

English language children's literature in teaching:

An overview of the current situation in the Finnish elementary school's English language classrooms.

Bachelor's thesis

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Tiivistelmä – Abstract <p>Kirjallisuuden lukemisen katsotaan olevan hyödyllistä kielten oppimiselle ja yleisesti myös kehitykselle. Lukija-identiteettimme kerrotaan alkavan muodostuvan jo varhaislapsuudessa, ja näin ollen lukija-identiteetin muodostumisen tukeminen tulisi aloittaa mahdollisimman varhain. Kirjallisuuden hyödyntämisen opetuksessa on kerrottu vaikuttavan muun muassa kognitiivisten ja emotionaalisten kykyjen kehitykseen, maailmankatsomuksen avartumiseen sekä toisen kielen eri osa-alueiden kehitykseen. Kirjallisuuden on kerrottu tarjoavan kielellisesti rikkaamman vaihtoehdon oppikirjoille, joihin suomalainen koulukulttuuri on jo pitkään pohjautunut. Aiemmat tutkimukset ovat osoittaneet, että kirjallisuuden hyödyntäminen suomalaisissa kouluissa ovat vähäistä, mutta kattavaa aiempaa tutkimusta ei alakoulujen tilanteesta ole aiemmin tehty. Tämän vuoksi tutkielmani etsii vastausta siihen, kuinka paljon suomalaisten alakoulujen englannin kielen opettajat hyödyntävät englannin kielistä kirjallisuutta opetuksessaan. Tämän lisäksi tutkielmani haluaa paneutua hieman taustoihin, jotka voivat vaikuttaa kirjallisuuden hyödyntämisen määrään opetuksessa. Yksi hypoteeseista on, että opettajien omat lukutottumukset ja asenteet kirjallisuutta kohtaan vaikuttavat heidän hyödyntämisen määräänsä.</p> <p>Tutkimuksen aineisto koostuu verkkokyselystä saaduista vastauksista. Kysely toteutettiin Google kyselyn avulla ja jaettiin Englannin opettajat- nimiseen Facebook ryhmään. Kysely sai vastauksia 25. Kysely tuotti sekä määrällistä ja laadullista aineistoa, joka analysoitiin manuaalisesti.</p> <p>Tutkimukseni tulokset vahvistivat aiempien tutkimuksien tuloksia siitä, että suomalaisten peruskoulujen opettajat eivät hyödynnä englannin kielistä kirjallisuutta opetuksessaan usein. Tutkimukseni selvittäessä hyödyntämiseen liittyviä tekijöitä selvisi, että opettajan asenteet kirjallisuutta kohtaan ja omat lukutottumukset eivät välttämättä ole yhteydessä kirjallisuuden hyödyntämisen määrään. Puolestaan se, kuinka tärkeänä kirjallisuuden hyödyntäminen alakoulutasolla nähdään, osoitti jonkin asteista yhteyttä hyödyntämisen määrään. Näiden lisäksi moni vastaajista ilmoitti ostavansa hyödyntämäänsä kirjallisuutta netistä tai kirjallisuuden saatavuusongelmista. Tutkimuksessa käytetty aineisto oli kuitenkin pieni, joten tulokset eivät ole yleistettävissä. Tutkimukseni tulokset antavat kuitenkin jonkinlaista kuvaa suomalaisten alakoulujen englannin kielen opettajien kirjallisuuden hyödyntämisestä ja saatujen tuloksien perusteella voitaisiinkin todeta, että kokoavaa materiaalipankkia opettamiseen sopivasta kirjallisuudesta kaivataan.</p>	
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1. Introduction

Reading of literature is said to be beneficial for language learning and general growth in many ways by increasing exposure to target language (Daskalovska and Dimova 2012) and influencing many cognitive and emotional skills (Ghosn 2013: 7). Through the content of the literary pieces reading has also shown to improve the development of cognitive and emotional skill formation (Ghosn 2013: 7). It has also been argued to provide cultural knowledge about the habits and values of the target language population (Aebersold and Field 1997: 5-18; Ghosn 2013: 3-12). First and foremost, though, it has been argued to improve many language skills such as literacy skills, reading strategies (Popp 2005: 45), vocabulary (Ghosn 2013: 85-92), independent reading (Kauppinen and Aerila 2019; Krashen 2013; Kolb 2013) and grammatical structures (Popp 2005: 45). In addition, it has been shown to affect motivation positively (Ghosn 2013: 43-52). Literature also provides an alternative to textbooks, which are used by most language teachers in Finnish context (Luukka, Pöyhönen, Huhta, Taalas, Tarnanen and Keränen 2008). In relation, literature has been argued to expose students to authentic and rich language (Kauppinen and Aerila 2019; Ghosn 2013; Daskalovska and Dimova 2012).

Despite the way in which it has been argued to be beneficial by international and national studies, research has shown that literature is not often utilized in the Finnish foreign language context (Harjanne, Tella and Reunamo 2015; Luukka et al. 2008). It has also been reported that non-existing reading habits are visible in the lowering level of reading skills of Finnish students at the stage when they are moving from elementary school to middle school (Knuutinen 2019).

However, extensive previous studies have not been conducted about the classroom practices involving literature in the Finnish elementary schools, which is why the present study will focus on this context. Due to this when the present study considers literature it refers specifically to children's literature. Children's literature is defined as a form of literature directed to children of all ages and could be used interchangeably with the term's storybooks and stories (Bland 2013: 1-12). The habits of reading literature are said to start forming in the early childhood (Aebersold and Field 1997: 3-12), which is why it would be important to have literature present in class as early as possible. This is also the reason why the present study strives to make sense of the ways in which literature is used in Finnish elementary school English language classrooms. Therefore, the first aim of this study is to discover whether elementary school English teachers utilize English language literature in their

teaching. In addition, the present study aims at discovering reasons behind the teachers' decisions to utilize or to not utilize English language children's literature in their teaching.

This study draws on data gathered from an online survey that was posted for two weeks in a Facebook group for English teachers in Finland called "Englannin Opettajat" that has over 4000 group members. The survey was targeted to elementary school English teachers. Out of the 4000 members in this group, 24 teachers responded to my survey. The low number of responses affects the generalizability of the present findings, and therefore the present study can only report some possible tendencies in the teachers' responses. The data on the teachers' views are mostly quantitative, but some qualitative data were also gathered. The quantitative data were analyzed manually. The qualitative data were analyzed by determining their relevance with respect to the research questions.

Next, I will introduce some of the key concepts related to the use of literature in second language teaching. I will first explain the formation of reading habits and discuss relevant previous studies on reading habits in the Finnish context. I will then proceed to define children's literature and to explain the benefits of utilizing second language children's literature in teaching. The final part of the literature review will discuss the previous studies of the field in the Finnish context before presenting the methods of data gathering and analyzing of the present study. Finally, I will report the results and analysis of the data and conclude with discussion of the findings as well as answering the research questions.

2. The formation of reading habits

It has been argued that the habits we acquire regarding reading fiction books begin to form in early childhood (Aebersold and Field 1997: 3-12). According to Aebersold and Field (1997: 3-12), this happens through interactions with our environment. This means that teachers as well as parents and other close adults in children's lives can model reading behavior and help build the children's identity as readers. It is clear then that teachers have their own reading identities as well (Aebersold and Field 1997: 3-12). Teachers' own attitudes and reading habits have been shown to have some influence on how they can model reading behavior for their students (Kauppinen and Aerila 2019: 12). Kauppinen and Aerila (2019: 14) explain that teachers can for example simply promote reading as a source of information or as a way to enjoy leisure time. In their view, literature has value in both of these ways. However, before a student can develop their reading identity in both ways, they need a model against which they can reflect their own actions (Kauppinen and Aerila 2019: 11). In this task teachers have a big role, even though they are not responsible for it alone (Kauppinen and Aerila 2019: 12).

The availability of a class, school, town, or city library has been seen vital for building a positive reading identity. More specifically, the need for a library to be functional and up-to-date: teachers cannot read or encourage their students to read books in class if there are no books available (Knuutinen 2019: 117). The texts students have access to and interact with are therefore part of the process of forming their identities as readers (Unsworth 2005: 5). However, at the same time, the internet has made literature more available. Traditional stories are now available in various forms, ranging from written texts to publications involving background sounds and additional activities (Unsworth 2005: 22-43). Therefore, the availability of literature, or libraries should no longer be the main issue as far as its use in classroom is concerned.

2.1. Reading habits in the Finnish context

According to Knuutinen (2019: 115) the habits of reading literature are already visible when children move from elementary school to middle school. They show the different levels of interest and reading skills that children have. At this stage, there are also clear differences between boys and girls (Knuutinen 2019: 115). Popp (2005: 63) remarks that students only learn to read by reading. According to her, regular daily reading helps establish good reading habits. However, reading of

literature should be distinguished from testing and other reading related activities, so that it promotes the “reading as leisure time activity” ideology, that was mentioned earlier.

Popp (2005: 74) presents studies that have argued that there is a window to establish the habits of reading literature and the window has been said to close around the age of 12, which stresses the importance of early exposure to literature. A Publication by the Finnish Opetus- ja kulttuuriministeriö (2019: 20) indicate that the reading- and writing skills of young Finnish learners have recently decreased. There might be multiple reasons to why the reading and writing skills are decreasing besides the fact that Finnish schools are not encouraging reading sufficiently. Nevertheless, based on the previous studies by Luukka et al. (2008) and Harjanne et al. (2015), it is evident that English teachers in the Finnish context do not utilize English language literature in their teaching that much, at least with younger students. Extensive studies covering elementary school grades have so far not been conducted in Finland. Similarly, there exists no previous studies that investigate the reasons behind the teacher’s ways of using literature in classroom. These are the gaps that the present study aims to bridge.

3. Literature in the language classroom

Children's literature refers to literature directed to children of all ages (Bland 2013: 1-12). According to Bland (2013: 1-12), children's literature encompasses all literary genres from fairy tales, nursery rhymes, graphic narratives and young adult literature that reflect topics that are of interest to younger readers. Building on this view, Ghosn (2013: 5) suggests that the term children's literature could, in fact, be used interchangeably with the notion of storybooks and stories. This is also how the present study will occasionally refer children's literature. Ghosn (2013:5) also argues that children's literature could have titles in any genre, but what makes it children's literature is the age appropriateness. Further, Ghosn (2013: 5) highlights the importance of the quality of the text, meaning that not all types of texts are literature. She (2013: 5) gives examples of texts that do not qualify as literature and describes them as texts that are "most simplified, controlled-vocabulary stories" and therefore do not fit the textbook definition of literature.

Children's literature as a means for language teaching and learning requires certain features. Ghosn (2002) mentions few of these features: the storyline should be clear and uncomplicated, the language used should be amusing, predictable and repetitive, and, in addition to the textual elements, the stories should have illustrations to help students assign meanings to difficult words or phrases (Ghosn 2002). Consequently, in this sense, not all children's literature is good for language teaching and learning and it is the schools' and teachers' task to choose the right types of materials for class.

3.1 Literature in foreign language classrooms

Citing Nuttal (1982: 168), Daskalovska and Dimova (2012: 1185) argue that: "best way to improve your knowledge of a foreign language is to go and live among its speakers. The next best way is to read extensively in it.". By this, they highlight the importance of reading in second language. Literature can be present in the classroom in various ways, for example, in reading circles, pair and group discussions, reflective assignments (Kauppinen and Aerila 2019), game-playing and roleplaying (Unsworth 2005: 22-43). In addition, as its use in a foreign language classroom increases the exposure to the target language (Daskalovska and Dimova 2012), it is said to be beneficial for language learning in many ways.

Firstly, it is argued to improve the formation of cognitive, and emotional skills. According to Ghosn (2013: 3-12), literature provides children more complex themes and experiences to process than what

is possible for them to achieve in their own life, by for example, overcoming fear, poverty, and death. She also suggests that processing these themes helps children deepen their understanding of the emotions evoked by stories. Stories also present models for children's own emotions and for controlling them. Hence, they help children build their emotional intelligence (Ghosn 2013: 3-12). The processing of these topics is therefore argued to be important for the children's psychosocial development (Ghosn 2013: 3-12). Emotions evoked by stories are also important with respect to memory, since events tied to emotional information are more likely to be remembered than the ones without emotional connection (Banich and Compton 2018: 276-277).

Secondly, foreign language literature provides information about customs, values, and habits of different cultures (Aebersold and Field 1997: 3-12). According to Ghosn (2013: 3-12) children can explore different roles and cultures through imaginative themes of the world and people, meant for their level of understanding. Further, she explains that foreign language literature can therefore serve as a mirror to reflect children's own experiences in relation to the experiences in literature. In addition it can act as a window to have a glimpse of other worlds, places, and times to widen their knowledge about other cultures and their people (Ghosn 2013: 3-12).

Thirdly, literature improves language skills. In Ghosn's view (2013: 3-12), through illustrated stories, children can improve their literacy skills by making connections between words and pictures. This is an example of first forms of reading strategies: picking up content clues and decoding words. With the help of pictures, students can assign meanings to unknown words and expand their existing vocabulary. This has been shown to have a connection with their improved comprehension skills (Popp 2005: 74).

If children are read stories in the classroom this has been discovered to improve the ability for a student to read on their own (Kauppinen and Aerila 2019: 12). In addition to improving their ability to read on their own, it also improves their interest in independent reading (Krashen 2013), as well as their confidence as readers (Kolb 2013).

Although research is still limited and inconclusive (Popp 2005: 39-55), it seems that when the teacher reads aloud to students, it can also help the students unconsciously learn the grammatical structures of language. Read aloud, literature also provides an opportunity for students to explore more complex content than what they would be able to process in their own reading (Popp 2005: 39-55). Despite the benefits that literature has in classroom in relation to learning grammatical structures, it also has some limitations. Unconscious learning of language structures through literature poses a threat that learners

form fossilized errors. Such a finding points to the limitations of the use of literature in teaching grammar as an assisting method not a primary one (Ghosn 2013: 93-98).

Fourthly, literature improves motivation. Ghosn (2013: 23-32) reports that content in elementary school language classrooms revolves around familiar topics, such as the self, family, hobbies, daily routines. These topics are also covered in a more general manner with little personal reflection. Ghosn (2013: 23-32) also remarks that there are many other topics and themes that younger students are interested in that do not get covered through textbooks in class, since the textbooks are meant to serve the masses. Through literature, children can choose topics and themes that they are interested in, which is argued to improve motivation (Ghosn, 2013: 23-32). Motivation determines how much students are willing to invest in a task. Therefore, motivation can act as a filter, which is suggested by the affective filter hypothesis, according to which filters prevent or hinder the accessibility of an input (Ghosn 2013: 11). According to Ghosn (2013: 11), if students could read children's literature guided by their own interests, it would have motivational value and therefore facilitate the input getting through without filters. Like Ghosn (2013:11), also Aebersold and Field (1997: 35-51) argue, that if teachers allow students to choose their own literary pieces from the ones that suit the course content and purposes, this supports their autonomy and motivation. In language textbooks, in contrast, there is rarely options to choose between texts, which, in turn, does not support the students' autonomy and interests (Aebersold and Field 1997: 35-51).

Lastly, literature provides language material. Language textbooks dominate the textual field of Finnish elementary schools. They are generally seen as having a high quality (Kauppinen ja Aerila 2019: 21). Language textbooks present simplified information before moving on to introduce more complex one, implying that this is the way to learn languages (Ghosn 2013: 13-22). This method is called the bottom-up method, according to which language should be taught and learned moving from the smallest units to bigger ones (Aebersold and Field 1997: 3-12). Its opposite, top-down methods, are just as good as bottom-up methods (Ghosn 2013: 13-22). Ghosn (2013: 13-22) has illustrated this with the help of an example of interaction between parents and infants: in this setting, infants have exposure to far more complex language than they are able to produce (Ghosn 2013: 13-22). Why would it not apply to second language learning context as well? In principle, L1 and L2 processes of reading are fairly similar, except for the bigger knowledge base and ability to handle basic grammar in L1 (Aebersold and Field 1997: 13-22). If literature is age and level appropriate the remaining question is, why L2 learners would not be able to learn through reading aloud and reading by themselves as a top-down method.

Ghosn (2013: 13-22) also thinks that simplified language, like textbook language, limits learners' access to authentic language and delimits their possibilities for their overall comprehension. The discourse in language textbooks is also limited in its expressiveness, whereas literature provides richer and figurative forms of language (Daskalovska and Dimova 2012). Therefore, as Daskalovska and Dimova (2012) suggest that literature presents language in its expressive form, in contrast to the functional form that characterizes the language textbooks in for example their emphasis on information seeking and giving. Since figurative language is not limited to literature and is used for example in advertising and naming businesses, exposing children to it allows them to become more aware and diverse readers of the surroundings they live in (Daskalovska and Dimova 2012).

Literature in language classroom has therefore proven to be important part of overall language learning of a second language, and studies agree that all of the above applies to EFL classrooms as well as they apply to the general foreign language context (Ghosn 2002).

3.2 Literature in the Finnish EFL classroom

As stated in the Finnish National Core Curriculum of 2014 for basic education, language teaching has plenty of room for playfulness and creativity (Perusopetuksen opetussuunnitelman perusteet 2014), which are key characteristics of literature (Daskalovska and Dimova 2012). It is also stated in the Core Curriculum that students should be encouraged to discover diverse cultural and linguistic worlds through authentic contexts (Perusopetuksen opetussuunnitelman perusteet 2014). Some of the goals of the Core Curriculum for the teaching of the English language point to the relevance of literature use, even though it is not explicitly spelt out. One of the goals in EFL is to teach vocabulary and grammar through a variety of texts, such as stories and plays. Another key goal is to offer possibilities for demanding language use and to teach students strategies to deal with demanding texts. Yet another goal is to help students discover the different English language materials from libraries and the internet – thus further highlighting the fact that there are language materials for different levels of competence (Perusopetuksen opetussuunnitelman perusteet 2014). Thus, in this way, Finnish National Core Curriculum can be interpreted to be in favor of using literature in classroom.

There are few studies about the usage of literature in English language teaching in the Finnish context, but they have mainly covered grades 7-9. For example, the study by Luukka et al. (2008) was based on the 9th grade students' and their teachers' perceptions of the use of literature in language teaching.

They discovered that overall, it seems that instead of printed texts, students and teachers seek materials from the internet, including visual materials, enabling new forms of reading. Out of the 740 participants in their survey, 55% answered from the English language perspective, so for the purpose of this present study, it illustrated the views of the English teachers' views well. Out of all the participants in their study 98% reported using the English language textbook and 95% reported using an activity book based on the textbook. This highlights the importance of textbooks in Finnish classrooms. In conclusion, according to Luukka et al. (2008) study, literature does not seem to be in as significant position as it is in Finnish as a first language classrooms, and to showcase this, their results indicated that 53% of the foreign language teachers reported using literature in teaching rarely and 28% reported that they never used it in their teaching.

Harjanne et al. (2015: 913-923) focused on teachers' perceptions. In the same ways as Luukka et al.'s (2008) study, their study considered all the language teachers in Finland instead of only English language teachers. However, out of their 147 participants, a large proportion were teaching English, so it effectively illustrates the English teachers' views, too. All in all, the study shows that language teachers in Finland use textbooks extensively in their teaching and that authentic materials, including literature, was used rarely if at all (Harjanne et al. 2015: 913-923).

In sum, despite the fact that literature is seen as beneficial, previous studies indicate that foreign language literature is not often used in foreign language classrooms in Finland. However, most of these studies (Harjanne et al. 2015; Luukka et al. 2008) considered either the grades of upper comprehensive school or older elementary school grades such as the 6th. graders (Hägglom 2006), which indicates a need for a study that considers the lower grades of elementary school as well. In order to acquire information about the current situation in English language classrooms in Finland, research focusing on specifically the use of literature in English language classrooms is also needed.

4. The present study

As noted above, there are few studies concerning the use of English language literature in elementary school level English language teaching in Finland. In particular, there are no known studies on the reasons behind the teachers' decisions to utilize or to not utilize English language literature in English as a second language classrooms. Therefore, the aim of the present study is to review the current state of how literature is used in English language classrooms in Finnish elementary schools, and to assess the reasons behind the using or neglect of using of literature in teaching. To fulfil this aim, the present study aims to answer these three questions:

- 1) How much do English language teachers in Finnish elementary schools utilize English language children's literature?
- 2) Is there a connection between teacher's own attitudes towards reading and literature, and reading habits and whether they utilize English language children's literature in their teaching?
- 3) Is there a connection between the size of the school, the grade the teacher teaches, topic of teaching, availability of library or the years of teaching and whether teachers utilize English language children's literature in their teaching?

Based on previous studies (Luukka et al. 2008; Harjanne et al. 2015), a hypothesis for the first research question is that elementary school English language teachers in Finland do not utilize English language children's literature in their teaching often and if they do, it would take place in the upper grades of elementary school.

In addition, based on previous studies (Kauppinen and Aerila 2019) a hypothesis for my second research question is that there is a connection between the teacher's own habits and attitudes, and whether they utilize English language children's literature in their teaching.

My last hypothesis does not rely heavily on previous studies, but more on my experiences as first a student and, later, as a substitute teacher of English in the Finnish elementary school. As stipulated in the first hypothesis, based on previous studies, it is assumed that if English language teachers in Finland utilize English language children's literature it happens mainly in the upper grades of elementary school. Hence, a connection between the grade that the teacher teaches and whether they utilize English language children's literature is assumed. The availability of a library and the size of the school are questions that relate to what resources are available. As a consequence, a connection between the availability of a library and whether teachers utilize English language children's literature

is assumed, although the increasing use of the internet might affect the importance of a physical library. When it comes to the school size, it will be interesting to see, whether smaller schools that have fewer students utilize more English language children's literature in their teaching, or whether bigger schools, that are usually urban schools, have more available resources and therefore utilize more English language children's literature in their teaching. Finally, it will also be interesting to explore whether the years of teaching has a connection with the utilization of children's English language literature.

When seeking an answer to these questions, this study aimed to discover possible tendencies in Finnish elementary school teachers based on the responses of the participants.

4.1. Data

The data were gathered with an online questionnaire in Google that was posted in a Facebook group for English teachers in Finland, called "Englannin Opettajat". The Facebook group was chosen due to its large number of members (n=4100) that represent the population of interest in the present study. The questionnaire was posted on the Facebook page of the association for the first time in the beginning of November 2020, and for the second time exactly one week later as a reminder. It was closed after a total time of two weeks. The questionnaire method for data collection was chosen, since it is argued to be the most efficient and convenient method for gathering a large amount of data (Alanen 2011; Heikkilä 2014).

Since the present study is interested in the current state of practices of using literature in EFL teaching in the Finnish elementary schools, the questionnaire was targeted to teachers currently teaching at a Finnish elementary school, and more precisely, at grades 1.-6. The questionnaire received 25 responses. It was a voluntary one, so the data were gathered from whoever wanted to participate. One response out of the 25 had to be omitted since the participant was currently teaching English in a Finnish high school, instead of an elementary school, and therefore was not regarded in face of the results of the study. Since the data are limited in number, the results cannot be generalized to the whole population, but they can still offer some insights of the ways in which literature is used by English language teachers in Finnish Elementary schools.

The questionnaire consisted of 11 compulsory, closed questions and 6 additional open-ended voluntary questions to clarify certain answer options. At the end of the questionnaire, there was also a voluntary, open-ended question for the participants that invited them to explain in more detail their

previous answers or other topic related issues. (See Appendix for full questionnaire). The use of open-ended and closed questions varied, based on whether the questions were acquiring information about the number of particular answers or the content of the individual answers (Heikkilä 2014). The questionnaire was conducted anonymously since no personal information was needed from the participants for the purpose of the study, but a consent was initiated.

The questionnaire was chosen as the method to gather data since it allows data to be gathered rapidly. Despite the fact that this study did not gather enough data for the results to be generalized to the whole population, the questionnaire still served as useful method, since the responses it generated can still reveal useful insights into and tendencies of teacher practices.

4.2. Methods of Analysis

Due to the small amount of the data collected, no statistical analysis was necessary. Therefore, the present study analyzed the quantitative data manually, by describing the numerical results of the questionnaire. In this sense, it is a typical example of a descriptive quantitative analysis. It arranges the participants' answers in categories based on the similarity of their answers, which in turn is said to be typical in qualitative analysis (Dörnyei 2007). Therefore, the method of analysis used here was a mixed one. After describing the numerical results question by question, the analysis then aimed to find tendencies between respondents' responses to find answers to the last two research questions.

In addition to the quantitative data investigated, there were some qualitative data to be analyzed in this study. The qualitative data was analyzed by interpreting the relevance of the qualitative data in face of the research questions, since the questions in the questionnaire producing qualitative data were voluntary. Therefore, the answers to these questions were not directly relevant when answering the research questions but showed other perspectives to the matter that this research did not cover in the compulsory questions.

5 Results

The first two questions of the questionnaire considered the participants' background information. 13% of the participants had 1-2 years of teaching experience, whereas two of the largest groups were participants with 3-9 years of experience (33%) and participants with 10-19 years of experience (33%). The group with over 20 years of experience formed 21% of the respondents, so the division between responses from novice teachers and experienced teachers was somewhat even.

The second question concerned the respondents' current grade of teaching. Here the study found a division between teachers that teach the grades of first through third (29%) and teachers who teach the grades of third through sixth (71%). All but two of the first through third grade teachers also currently taught grades 4-6 and two of the third through sixth grade teachers also currently taught in grades 7-9.

The size of the schools the teachers were teaching in was determined in the questionnaire by a question of the number of students in the school in the academic year of 2020-2021. Out of the 24 participants, 38% of the teachers were teaching in a relatively small school with the number of students ranging from 30 to 250. The most common school size in the sample was one with 300-430 students (42%). Out of the 24 participants, 17% were teaching in a big school with 500-600 students and 4% were teaching in a very big school with 1000 students. In relation to this, the next question in the questionnaire was about the availability of class, school, town, or city library. To this, all the participants responded that one of the above-mentioned libraries were available to their students.

The next six questions addressed the respondents' reading habits and interest in reading (Figure 1 and Figure 2). First, 21% of the participants responded that they read Finnish and other non-English literature a great deal. 33% indicated that they read English literature a great deal. The majority in both categories responded that they read literature to some extent (71% read Finnish and non-English literature and 50% read English literature). All of the participants read Finnish and non-English literature at least to some extent, but 8% of the participants replied that they do not read English language literature at all and an additional 8% replied that they hardly read English language literature.

6. Luen vapaa-ajallani suomen- tai muun kuin englanninkielisiä kirjoja...

24 vastausta

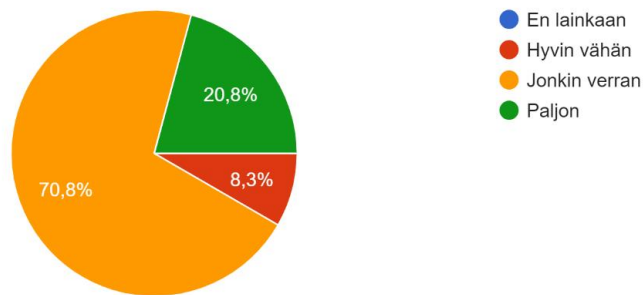


Figure 1: Reading of Finnish and non-English literature

7. Luen vapaa-ajallani englanninkielisiä kirjoja...

24 vastausta

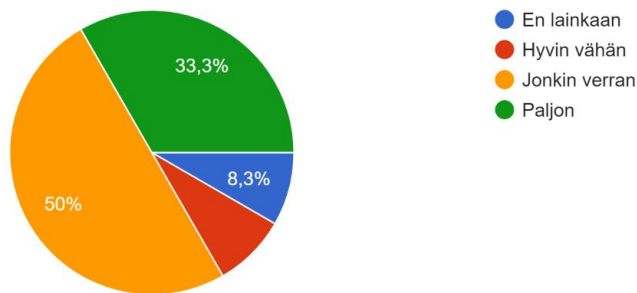


Figure 2: Reading of English literature

Out of the 21% of the respondents who declared reading Finnish and non-English literature a great deal, 80% also replied reading English literature a great deal. On the other hand, out of all the participants 33% responded that they read English language literature a great deal, and 50% of the 33% read more English language literature than Finnish and non-English language literature. Therefore, some overlap between those participants who declared reading Finnish and non-English literature a great deal and those participants who declared reading English literature a great deal is visible.

The subjectivity of these two questions is highlighted in the respondents' estimate of the number of books they read in a year, since their responses varied between 15 and 150 books with those who had declared that they read a great deal in either of the previously discussed questions. Some of the

participants who declared reading to some measure therefore indicated a higher number of books read on average in a year than those who declared reading a great deal.

The next set of questions in the questionnaire dealt with the utilization of English language children's literature in the classroom. 92% of the participants responded that they utilize English language literature in their teaching, leaving only 8% of the participants who indicated that they do not use English language literature in their teaching.

After this, it was investigated in more detail, how much the participants utilized English language children's literature in their teaching. The results showed that out of the 92%, only 5% utilized English language children's literature weekly, whereas 27% use it once a month, and 68% even more sparsely than that (Figure 3).

12.1. Jos vastasit kohdassa 12. Kyllä, kuinka paljon hyödynnät englanninkielistä lasten- ja nuortenkirjallisuutta englannin kielen opetuksessasi?

22 vastausta

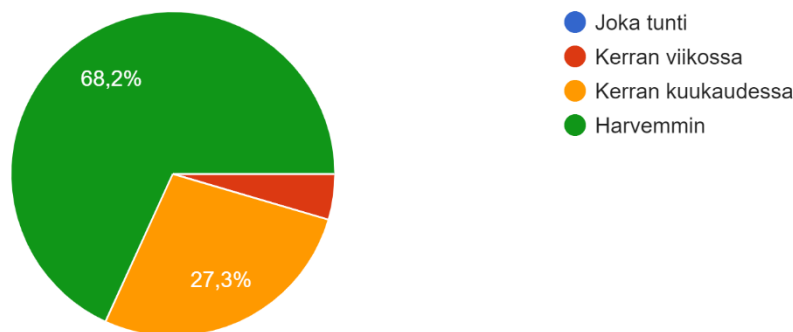


Figure 3: How often literature is utilized in teaching

The next question, number 10.2. (See Appendix) focused on whether the topic or theme of teaching affects the amount of literature the respondents use in their teaching. Out of the 92% of the respondents that indicated using English language literature in their teaching, 76% responded that the topic or theme of teaching affects how much literature the respondents use in their teaching.

Question number 10.3. (See Appendix) asked about the origin of the English language children's literature teachers use in their teaching. The results indicate that buying books was the most popular response with 67% of the participants choosing this option. Libraries and the internet was the second most popular answer, with 57% of the participants choosing each option. Further, 28% of the participants declared getting material from somewhere else.

The 8% of the participants who declared that they did not use English language children's literature in their teaching, were also asked to explain the reasons behind this decision. One participant stated that their reason was the lack of time and the non-availability of age appropriate English language literature due to a small library. Another participant stated that they had just started teaching and, since the school did not have a ready-made plan for utilizing literature, the participant has not used literature in teaching yet, but is planning to do so, once they have the time to do it.

Finally, the study was interested whether the respondents consider the utilization of English language literature in Finnish elementary school teaching important. The question was designed so that the respondents had a scale of 1-5 where 5 corresponds to "very important". Out of the 24 participants, 53% thought that English language literature is either very important or important in Finnish elementary school English language teaching and 42% of the participants consider it somewhat important. No one considered English language literature in elementary school teaching "not important" (Figure 4).

13. Asteikolla 1-5, kuinka tärkeänä pidät englanninkielisen kirjallisuuden hyödyntämistä englannin kielen opetuksessa alakoulussa?

24 vastausta

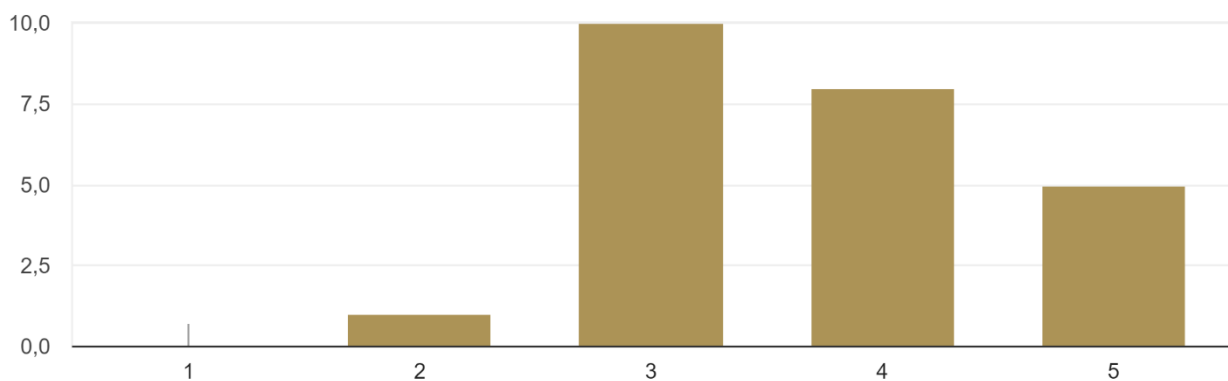


Figure 4: The importance of utilizing English language literature in teaching on a scale from 1-5 (5=very important and 1=not important).

6 Discussion

The first research question the study sought an answer to was whether English teachers in Finnish elementary schools utilize English language children's literature in their teaching. 92% of the participants utilized, but only few of them utilized it on a regular basis with only 5% of the 92% utilizing English language literature on a weekly basis and 27% on a monthly basis. The conclusion therefore is that even though most of the participants declared using English language children's literature in their teaching, it is not used frequently. The present study therefore shows a similar tendency with the previous studies by Luukka et al. (2008) and Harjanne et al. (2015) and concludes that English teachers in Finland do not utilize English language literature in their teaching.

These findings are interesting, since, as shown in section 3.1, literature is seen beneficial in many ways as to language learning. It increases the exposure to the target language (Daskalovska and Dimova 2012), and by that improves many language skills such as expands vocabulary (Popp 2005), improves reading skills (Kauppinen and Aerila 2019; Krashen 2013), increases reading confidence (Kolb 2013) and unconscious learning of grammatical structures (Popp 2005). Literature in language teaching also opens a window to the customs, values, and habits of the target language (Aebersold and Field 1997) and provides rich, authentic material in addition to language textbooks (Ghosn 2013; Aebersold and Field 1997; Daskalovska and Dimova 2012). It has also been shown to increase the overall motivation in language learning (Ghosn 2013). In addition, as mentioned earlier, even though the Finnish National core curriculum does not require that literature should be used in classroom, it acknowledges its relevance (Perusopetuksen opetussuunnitelman perusteet 2014). Therefore, it is interesting to note that very few of the participants in the present study seem to utilize English language literature in their teaching regularly, especially when most of them deem it very important or somewhat important in elementary school teaching (Table 4).

The last two research questions explored the various aspects related to teachers' decisions (not) to utilize English language children's literature in their teaching. Studies on this topic has not previously been conducted at least in the context of English language classrooms in Finland. First of all, the present study was interested to find out, if teachers' own habits and attitudes towards reading and literature affected their use of literature in their teaching as was suggested by Kauppinen and Aerila (2019).

As mentioned earlier, the present study was interested to find out the respondents' subjective and objective views of reading habits. When comparing all of the participants, it appeared that the

subjective views do not align with the objective views of reading habits, meaning that some participants who declared reading a great deal, objectively read fewer books on average, than many of those who declared reading books to some extent. Therefore, it transpires that it is difficult to define and separate the categories for “positive reading habits and attitudes” and “negative reading habits and attitudes” based on the questions set in the questionnaire of the present study. It is evident though, that those who declared reading 1-10 books in a year on average, despite their subjective views of their reading habits, utilized English language literature in their teaching more infrequently, which could indicate some support for the hypotheses. The hypothesis does not get supported when investigating the other end of the spectrum though. This is because three teachers declared reading 100-200 books a year on average, and only one of them indicated that they use English language literature on a weekly basis, while two of them declared using literature less frequently than once a month. This phenomenon could also be the result of the fact that 68% of the participants stated that they use English language literature in their teaching less than once a month. Such a finding could indicate that the participants in general do not utilize English language literature in their teaching frequently, despite their reading habits. Therefore, the findings do not support my initial hypotheses.

When evaluating the participants’ ratings of the importance of including English language literature in their teaching on a scale from 1-5, the study shows some contradictory results. Out of the 68% of the participants who declared using English language literature in their teaching less than once a month, 67% gave the rating of 3 or lower. In a similar way, out of the 27% of the participants who declared using English language literature in their teaching once a month, 83% gave the rating of 4 and higher. This finding shows that it might not be the teachers’ habits of or attitudes towards reading and literature in general that influence the decision to utilize or to not utilize English language literature in their teaching. Instead, what matters, may be how the participants perceive the importance of using literature in teaching on an elementary school level. A conclusion for the second research question is therefore inconclusive. Nevertheless, some tendencies for for and against the hypotheses were indicated, but also that the teachers’ habits of or attitudes towards reading and literature might not be the only factor when making the decision to utilize or to not utilize English language children’s literature in teaching.

Secondly, the present study sought to find out if the years of teaching, size of school, current level of teaching or availability of library affected the decision to utilize or to not utilize English language children’s literature in their teaching. Firstly, all of the participants declared that the school they teach at have an available class, school, town, or city library, so any distinctions based on that cannot be made and the present study should have focused on the different style of libraries individually. The

study also investigated the origins of the children's literature used in teaching and found surprisingly that 67% of the participants declared buying material from different types of bookstores. 57% of the participants also declared receiving material from libraries and the internet. There was no significant connection between ways of obtaining material and a user profile. Nevertheless, the finding that most of the participants who utilize English language literature in their teaching obtain the material by buying is interesting to say the least. The analysis of the qualitative data provided further insights about how teachers perceive using literature in elementary school level teaching. Many participants were of the opinion that the availability of age-appropriate English language literature is low on the internet and at the local library. This lack of resources result in difficulties in obtaining language materials. This most certainly explains why many teachers reported buying the materials. These findings show that this study may have over-valued the importance of a library in the era of the internet, since a great deal of materials can be obtained from the internet. However, the availability of resources seems to be an issue when discussing the utilization of literature in language teaching.

The size of school was determined by the number of students in the academic year of 2020-2021, but no significant connection between school size and patterns of utilization were found. The only exception to this is that teachers in the smallest schools (30-100 students) and the biggest schools (600-1000) all declared utilizing English language literature in their teaching less than once a month. My initial hypotheses here was formulated on the basis of common knowledge about the characteristics of smaller and bigger schools, but it was not significantly supported by the results of the study.

The study was especially interested in the lower grades of elementary schools in Finland since previous studies have only focused on the upper grades of elementary school (Hägglom 2006). Out of all the participants of the present study, only 17% also taught first through third grades, leaving the majority of the participants teaching the grades third through sixth. Based on previous studies (Luukka et al. 2008; Harjanne et al. 2015) one of my hypotheses was that if the present study found that English language teachers in Finnish elementary schools utilized English language literature in their teaching, it would be for the upper levels of elementary schools. The present study confirms this hypothesis, since 71% of the participants who indicated that they use English language literature in their teaching once a month or once a week actually taught the upper grades of elementary school. This leaves only 29% of the participants who utilized English language literature more frequently teaching grades 1-2. The analysis of the qualitative data yielded contradicting insights to the hypothesis. Some of the respondents reported only using literature on upper grades of elementary school and for those students who needed more advanced language materials, indicating that literature

should be used for those who have some basic knowledge of the language. Whereas some reported using literature for all of the first and second graders and how much the first and second graders had enjoyed the involvement of literature, indicating that literature can be used for all levels of language learners. Since only 17% participants of the whole study were teaching the lower grades of elementary school, conclusions need to be made carefully.

Another factor hypothesized by the present study to influence whether teachers utilize English language children's literature in their teaching was the years of teaching. Out of all the participants, 13% had 1-2 years of teaching experience. Within this group two out of the three declared using English language children's literature in their teaching once a month, whereas one out of the three declared not utilizing English language literature in their teaching at all. Most of the teachers with 3-9 years of teaching experience (60%) declared utilizing English language children's literature in their teaching less than once a month. However, this could also be the result of the fact that in general, the participants in the present study do not utilize English language literature in their teaching. In conclusion, some tendencies were found: the teachers with less experience seem to utilize English language children's literature less frequently in their teaching than the teachers with more experience. On the other hand, teachers with 10-19 and +20 years formed 54% of all the participants, but only 38% of them declared using English language literature in their teaching once a month or once a week. Therefore, the results are again inconclusive.

The present study was also interested to find out whether the topic of teaching influenced teachers' decisions to utilize English language children's literature in their teaching. It was found out that 67% of those who declared using English language children's literature in their teaching less than once a month and 86% of those who declared using English language children's literature in their teaching once a month or once a week declared that the topic of the teaching does influence their decision to utilize English language literature. Therefore, it can be concluded, that with the majority of the participants, the topic does influence whether they decide to utilize English language children's literature in their teaching. An interesting finding emerging in this study is that 75% of the teachers, who declared that the topic of teaching influence their use of literature, taught the same grades. Nevertheless, only 33% of them utilized English language children's literature in their teaching once a month and rest of them more sparsely. Therefore, the conclusion in this respect is that some teachers utilize English language literature more than others, even though they agree on the topic of the teaching influencing their utilization and despite them teaching the same grades. This finding indicates that the topic of teaching is not the only determinant when teachers decide to (not) use English language children's literature in teaching.

My final conclusion on the qualitative data analysis is that many of the participants wished that more simplified literature existed. This view partly clashes with the idea of literature as an authentic language material. First of all, simplified language material might not pass the definition of literature according to Ghosn (2013: 5). Secondly, the original pieces of literature that are simplified for lower-level readers, are usually meant for older readers. Therefore, the themes and topics might not be age appropriate or relevant to them, which in turn is in connection to motivation, as stated earlier in the literature review (Ghosn 2013: 6). This view is one sided though, and Ghosn (2013) does acknowledge that the practice of simplifying literature for lower levels of language proficiency is common. In conclusion, it could be argued that any literature is better than no literature at all, and an extensive collection of age-appropriate, including the simplified pieces of literature could be useful in the Finnish context to provide more easily accessible literature for Elementary school teachers.

The findings of this study can provide a few things for future research. Based on previous studies (Luukka et al. 2008; Harjanne et al. 2015) the hypothesis was that English teachers in Finnish elementary schools do not utilize English language children's literature in their teaching often. This study found similar tendencies, and can therefore pave path for further studies related to the issue: is it true that there is a connection between students' earlier reading habits and later reading skills? If so, would it not be important to also include second language literature in teaching as early on as possible?

Present findings of the present study indicate that Finnish elementary school English language teachers use English language literature in their teaching to a varying degree. What is left unclear in this study, is how are they doing it and what kind of background knowledge do they have to do so. This study could also provide information of the current situation of literature utilization in the Finnish elementary school English classrooms for the Finnish school administrators and the Ministry of education, that can then make decisions on how to change the current curriculum to further support first of all the literary teaching of English language teachers and second of all the evolvement of a positive reading identity in earlier grades than before.

This study also faced some restrictions. Firstly, it seems that the Facebook group might not be a suggestive enough platform for gathering participants and therefore an alternative option for data gathering should be considered for further research. With more respondents, many of the findings that were now left inconclusive could have supported or canceled the initial hypotheses explicitly. Secondly, the framing of the research questions did not produce broad information on the topic, and therefore in similar, further research the layout for the research questions should be considered.

7 Conclusion

The present study aimed to portray the current situation of the use of literature utilization in the context of Finnish elementary schools' English language classrooms. It provided some insights into the topic, despite the small sample of data. Firstly, the study provided parallel results to those in the previous studies (Luukka et al. 2008; Harjanne et al. 2015), concluding that, even though most of the participants utilized English language literature, their utilization was infrequent. Secondly, the study found some inconclusive results, as well as some tendencies with respect to the factors that influence the utilization of English language children's literature in teaching.

A striking observation was that it might not be the teachers' general attitudes to or habits of reading and literature, that influence the decision to utilize or neglect to utilize English language children's literature in their teaching. Instead, the reason may be how important they see the utilization of English language literature at the elementary school level. Lastly, many participants reported buying the materials they use, indicating that the availability of literary materials is a major factor. The acquisition of materials therefore create inequality among students and teachers since it should not be the teacher's job to pay for the materials used in class.

The findings of the present study indicate that despite the utilization of English language children's literature is considered quite important and beneficial by both the teachers and previous studies, the use in the classroom is actually infrequent. This could be an indication of inadequate training of the teachers when it comes to utilizing literature. Another factor may be the inadequate materials available for the students, which is a surprise especially when many traditional stories are available online (Unsworth 2005: 22-43). Therefore, this study indicates that a collection of easily accessible English language children's literature should be made available for teachers without the need to buy the materials themselves.

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Appendix

Kysely opettajien kirjallisuuden hyödyntämisestä opetuskäytössä ja siihen vaikuttavista tekijöistä

Hyväksyn antamani tietojen hyödyntämisen tässä tutkimuksessa?

Kyllä / Ei

Opettajan taustatietoja koskevat kysymykset (Vastaukseksi riittää numerovastaukset.)

1. Opetusvuodet _____
2. Luokkataso, jolla opetat englannin kieltä tällä hetkellä _____

Koulua koskevat kysymykset

3. Koulun oppilasmäärä (noin) lukuvuonna 2020–2021? _____
4. Onko koulunne oppilaille mahdollisuus vierailuun/kirjojen lainaamiseen jossain seuraavista: luokkakirjasto, koulukirjasto, kunnan- tai kaupunginkirjasto?

Kyllä / Ei

Pohdi seuraavien väittämien paikkaansa pitävyyttä (valitse itsellesi sopivin vaihtoehto tai vaihtoehdot tai anna lyhyt kuvaus.)

5. Luen vapaa-ajallani suomen- tai muun kuin englanninkielisiä kirjoja...
 - a) En lainkaan b) Hyvin vähän c) Jonkin verran d) Paljon
6. Luen vapaa-ajallani englanninkielisiä kirjoja...
 - a) En lainkaan b) Hyvin vähän c) Jonkin verran d) Paljon
7. Lukemieni kirjojen määrä on keskiarvoltaan vuodessa (numerovastaus)... _____
8. Pidän kirjojen lukemisesta...
 - a) En lainkaan b) Hyvin vähän c) Jonkin verran d) Paljon
9. Luen koska...
 - a) Nautin siitä b) Hyödyn siitä c) Joku muu syy (katso kohta 11.1. d) en lue (katso kohta 11.2.)
 - 9.1. Jos vastasit kohdassa 11. Joku muu syy, mikä muu syy? _____
 - 9.2. Jos vastasit kohdassa 11. En lue, miksi et? _____

Opettamista koskevat kysymykset (Valitse itsellesi sopivin vaihtoehto tai vaihtoehdot.)

10. Olen hyödyntänyt englannin kielistä lastenkirjallisuutta englannin kielen opetuksessani esimerkiksi lukemalla tai luettamalla englanninkielisiä kirjoja oppilaille/oppilaille?

- a) Kyllä (Katso kohdat 12.1., 12.2. ja 12.3. b) Ei (Mene kohtaan 12.4.)

10.1. Jos vastasit kohdassa 12. Kyllä, kuinka paljon hyödynnät englanninkielistä lasten- ja nuortenkirjallisuutta englannin kielen opetuksessasi?

- a) Joka tunti b) Kerran viikossa c) Kerran kuukaudessa d) Harvemmin.

10.2. Jos vastasit kohdassa 12. Kyllä, vaikuttaako hyödyntämisesi määrään opetussisältö tai opetettava aihe?

- a) Kyllä b) ei

10.3. Jos vastasit kohdassa 12. Kyllä, oletko saanut materiaalisi... (voit valita useamman)

- a) Kirjastosta b) Internetistä c) Kirjakaupasta (netti- tai kivijalka) d) jostain muualta.

10.4. Jos vastasit kohdassa 12. Ei, miksi et (hyödynnä englanninkielistä lasten- ja nuortenkirjallisuutta? _____

- a) Kyllä b) Ei

11. Asteikolla 1–5, kuinka tärkeänä pidät englanninkielisen lastenkirjallisuuden hyödyntämistä englannin kielen opetuksessa alakoulussa?

En pidä tärkeänä 1 _____ 5 Pidän erittäin tärkeänä

12. Tähän voi vapaasti kertoa kyselyyn tai omiin vastauksiin liittyen mitä vain, jos jotain jäi mielen päälle! _____