural to provide a background by writing an introductory paper in which the phenomenon would be generally presented and discussed, and only later go into detail with a more specific topic. Further, as a similar study has not yet been conducted in Finland, preparing a general overview of the phenomenon was the most suitable option.

Eventually, I opted for concentrating on the interviews of two teachers of different subject areas, the one teacher being an EFL teacher in general education whilst the other was a special education teacher in autism education; hence, the thoughts and experiences of two professionals from two distinct spheres of education, general and special, could be collected, analyzed and compared in order to make more solid conclusions. Additionally, inclusive education in the form of

organizing integration lessons for autistic pupils to attend was clearly encouraged in the school in question. Furthermore, inclusion, at least to some extent, seems to be a modern trend in education; it is also promoted by some schools' syllabi and, on a greater scale, in article 6 of the Constitution of Finland (Finlex 1999) and in the 1994 United Nations Salamanca Statement (UNESCO 1994). It was therefore important to include integration lessons in the present study.

The school in which the study was conducted is located in Southern Finland. After the consent of the school's management, it was chosen as the place in which the study was to be carried out. It was not, however, the only school that was contacted; for example, some schools were not suitable as a place of surveying or lacked the teachers' approval. After receiving the school's consent, more information was given to the school mainly via research permits which were to be handed out to staff members and pupils who were possible participants in the present study. At first it seemed to be somewhat problematic to receive a sufficient amount of research permits. Nonetheless, enough permits were finally returned, enabling the execution of the study, which was conducted in a time span of three days.

The data derived from the interviews will be interpreted below. The two interviewees will be discriminated by the use of titles "Teacher 1" (referring to the English subject teacher in general education, who has experience of integrated pupils with ASD) and "Teacher 2" (referring to the special education teacher in the school's autism education). The two teachers were interviewed individually but connections are made between the data in order to draw conclusions and create reciprocity. Both interviews were conducted in Finnish.

Teacher 1 is a qualified teacher of English and French with many years of experience but she has not specifically studied or received training in special education; instead, she has learnt "through practice". On the other hand, neither is Teacher 2 a fully qualified special education teacher as at the time of the interview she was completing Advanced studies (Aineopinnot, in Finnish) in special education. Nevertheless, she has completed teacher's pedagogical studies and has previous work experience of children with special needs.

The data will be discussed chiefly through qualitative analysis with reference to previous studies and literature. Information concerning the participants is confidential and therefore the names of the participants have been changed.

3.3 The methods of analysis

I decided to opt for a semi-structured interview (or theme interview) in order to have more freedom and flexibility in the interviews and later in the analysis of the collected data. Prior to the interviews, I listed a number of questions that I wanted to ask. I did not thus have a strict list to follow; instead, I asked questions that I had formulated in advance as well as made additional questions that arose from the participants' answers and comments. I did not ask all the participants totally similar questions even though there were many chief issues of which I wanted to collect data. Furthermore, I had planned varied or slightly varied questions for teachers in general and autism education, school assistants, and pupils, whose interview questions differed the most from the rest since they were more connected with their personal comments, opinions and experiences about English learning and teaching.

I chose to conduct my study as a case study since thus it was easier to manage and deal with the topic, preventing it from becoming too extensive a study for a Bachelor's thesis. With such a small number of participants, the results are not directly generalizable albeit they might give insight into some phenomena taking place in EFL teaching for ASD pupils in Finland. Moreover, through semi-structured interviews broader and more versatile issues could be discussed without being confined to questionnaires or a rigid list of questions. I hoped also that this way data gained from the interviews would be more objective.

Initially, my idea was also to video record lessons. However, since I did not receive permits for videoing, I only took some notes while observing lessons. Video recording would have made the study more comprehensive and precise since it makes it possible to observe the learning situations in depth and ultimately draw more reliable conclusions. Notes are always limited to certain aspects that are being observed, which means that some occurrences go without notice. Nonetheless, the

possibility of audio recording most of the interviews made it easier to deal with and interpret the data, and make the study more valid and reliable.

It was therefore natural that the interviews and observations were analyzed and interpreted qualitatively bearing in mind previous research and literature. As the main body of the data consists of two theme interviews, it is natural to apply qualitative data-based content analysis in order to interpret and discuss the data (Tuomi and Sarajärvi 2009). Since the present study does not focus on discourse analytical aspects, the excerpts taken from the interviews are not written down verbatim, word for word; instead, they are content-based. In spite of the fact that the interviews were held in Finnish, the quotes from the interviews are translated into English. The Finnish equivalent is also presented in order to give more clarity and preciseness to certain comments. The results of the present study will be discussed in the following chapter.

4 WAYS OF REALIZING EFL TEACHING FOR PUPILS WITH ASD

Below certain central aspects of autism education derived from the interviews will be presented and elaborated.

4.1 Integration: A positive or a negative trend?

Since there is an on-going debate about inclusive education and its realization it is justified to ask whether integration is a positive or a negative matter for pupils with ASD. According to the two interviewees, the answer is clear-cut: integration is beneficial. Teacher 1 brings up the following perception:

1. Integroinnissa ei ookaan aina se oppiaineen sisällön omaksuminen se ainoa tärkeä asia vaan siinä voi olla juuri tämä sosiaalisten taitojen harjoittaminen [...] jos sieltä [autismiopetus] koetaan että he hyötyvät tästä tai oppilas itse pitää siitä [integraatio] niin en näe siihen mitään estettä vaikka oppimistuloksissa ei nyt päästäis kovin huikeisiin suorituksiin (Teacher 1)

[In integration, acquiring the content is not always the only important thing; instead, also social skills are important [...] if there [in autism education] it is found that the pupil

benefits from it or likes it [integration], there is no obstacle, although in learning results good performances are not reached]

Hence, Teacher 1 highlights that integration is more than merely acquiring knowledge since it enables the practice of social skills. Teacher 1 does not consider integration a negative option even though satisfactory learning results are not reached as it can be both beneficial and pleasing to the pupil with ASD in various ways.

In addition, when asked about a positive, memorable incident, Teacher 1 recalled a situation in which the integrated pupil happily and enthusiastically presented a pair assignment about music to the class together with a pupil of general education. The occurrence clearly demonstrates yet another positive aspect of integration in a safe environment (cf. Stone 2004:69) and how it may provide a pupil with ASD an experience of success presumably boosting his/her confidence.

Similarly, Teacher 2 considers integration very good since integrated pupils get more social contacts as general education group sizes are larger than those of special education. She points out that it is positive that autistic pupils who are talented in certain subjects get the possibility of working with peers of the same age and skill in integration lessons. Despite the assets, Teacher 2 notes also the importance of autistic pupils' own class in autism education, which is like a safe haven in which various subjects can be practised and exams can be studied for.

All in all, the two teachers have had positive experiences of integration and believe it to be advantageous for autistic pupils not merely for their learning but also for the development of their social and communication skills, which often pose a challenge for people with ASD (cf. Frith 2008:8, 9). Hence, integration is something that should be carried out in the future as well. It is not merely a practice for the autistic pupil of merging into the society but also the pupils of general education get experiences of societal diversity.

4.2 Autistic pupils' strengths and weaknesses in EFL settings

When it comes to discussing the strengths and weaknesses of a person with ASD, oral communication is a topic that is very central to it. Teacher 1 notes that oral production is often easier whilst forming a complete sentence let alone a text is difficult. The pupils with ASD get along orally and in e-learning mouse clicking exercises activities (such as Opiit, a service of e-learning designed for Finnish institutions [Sanoma Pro Oy 2009]). In her article, Murray (2012:89) claims that computers suit people with autism since it offers “restricted stimuli in all sensory modalities”, “safe error-making”, “possibilities of non-verbal and verbal expression” and since it “interacts cotropically with the individual”, producing a link in the individual’s tunnel of attention, that is, being child-centered. Teacher 1 draws also attention to listening exercises which she thinks are definitely challenging for autistic pupils for two reasons. First, autistic pupils' vocabulary is commonly more limited than that of the general education group's since their English studies are less advanced. Second, difficult words and speech rate in listening exercises pose a challenge as autistic pupils require more time to answer. Teacher 1 does not, however, consider pronunciation a particularly troublesome area as integrated autistic pupils may have challenges in specific speech sounds like pupils of general education, too.

On the other hand, Teacher 2 accentuates individual differences in skills among pupils with ASD: for example, one pupil is excellent in creative writing and is very talkative and extrovert whereas other pupils face problems in forming simple sentences. Similarly, Janzen (1996:9) lists variation in skill levels as one clear symptom of autism. Teacher 1, too, mentions that the integrated pupils have difficulties with producing complete sentences and therefore they might achieve high marks in vocabulary quizzes but have challenges in course exams in which one needs the power of deduction. However, Teacher 2 brings forward self-direction of action (*omantoiminnanohjaus*, in Finnish) as an issue that all of her pupils share in addition to difficulties in reading comprehension even in their mother tongue. Furthermore,

she suggests clear, simple speech, and use of pictures and drawing as assets in teaching pupils with ASD.

The choice whether an autistic pupil participates in some general education lessons of certain subjects is made on the basis of the pupil's degree or level of function of autism, (intellectual or motor) capacity, skills, adaptability and, naturally, his or her own motivation. The ability to speak is not a criterion; for example, one of the pupils with ASD was not capable of verbal communication, but nonetheless was integrated into English lessons in which the pupil communicated via a facilitator with the help of a school assistant. In the school in which the study was conducted, some pupils with ASD were integrated into, for instance, English, history, woodwork, and art lessons.

4.3 Materials, methods and use of English

As for materials and teaching methods, both teachers have alternatives to choose from. Teacher 2 commented that she uses functional learning rather often. Quick drawing, supportive signs (tukiviittomat, in Finnish), and sometimes images are employed. Moreover, in English classes Opit (Internet assignments), handouts, CD, English cards from Early Learning (for comparative and superlative forms, irregular verbs, etc.), animal and family cards, and other material from the English primary school, operating in the same building, are used in addition to the text book, which was of the *Wow* series at the time of the interview. Teacher 2 recognizes the benefits of using Internet activities albeit she had some concerns: "Meillä on joitakin oppilaita jotka jumittuu siihen tietokoneeseen ... niit ei saa enää koko tunnin aikana pois sieltä tietokoneelta ... että se on niinku sellanen ongelma". [Some pupils get stuck with the computer [...] can't get them away from the computer during the whole lesson... it's that kind of a problem.] Hence, computer and Internet assignments can be useful unless they occupy pupils' minds in a way that interferes with their other studies and their structured daily routine. Teacher 2 is of the opinion that this is particularly a problem with young primary school pupils.

Even though computer is utilized for extra assignments or independent learning, Teacher 2 would have wanted to have more communal studying with the whole group in addition to individual assignments like those in the Internet. Teacher 1, on the other hand, found it impractical to use Opit Internet activities extensively as there is only one computer in her classroom. In brief, the teachers considered the use of computer and the Internet to have its downsides and advantages in teaching autistic pupils.

The interviewees were asked about differentiation in their teaching and how they implemented it. Teacher 1 makes decisions concerning differentiation based on the background knowledge of the pupil and the discussions with the teacher of autism education. Stone (2004:69) considers also awareness of the autistic child's needs and understanding the principles of autism instruction important. Further, Teacher 1 pointed out collaboration with the school assistant significant with the ideal situation being that the assistant would always be the same person. Teacher 2 likewise underlines the importance of school assistants as some of the pupils need almost one-to-one help of an adult when doing exercises as their self-direction of actions is poor and, therefore, an adult's urging is necessary. Moreover, from time to time Teacher 2 herself works tête-à-tête with a pupil. It can be concluded that it is crucial and natural to differentiate teaching when instructing pupils with ASD. The methods applied by the teachers are very general in nature, with the role of school assistants being emphasized.

Both teachers were explicitly asked about their use English in their classes. Teacher 1 claims that her choice of language does not depend on integration. Instead, there are groups in which only English is used; others where instruction is partially in English while in others everything is in Finnish. Teacher 2 points out other benefits of using English with pupils with ASD:

2. Nuorimman oppilaan kanssa... pysähtyy kuuntelemaan... on käytösongelmia. Saattaa rauhoittua, kun hänelle puhutaan englantia... sitä käytetään joskus kikkana saamaan hänen ajatukset muualle jos aggressiivinen [...] keskittyy, kuuntelee... voi unohtaa mistä oli kiukustunut. (Teacher 2)

[with the youngest pupil... stops to listen... has behavioral problems, may calm down when English is spoken to [him/her]. It is sometimes used as a trick to get [his/her] thoughts elsewhere if is aggressive [...] concentrates, listens... May forget why [he/she] was flared up.]

The excerpt demonstrates that English is not merely used for linguistic reasons but also for behavioral purposes such as to calm down a pupil with ASD. Additionally, pupils receive English input via videos as it is possible that in the weekly video lessons English clips are shown. Teacher 2 admits, however, that more English could have been used in other lessons, too.

In regard to familiarizing teachers of general education with teaching pupils with ASD, Teacher 1 is of the opinion that more orientation ought to be offered by the school since much of it depends on the teacher's own activity. Further, she considers insufficient time to be one of the problems as every teacher already has his/her duties like that of being a form master (*luokanvalvoja*, in Finnish). Teacher 1 acknowledges the help of special education teachers in the process of orientation. In addition, she considers that the special education teacher has the primary responsibility for mapping and taking care of resources as well as managing the practicalities of integration. Teacher 2 adds that the school's basic resources suffice as they have four school assistants in their class although some of them are also involved in integration lessons and therefore not always present in class. Similarly to Teacher 1, Teacher 2 recognizes that extra training is always an asset. In spite of adequate personnel and material resources, there is a need for further training of teachers involved in the instruction of pupils with ASD.

4.4 Homework and evaluation

Homework, exams and evaluation are also differentiated for pupils with ASD. In regard to evaluation, if the integrated pupil is expected to study according to the syllabus of general education, his/her evaluation is fundamentally the same as others' although modifications can be made. For instance, Teacher 1 comments that if the pupil has better oral skills, the same evaluation scale for oral communication can be used when evaluating his/her writing skills. Teacher 2 says that grades are given for lower secondary (*yläkoulu*, in Finnish) pupils in autism education even though pupils are evaluated based on individual indicators. She exemplifies the case by

mentioning that in her class there is a ninth and eighth grader and both of them study a sixth grade English school book. Thus, materials are not chosen in accordance with their grade; instead, as per their skills.

Concerning homework and exams, Teacher 2 points out that completing homework depends on the pupil. Some always tend to have homework undone while others do it conscientiously. She claims that integration makes checking the homework more difficult as pupils do not always make it to classes at the same time. She reveals also that only a small number of exams have been held and that they are set by the teacher. However, Teacher 1 mentions that with the consent of the teacher in autism education and the assistant, it was decided that it is not reasonable for the autistic pupil to take part in the national exam since the chances of passing it are minimalistic. Hence, there seems to be less emphasis on homework in EFL lessons held in autism education than in those organized in general education. In conclusion, evaluation is usually carried out bearing in mind individual indicators.

4.5 Goals of EFL teaching

The two teachers share analogous ideas about the focus or goal in EFL teaching for autistic pupils. Both regard the development of oral skills in practice crucial, and diminish the role of grammar in the oral sphere of English. Teacher 1 highlights the communicative aspect of language that should be supported:

3. Jokainen tuottaa omalla tasollaan ja kyvyllään sitä kieltä ja... etenkin puhumisessa kaikkien oppilaiden kanssa on se periaate et kieliopillisilla virheillä ei ole puhuttaessa mitään merkitystä... se on kommunikaatioväline jolla harjoitellaan sitä kommunikaatiota ihan sama kuin muillakin [oppilailla] et rohkaistuu käyttämään sitä kieltä." (Teacher 1)

[Everyone produces [language] in accordance with their level and skill and... especially in speaking there is a principle with all pupils that grammatical errors don't have any importance in speech... It is a means of communication with which communication is practised. It's the same as with other [pupils] that one is encouraged to use the language.]

Thus, Teacher 1 accentuates that the oral use of English should be encouraged and that every pupil should produce output in accordance with their level. Further, Teacher 1 sees language as a means of reciprocal communication and therefore linguistic errors do not carry substantial significance. In spite of several similar ideas,

Teacher 2, on the other hand, emphasizes the importance of everyday language, small talk and practical vocabulary:

4. Käytännön tota kyky jonkinlaiseen pieneen small talkiin ois se tavoite [opetuksessa] enemmän pitäis varmaan tunnilla puhua englantia [...] katsoisin että se ois se tärkein [asia] et niin paljon kuin mahdollista sitten niitä kielioppia-asiota siinä sivussa [...] mutta ajattelisin että pojilla [...] ja yhdellä tytöllä et heillä ehk elämässä hyödyttää kaikist eniten se et heil on tällanen pieni käytännön sanasto mitä he tarvittaessa sitten voivat käyttää [...] tällanen pieni keskusteleva ja sitten ... keskusteluun riittävä ja sitten ehkä johonkin ... vähän jotain jos he lukevat ohjekirjoja tai jotain et he ymmärtävät sitten ... et kielioppi ehkä sitten jää kakkosasiaksi (Teacher 2)

[The functional um skill for a little small talk would be the goal [in teaching] ... more English probably should be spoken in class. I'd regard it the most important [matter] that as much of grammar things as possible there at the same time [...] but I'd say that for the boys [...] and one girl that in life they benefit most that they have this kind of a little practical vocabulary that they can use if necessary [...] this kind of a little dialogical ... and then... sufficient for conversation and then maybe for something... something little if they read manuals or something... that they understand then... that grammar maybe is left in second place.]

Teacher 2 considers the practical and communicative aspects the most essential spheres in English teaching while grammar is not explicitly focused on. Teacher 2 sees that it is beneficial to provide pupils with an adequate vocabulary to get by in mundane small talk or other situations in which practical vocabulary and oral skills are required. Hence, both of the interviewed teachers underline the significance of communication and diminish the role of grammar.

When asked about giving hints and tips for someone engaged in teaching autistic pupils, whether in an integration or a special education class, Teacher 1 recommended that one should begin open-mindedly as it is an interesting experience for the teacher and above all for the rest of the group when pupils of general education work with pupils with ASD. She mentioned also the importance of close collaboration with the teacher in autism education. Teacher 2 adds that it would be recommendable to proceed peacefully. She is in line with Janzen (1996:8) by noting that pupils with ASD tend to benefit from a familiar and secure way of advancing. The arrival of a new teacher is a horrible shock to them and therefore it is not advisable to make fundamental changes but instead initially resort to the same structures as the former teacher and only later make gradual changes. Moreover, since autistic persons are generally sensitive to sounds (cf. Janzen 1996:8, 9), Teacher

2 highlights that:

5. Monet nää autismin kirjon oppilaat reagoi äänenpainoihin [...] ehkä ei missään tilanteessa kannata olla äkäisenkuuloinen koska se ei hyödytä mutta jotkut oppilaat ... imevät ... jos on äkäinen niin kannattaa olla vain lempeä koska muuten se voi vain provosoida sellaisia oppilaita jotka ovat taipuvaisia aggressiivisuuteen [...] omalla tavalla tilanteessa kuin tilanteessa olla pitkäpinnainen ja rauhallinen. (Teacher 2)

[many of these pupils in the spectrum of Autism react to stresses [...] maybe in no situation one should sound ill-tempered because it is of no use, but some pupils ... absorb ... if one is cross, so it is recommendable to be gentle only, because otherwise it can only provoke such pupils who have a tendency for aggressiveness. [...] In one's own way, in one situation or another, be patient and calm.]

It is therefore important to be aware of and bear in mind certain aspects, such as sensitivity to sounds, when teaching autistic pupils. Patience, kindness and tranquility are the keys when dealing with pupils with ASD since they easily note and are provoked by signals, such as testiness, in others' speech. Some pupils with ASD frequently use hearing protectors. Hence, it is crucial to have some background knowledge and understanding of the world of autism in order to encounter them in a more efficient and suitable manner.

In brief, EFL education for pupils with ASD aims at equipping the pupils with the tools to use the language in practice with an emphasis on oral communication skills whereas patience, calmness, open-mindedness as well as using familiar structures help the teacher to achieve his/her goals and make EFL teaching more beneficial.

5 CONCLUSION

Based on the data of the present study, it can be concluded that EFL teaching for pupils with ASD is realized in Finland in two main contexts, in special education classes or integrated into general education classes into which pupils are designated depending on the degree of their disorder. The experiences of inclusive teaching are mainly positive which suggests that it should be continued to be organized in the future as well. As for EFL lessons, the communicative aspect of language is stressed in order to equip the pupils with practical language skills. Due to the centrality of

oral communication and the autistic pupils' learning challenges in certain areas, evaluation is based on distinct criteria and exams given little or no relevance. Hence, EFL teaching for pupils with ASD is primarily communicative, and this was seen both in autism education as well as integration lessons of English.

The interviewees had found suitable methods and materials albeit Teacher 2 in particular would have wanted to exploit them even more efficiently than at the time of the interview. In addition to the employment of images, gestures, facilitator, computer, and the like, the role of school assistants was highlighted by both of the teachers. This supports the importance of having school assistants highly involved in autism education and promotes having a sufficient number of them in the future as well. School assistants' support was seen as helpful in integration classes and differentiating teaching in particular. However, even though the teachers claimed that enough resources were at hand, both of them would have hoped for additional training. In brief, although EFL teaching is already realized for pupils with ASD in some Finnish schools, more resources, training and knowledge should be offered to the ones engaged in it in order to develop it even further in the future.

In spite of all the advantages of a semi-structured theme interview, a more structured approach could have been used to narrow down the topics and concentrate on particular themes in all of the interviews and thus gain a more accurate insight into those issues. Additionally, more teachers could have been interviewed not only from the same school but also other professionals from different schools in order to receive a broader and more objective overview of the situation and draw firmer conclusions and even generalizations. However, this was not possible within the scope of the Bachelor's thesis; instead, it might be possible to be carried out for a Master's thesis. In the present study there was also disproportion in the length of the interviews, Teacher 2's interview being over 20 minutes (total 51 minutes) longer than that of Teacher 1's. Furthermore, if the participants had had more experience of teaching English to pupils with ASD, more reliable conclusions could have been made. On the other hand, despite the lack of more years of experience, perhaps the study presents the current situation in Finland since EFL instruction specifically for autistic persons is still a rather limited phenomenon and it

is not even materialized in all Finnish schools where there are pupils with ASD.

A significant amount of data was left without analysis in the present study due to restrictions in the extent of the thesis. Since altogether four pupils with ASD were interviewed, it would have been interesting to analyze their thoughts towards EFL teaching. It is something, however, that can be studied in the future, perhaps in a Master's thesis on a similar theme.

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APPENDICES

Attached are the research permits for the participants and the guardians and more information for the principal of the school in which the study was conducted.

SUOSTUMUS TUTKIMUKSEN OSALLISTUJAKSI

Tutkimuksen suorituspaikka:

Tutkimuksen tekijä:

Tutkimuksen ohjaaja:

Tutkimusta tekevä yliopisto ja laitos:

Kyseessä on kandidaatin tutkielmaa varten tehtävä tutkimus, jonka nykyinen päätarkoitus on selvittää, miten englannin opetus toteutetaan autismin kirjoon kuuluville yläkoulun oppilaille Suomessa. Lisäksi tutkimus pyrkii saamaan vastauksia alatutkimuskysymyksiin. Varalla on myös vaihtoehtoisia kysymyksiä sekä lisäteemoja, joten lopulliset tutkimuskysymykset muotoutuvat varsinaisesti tutkimuksen aikana. Tutkimus olisi tarkoitus toteuttaa tapaustutkimuksena seurannan, muistiinpanojen, haastatteluiden (mielellään vähintään yhden opettajan ja oppilaan haastattelu), ääninauhoituksen ja mahdollisesti videoinnin avulla. Seuranta tapahtuisi joidenkin tuntien ja/tai koulupäivöiden aikana. Aineistoa tutkitaan koalitatiivisesti. Tutkimus olisi tarkoitus tehdä huhtikuun (tai toukokuun) 2012 aikana, aikaisintaan viikolla 14. Lisätietoja varten voi ottaa yhteyttä tutkimuksen tekijään.

Tutkimusta varten kerätty aineisto käsitellään niin, että osallistujan henkilöllisyys ei paljastu. Aineistoa säilytetään tutkimusta tekevässä yliopistossa ja se sijoitetaan tutkimuksen päätyttyä kirjaston sähköiseen arkistoon. Osallistujalle kerrotaan, milloin ja missä tilanteissa tutkimustietoa kerätään. Tutkimuksen osallistuja voi halutessaan myös perua osallistumisensa.

1. Suostun siihen, että kirjoittamiani tekstejä kerätään ja tallennetaan
2. Suostun siihen, että tutkimustilanteessa tuottamiani kirjallisia materiaaleja kerätään ja tallennetaan
3. Suostun siihen, että haastatteluni
 - kuvanauhoitetaan (videoidaan)
 - ääninauhoitetaan
4. Suostun siihen, että vuorovaikutustani
 - kuvanauhoitetaan (videoidaan)
 - ääninauhoitetaan
 - seurataan nauhoittamatta
5. Näin kerättyä minua koskevaa aineistoa saa käyttää
 - tieteellisissä tutkimuksissa ja julkaisuissa
 - tieteellisissä esitelmissä
 - opetus- ja koulutilanteissa

Paikka:

Aika:

Allekirjoitus:

Nimen selvennys: Etunimet:

Sukunimi/sukunimet:

Lomakkeen täyttöohje: Ole hyvä ja täytä **kaikki** Sinulle sopivat vaihtoehdot.

HUOLTAJAN SUOSTUMUS: LAPSEN OSALLISTUMINEN TUTKIMUKSEEN

Tutkimuksen suorituspaikka:

Tutkimuksen tekijä:

Tutkimuksen ohjaaja:

Tutkimusta tekevä yliopisto ja laitos:

Kyseessä on kandidaatin tutkielmaa varten tehtävä tutkimus, jonka nykyinen päätarkoituksena on selvittää, miten englannin opetus toteutetaan autismin kirjoon kuuluville yläkoulun oppilaille Suomessa. Lisäksi tutkimus pyrkii saamaan vastauksia alatutkimuskysymyksiin. Varalla on myös vaihtoehtoisia kysymyksiä sekä lisäteemoja, joten lopulliset tutkimuskysymykset muotoutuvat varsinaisesti tutkimuksen aikana. Tutkimus olisi tarkoitus toteuttaa tapaustutkimuksena seurannan, muistiinpanojen, haastatteluiden (mielellään vähintään yhden opettajan ja oppilaan haastattelu), ääninauhoituksen ja mahdollisesti videoinnin avulla. Seuranta tapahtuisi joidenkin tuntien ja/tai koulupäivien aikana. Aineistoa tutkitaan kvaalitatiivisesti. Tutkimus olisi tarkoitus tehdä huhtikuun (tai toukokuun) 2012 aikana, aikaisintaan viikolla 14. Lisätietoja varten voi ottaa yhteyttä tutkimuksen tekijään.

Tutkimusta varten kerätty aineisto käsitellään niin, että osallistujan henkilöllisyys ei paljastu. Aineistoa säilytetään tutkimusta tekevässä yliopistossa ja se sijoitetaan tutkimuksen päätyttyä kirjaston sähköiseen arkistoon. Osallistujalle kerrotaan, milloin ja missä tilanteissa tutkimustietoa kerätään. Tutkimuksen osallistuja voi halutessaan myös perua osallistumisensa.

1. Suostun siihen, että lapseni kirjoittamia tekstejä kerätään ja tallennetaan
2. Suostun siihen, että lapseni tutkimustilanteessa tuottamia kirjallisia materiaaleja kerätään ja tallennetaan
3. Suostun siihen, että lapseni haastattelu
 - kuvanauhoitetaan (videoidaan)
 - ääninauhoidaan
4. Suostun siihen, että lapseni vuorovaikutusta
 - kuvanauhoitetaan (videoidaan)
 - ääninauhoidaan
 - seurataan nauhoittamatta
5. Näin kerättyä lastani koskevaa aineistoa saa käyttää
 - tieteellisissä tutkimuksissa ja julkaisuissa
 - tieteellisissä esitelmissä
 - opetus- ja koulutilanteissa

Paikka:

Aika:

Allekirjoitus:

Nimen selvennys: Etunimet:

Sukunimi/sukunimet:

Lomakkeen täyttöohje: Ole hyvä ja täytä kaikki Sinulle sopivat vaihtoehdot.

Kandidaatin tutkielma
Jyväskylän yliopisto
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puh.

Rehtorille lisätietoa tutkimuksesta

Mikäli sopii ja on mahdollista, toivoisin, että lisätiedot tutkimuksesta tutkimuskysymysten osalta olisivat ainakin ensisijaisesti koulun johtoa varten, jotta tieto niistä ei vaikuttaisi tutkimustuloksiin.

Tutkimuksen nykyinen päätarkoitus on selvittää, miten englannin opetus toteutetaan autismin kirjoon kuuluville yläkoulun oppilaille Suomessa. Mitä opetusmenetelmiä ja -materiaaleja käytetään ja mitä niistä opettaja pitää toimivina? Mitä mielipiteitä oppilailla on englannin oppimisesta ja opetuksesta? Vaihtoehtoisesti tai lisäksi voisin tutkia muun muassa tietokoneen ja Internetin käyttöä ja integraation roolia autististen oppilaiden englannin opetuksessa. Tutkielmassani mahdollisesti myös esittelisin ideoita englannin opetuksen kehittämiseksi. Lopulliset tutkimuskysymykset muotoutuvat kuitenkin vasta tutkimuksen aikana.

Aineistoa tutkimukseen olisi tarkoitus kerätä seurannan, muistiinpanojen, haastatteluiden, ääninauhoituksen ja mahdollisesti videoinnin avulla. Tutkimus toteutettaisiin pääasiassa koulun autismiopetuksen (ja ehkä integraation) tunneilla. Haluaisin haastatella vähintään yhtä oppilasta sekä yhtä autismiopetuksessa englantia opettavaa opettajaa. Tarkoitukseni olisi seurata ainakin joitakin autismiopetuksessa pidettäviä englannin tunteja, mutta seuraisin ehkä muitakin ryhmän oppitunteja, jotta oppilaat totuisivat minuun.

Aineistoa olisi tarkoitus tutkia kvalitatiivisesti muun muassa peilaten tutkimustuloksia taustakirjallisuuteen. Mikäli haastatteluja ja/tai opetustilanteita saa nauhoittaa, olisi tutkielmassa (litteroituja) suoria lainauksia niistä parafrasien ja lyhennelmien lisäksi.

Kysymyksiä varten voi ottaa yhteyttä allekirjoittaneeseen.

Kiitos paljon jo etukäteen!

Ystävällisin terveisin,

Tuomas Kuparinen