

Teachers' perspectives on the role of textbooks in English language learning and teaching in
Finland

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Master's Thesis
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Spring 2017

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1. Introduction

It can be stated that virtually every Finnish learner who has studied English at school has come across textbooks in their studies, some perhaps to a greater extent than others. Nevertheless, textbooks have traditionally played a significant role in English language teaching in Finland, and continue to do so to this day. Lähdesmäki (2004) argues that the printed book, and the textbook in particular, still has a strong status in our culture and, thus, it has the power to define what the English language and the studying of it is (p. 273). However, Hiidenmaa (2015) has pointed out that despite the dominant role of textbooks, there has hardly been any systematic research on them in Finland (p. 27). When it comes to teaching materials specifically in language teaching, Elomaa (2009) states that they have been systematically studied for only for a few decades (p. 32). Furthermore, the majority of the research on textbooks has concentrated on texts, i.e. they have examined the content of textbooks, while a smaller portion has investigated user experiences by interviewing teachers or students (Hiidenmaa, 2015, p. 28). A particular aspect of interest both in the Finnish and international research on textbook content seems to have been culture (see for instance Lappalainen, 2011; Kinnunen, 2013; Shin, Eslami & Chen, 2011). On teacher attitudes, for instance Allen (2015) has investigated Swedish teachers' attitudes towards English language teaching materials.

Instead of focusing on analysing textbook content, the aim of this present study is to find out Finnish English teachers' perspectives on the role of textbooks in English language teaching and learning. The topic is worth studying because the teacher's role is integral in teaching, and it is important to investigate how they perceive the role of textbooks, a significant part of language teaching, as has already been established by previous research. The approach chosen for the study was a sociocultural and ecological perspective to language learning and teaching, which emphasises, for instance, that learning occurs in interaction with others, rather than inside the mind of an individual. Furthermore, meaningful contexts and the learners' engagement are crucial in order for learning to occur. The study was conducted as a semi-structured group interview for six teachers. The teachers represented the levels of primary school, secondary school and upper secondary school education. Qualitative content analysis was used to analyse the interview data. After transcribing the interview, it was examined through text analysis and categorised into different themes of relevant interest.

The thesis is divided into different sections. Section 2 will form the theoretical background of the study. The section will start by introducing the sociocultural and ecological perspectives of language learning and teaching, before examining English language teaching and teaching materials in-depth. Section 3 will introduce the data and the method used in the current study. Moreover, section 4 will carefully present and discuss the findings of the group interview, all the while relating them to the theoretical framework. In section 5, these findings will be summarised and discussed even further. Lastly, section 6 will present the conclusion of the current study, its limitations, and possible interests for further study in the future.

2. Theoretical background

This section forms the theoretical background of the present study. It is divided into two sections: section 2.1 presents the sociocultural and ecological views of language learning and teaching and their pedagogical implications, while section 2.2 discusses English language teaching and teaching materials.

2.1 Sociocultural and ecological views of language learning and teaching

This section examines the sociocultural and ecological views of language learning and teaching. In subsection 2.1.1 the sociocultural theory is examined, before turning to the ecology of language learning in subsection 2.1.2. The final section 2.1.3 discusses the implications these two notions have on language teaching.

2.1.1 Sociocultural theory

The sociocultural theory (SCT) is largely based on the body of work of Russian psychologist L. S. Vygotsky. The fundamental idea of SCT is that human mental functioning is “a mediated process that is organized by cultural artefacts, activities, and concepts” (Lantolf, Thorne & Poehner, 2015, p. 207). SCT maintains that while human neurobiology is required for higher mental processes (for example voluntary memory, logic thought, learning, and attention), it is through interaction in social and material environments that the most crucial forms of human cognitive activity develop (Lantolf et al., 2015). In other words, “the source of learning and development is found in social interaction rather than solely in the mind of an individual” (Swain, Kinnear & Steinman, 2011, p. x). Lantolf (2003) states that SCT is an exception to many theories of language learning because it sees that humans are not bound only to their biology, but rather humans are “agents who regulate their brains rather than the other way around” (p. 349). Schoen (2011) points out that because they are relatively new in research terminology, there remains some ambiguity over the precise meanings of the terms sociocultural theory and socioculturalism (p. 11). Next, some primary concepts of SCT – i.e. mediation, the zone of proximal development and internalisation – are discussed more in-depth.

The core principles of SCT is the mediated human mind. Vygotsky argued that just as humans use material tools to interact with the physical world, we also use symbolic tools to “establish an indirect, or *mediated*, relationship between ourselves and the world” (Lantolf, 2000, p. 1). These

symbolic tools are artefacts created by human and they can include numbers, music, art, concepts and belief systems and, most importantly, language (Lantolf, 2000; Swain et al., 2011). On the other hand, material tools related to language environments could be, for instance, books, pens, paper, or computers (Dufva, 2013a, p. 4). One of Vygotsky's arguments was that all human mental activity is mediated by material and/or symbolical means that are culturally constructed (Swain et al., 2011). An essential form of mediation is called *regulation*, which can be divided into object-, other-, and self-regulation (Lantolf et al., 2015, p. 209). Object-regulation is when one uses material artefacts in the environment, for instance a dictionary to look up words, or pen and paper to make a to-do list (p. 209). Other-regulation refers to mediation by other people and can be, for example, explicit or implicit feedback on grammar, corrective comments, or guidance from an expert (ibid.). Finally, self-regulation is when one has "internalised external forms of mediation for the execution or completion of a task" (ibid.). When an individual reaches self-regulation, they can be considered a proficient user of a language (ibid.). But at times, when faced with a communicatively demanding situation, even the most skilled speakers, including native speakers, may have to *reaccess* the earlier levels of development, i.e. other- or object-regulation, by, for example, asking help from other people or using an object such as a dictionary (ibid.). In sum, mediation can be understood to happen at least on a material, mental and interpersonal level.

Another central concept to SCT is the *zone of proximal development* (ZPD). The most commonly referenced definition of ZPD seems to be that is it the "difference between what a person can accomplish when acting alone and what the same person can accomplish with support from someone else and/or cultural artefacts" (Lantolf, 2000, p. 17). Ohta states that in the ZPD "a learner performs above his or her level of individual competence with the assistance of another; development occurs as the learner acts with increasing independence" (2000, p. 62). ZPD has been a very popular and widely used concept in educational research, which has led to misinterpretations and conflicting views of it (Chaiklin, 2003; Swain et al., 2011). Some researchers seem to be of the opinion that the ZPD always includes interaction between an expert and a novice "in which the expert eventually transmits an ability to the novice through social interaction" (Lantolf, 2000, p. 17). While a common occurrence of ZPD would be a traditional formal teaching situation between a teacher, i.e. the expert, and a student, i.e. the novice, the expert can also be, for instance, another student or an inanimate cultural artefact (Swain et al., 2011). Some researchers have found that ZPD can also emerge in peer interaction where there is no clear expert (Ohta, 2000, p. 55). Thus, as can be seen, interaction plays a complex and multifaceted role that is highlighted in SCT.

Further, Vygotsky claimed that a child's cultural development happens on two levels: first it happens on the social level, i.e. between people as an *interpsychological* category, and then on the psychological level, i.e. as an *intrapsychological* category (Lantolf et al., 2015, p. 211). Moving from the intermental level to the intramental one occurs through the process of *internalisation* where culturally created mediational artefacts, above all language, take on a psychological function (Lantolf, 2000; Lantolf, 2003; Lantolf et al., 2015). Swain et al. (2011) describe it as the "process by which symbolic systems take on psychological status" (p. 8). At first, the activity of the individual is regulated by other people, but, through internalisation, the individual starts to regulate their own mental and physical activity, or in other words "perform complex cognitive and physical-motor functions with progressively decreasing reliance on external mediation and increasing reliance on internal mediation" (Lantolf et al., 2015, pp. 211-212; Lantolf, 2000). Ultimately, such processes of internalisation lead to self-regulation and independence in learning.

More specifically, internalisation is marked by *private speech*, i.e. talking audibly to oneself, and *inner speech*, i.e. silent speech to oneself (Lantolf, 2003). Private speech is "intrapersonal communication that mediates thinking processes" or, in other words, a tool that "helps to structure and organize our own thinking" (Swain et al., 2011, p. 36). As cognitive development proceeds, private speech evolves into inner speech, language that is condensed into pure meaning, and for example, if somehow heard by another person, would not be comprehensible to them (Lantolf, 2000, 2003). Also fundamental to internalisation is *imitation*. Often mistaken for simply a copying process, imitation differentiates from "simple mimicry" by its "intentionality of the imitation, the reflection and examination of the results, and the subsequent revisions" (Swain et al., 2011, p. 58; Lantolf, 2003). Furthermore, what separates imitation from plain repetition and the behaviouristic interpretations of it is its potential for transformation and the agency and intentionality it implies (Lantolf, 2003, p. 353). When imitation occurs in the ZPD with some kind of instruction, it is a "complex activity in which the novice is treated not as a repeater but as a communicative being" (Newman and Holzman, 1993, quoted in Lantolf, 2000, p. 18). However, Lantolf points out that often in a traditional school setting the expert, for instance, a language teacher, can demand that the novice, for instance, a student, repeats what is being said word for word, in which case "little if any account is taken of the student's ZPD" and, though the novice might succeed in reproducing the required model, imitation has not occurred and "such a situation is rarely if ever communicative" (2000, p. 18). What is more, Lantolf (2003) brings up that in certain circumstances, such as in traditional educational institutions, replicating exact information presented by an authority is viewed as more valuable than actual imitation that leads to transformation (p. 353). In conclusion,

SCT emphasises the learner as a self-regulating actor and underlines the highly communicative nature of learning. The next section, section 2.1.2, discusses another perspective on language learning, the ecological approach, which is closely related to the sociocultural view.

2.1.2 Ecology of language learning

German biologist Ernst Haeckel invented the term *ecology* in the 19th century to refer to “the totality of relationships of an organism with all other organisms with which it comes into contact” (van Lier, 2004, p. 3). In terms of linguistics, Norwegian linguist Einar Haugen defined *ecolinguistics* or *language ecology* in 1972 as “the study of interactions between any given language and its environment (as quoted in Kramsch & Steffensen, 2008, p. 17). More recently in the field of linguistics, especially professor Leo van Lier has developed the ecology of language learning. Van Lier states that ecological linguistics is the study of language as “relations (of thought, action, power), rather than objects (words, sentences, rules)”, i.e. the view of language is not material, but rather a relational one (2000, pp. 251-253). Van Lier also argues that, regardless of what view of learning and teaching education professionals promote, the widely accepted fact seems to be that language learning takes place uniquely in the brain and “information is received and subsequently processed in the brain and incorporated into mental structures providing knowledge and skills of various kinds” (2000, p. 246). What is more, van Lier states that standard scientific thinking considers activity and interaction, and in general the contexts in which learning takes place, to relate to learning only in indirect ways (ibid.). Ecology resists these views and argues that “not all of cognition and learning can be explained in terms of processes that go on inside the head” (ibid.). Furthermore, ecology emphasises that in order to form an understanding of learning, the social activity of the learner and the verbal and nonverbal interaction they participate in are integral (ibid.). In van Lier’s words: “they do not just facilitate learning, they *are* learning in a fundamental way” (ibid.). An ecological perspective asserts that the learner’s environment is full of potential meanings that slowly become available for the learner through interaction with and within the environment (ibid.). Hence, to consider learning is to inspect the active learner in their environment, not solely what goes on in their brain (pp. 246-247). However, ecology does not deny cognitive processes altogether, but rather they are connected with social processes (p. 258). Van Lier summarises that “language is located in the world around us as well as in the brain” (2002, p. 158). In his book (2004), he lists the ten characteristics he considers the ecological approach to have: relations, context, patterns and systems, emergence, quality, value, critical approach,

variability, diversity, and activity. Some of these characteristics will be dealt with in more detail in the following paragraphs.

Ecological linguistics (EL) focuses on “language as relations between people and the world”, while language learning is seen as “ways of relating more effectively to people and the world” (van Lier, 2004, p. 4). A key concept is *affordance*, which refers to a relationship between a learner and a particular property of their environment (van Lier, 2002; van Lier, 2004). Affordances are “possibilities for action that yield opportunities for engagement and participation”, or to put it more simply “affordance refers to what is available to the person to do something with” (van Lier, 2004, p. 81, p. 91). It depends on the learner’s desires, actions and needs what becomes an affordance (van Lier, 2002, p. 252). Also integral in EL is context; it is “not just something that surrounds language, but that in fact defines language, while at the same time being defined *by* it” (van Lier, 2004, p. 5). The context is a central focus of study in ecology, it cannot be pushed into the background (van Lier, 2002, p. 144). When it comes to language learning, instead of a gradual, linear acquisition, EL sees it as emergence (van Lier, 2004). Emergence is “a reorganisation of simple elements into a more complex system” (p. 81). So in language, “grammar emerges from lexis, symbols emerge from tools, learning emerges from participation”, and, finally, from all these transformations emerges language proficiency (p. 5). In similar fashion to SCT, the ecological approach regards language learning as a holistic process that takes into consideration interaction between people, objects, environments and the situational context.

Another important notion in EL is variability. Van Lier mentions that many teachers might, out of good will, state that they treat all their students the same, but learners are actually different so treating everyone equally might not be the best pedagogical practice, instead, a good teacher would be able to take these differences into account (2004, p. 7). But variability, van Lier argues, can also be seen on higher levels, i.e. in educational systems that actually “manufacture inequalities across regional and socio-economic fault lines” (ibid.). Related to variability is diversity. The difference between the two is that while variability is about the different *ways* learners learn, diversity concerns the *value* of having different learners in, for instance, a class (ibid.). Much like diversity is crucial in an ecosystem, a society with diverse people may end up being healthier than a homogeneous one (ibid.). Furthermore, similarly to the notions in teaching English as an international language, van Lier also argues that the language to be learnt “is presented as one that is not one monolithic standardized code, but a collection of dialects, genres and registers” (ibid.).

What is more, van Lier states that the assumption seems to have been that learners would be confused when a language is presented in such a diverse way, but actually, he argues, it might be the homogeneous and generalised presentation of a language that causes more confusion to the learners, since it might not even exist in real life (ibid.). In keeping with the holistic approach of EL, in addition to promoting diversity among language learners, it also emphasises the importance of presenting the language learners a diverse view of language.

Finally, ecological linguistics aims to study language and language learning “as areas of activity”, meaning that learners go through the process of learning by carrying out various activities, by themselves, working with others, or working side by side, for instance (van Lier, 2004, p. 8). The learners are autonomous, i.e. “they are allowed to define the meaning of their own acts within their social context”, but in EL this does not signify independence, but, rather, having “authorship over one’s actions, having the voice that speaks one’s words, and being emotionally connected to one’s actions and speech” (ibid.). In other words, language learning happens in interaction with others while engaged in meaningful activities.

Ecology and the previously discussed Vygotsky’s sociocultural theory are similar in many ways but also differ in others. For instance, ecology expands on the notion of Vygotsky’s context by being both physical as well as social and also introduces the notion of affordance (van Lier, 2004, p. 18). On the other hand, Vygotsky’s notion that new levels of learning cannot be directly drawn from existing level represents an emergentist view of learning (ibid.). Another similarity between these theories is in their approach to learning; Vygotsky asserted that learning must be “relevant to life”, which represents an ecological approach. Another shared central concept between the two is activity. Language is seen as activity rather than an object and, thus, language exists in the world rather than in the head (p. 19). But with ecology, the focus moves more strongly from guidance to action (p. 20). Van Lier states that the ecological approach attempts to bring the sociocultural theory “into a motivated, well-articulated framework that accounts for language, semiosis, activity, affordance, self and critical action” (p. 20). In sum, many features are shared in present-day research on sociocultural theory, but van Lier suggests that ecology can “add significant direction and theoretical cohesion” to SCT work and move SCT forward (pp. 21-22). Indeed, in many ways, the ideas developed within SCT have been advanced by academics with an ecological approach to language learning. The following section 2.1.3 discusses the implications these two approaches have on language teaching.

2.1.3 Pedagogical implications

After examining the sociocultural theory and the ecological approach, this section aims to summarise the implications these views have on language teaching and how they could be applied to practice.

Second language teaching has been traditionally dominated by the behaviourist approach that focuses on the individual, but with the rise in popularity of the sociocultural theory, the focus has shifted to a relational view of learning and the learners' "active role to (re)construct the context for their own learning" (Yoon & Kim, 2012, p. xiii). To sum up the sociocultural view of language learning, it sees it as a mediated process that uses different kinds of mediational means, which, in a traditional school setting, include textbooks, classroom interaction and teacher-directed talk (Dufva, 2013a, p. 4). Furthermore, Dufva underlines the significance of resources in out-of-school contexts that learners are exposed to, for instance gaming or television (ibid.). Tying the notion of mediation into language teaching, Yoon & Kim (2012) state that the role of the teacher as a mediator is to help learners "move from assisted to independent performance" (p. xix). They list three ways in which mediation represents the teachers' roles. First, the teacher mediates and supports the learners' learning "by using language as the main linguistic tool" (ibid.). To help the learner's learning advance from the interpsychological level to the intrapsychological one, the teacher uses form of repetition, expansion, or question as a mediational tool (ibid.). Secondly, the teacher promotes interaction "by utilising language as a social and political tool". As language does not solely comprise of linguistic components but includes ideological concepts as well, the teacher might, even unintentionally, deliver certain messages to the learners or, through classroom activities, position them as powerful or powerless (ibid.). Furthermore, the way the teacher shares authority with the learners is an example of the use of language as a social and political tool, but it also promotes the learner's internalisation, as the teacher implements activities as external operation, and, consequently, assists the learners to "construct meaning internally" (ibid.). Lastly, Yoon & Kim emphasise the importance of meaning-making activities through which the teacher aims to inspire and advance the learners' learning (p. xx). In sum, in the sociocultural view of language teaching and learning, the role of the teacher is to act as a mediator in the learning process of the learner. The teacher can use language as a linguistic tool, to support the learner's learning, as well as a social and political tool to promote interaction.

Furthermore, in terms of ecology and pedagogic practices, van Lier (2004) emphasises that the learners should be engaged, “so that learning emanates from them, rather than being delivered to them” (p. 222). Moreover, he states that in the classroom, “language must be richly contextualised and semiotically interconnected with all available meaning making systems” (ibid.). Dufva (2013a) also highlights the importance of engaging learners and states that learners need to be “doing things in language, through language and with language” (p. 11). What is more, she argues that we should start speaking about learning as “activity”, “doing”, and “participation” as this gives also learners different expectations (ibid.). Pedagogies should nourish aspects that encourage participation and for that, there are two things that need to be taken into consideration: perception and action (p. 12). Firstly, it is important to improve learners’ ability to “notice and reflect different features of both language and learning”, and, secondly, the skills of action and participation are also crucial (ibid.). That being said, Dufva also points out that traditional grammar or the acquisition of theoretical knowledge of language are not completely excluded in this view, as it is essentially inevitable that they will be a part of language curricula; instead, they are given a new position and new kinds of activities are created (p. 13). In other words, both van Lier and Dufva stress that learners need to be engaged instead of passively receiving information from the teacher. Furthermore, the teaching should ideally develop the learner’s participation skills as well as the ability to notice different properties of both language and learning.

Further, Dufva (2013a, p. 12) brings up the common misconception that language learning only occurs at school and/or is led by a teacher. As already briefly mentioned earlier, she underlines the importance of informal contexts in which learners learn and also points out that informal and formal contexts can definitely be intertwined and mixed (ibid.). Furthermore, she asserts that language pedagogy “could - and should” put more emphasis on how to combine school practices with out-of-school activities (p. 11). The same sentiment is expressed by van Lier (2002) who states that “everyday knowledge is generally not ‘legitimate’ in the language classroom” (p. 158). He recounts cases he has seen of students who have been failing language classes and detesting them, but who have in their free time produced the target language in the form of, for instance, songs or rap. In these cases, the “‘official’ business of the language classroom” has hindered the learners’ learning and “does not connect with the existing everyday expertise” (ibid.). What is more, van Lier argues that learners are only required to showcase their knowledge of complex parts of syntax or distanced lexical items, and their “vernacular dexterity” is never taken advantage of or appreciated (ibid.). In summary, based on the studies, it can be argued that school should not only insist on possibly rigid practices and restrict learning to happen only inside the classroom and possibly solely within a

textbook, but it should also take into consideration learners' extramural and informal skills and knowledge in English.

van Lier (2004) encourages the use of project-based curriculum as an ecological approach, but recognises that this might sometimes be challenging, if not impossible, to put into practice (p. 222). For instance, seating arrangements might prevent project-based work and also "high stakes tests" might put pressure on the teacher to spend more time on drilling and test practice (ibid.). However, van Lier states that from his own vast experience of observation of classes, there is a stark difference between an engaged class and "one that is just going through the passive motions of receiving instructions" (ibid.). Therefore, van Lier asserts that, despite possible, and often very real, difficulties and constraints, ecological ideas can be applied in any context; perception, action and context can be taken into consideration, and engagement can always be recognised (ibid.) What is more, van Lier asserts that in the ecological approach the learner is "a whole person, not a grammar production unit" (p. 223). This includes that the learner has "meaningful things to do and say", that they are taken seriously, given responsibility, and "being encouraged to tackle challenging projects, to think critically, and to take control of one's own learning" (ibid.). The teacher's role is to provide enough and well-timed assistance and they have to choose to set the learner's developing skills and interests as the most influential part of the curriculum (pp. 223-224). Ecology sees classrooms as busy workshops filled with activity and learners "who have things they want to accomplish, and who, with the help of teachers, fellow learners, and other sources of assistance, find the tools they need to achieve their goals" (p. 224). In summary, van Lier emphasises the importance of engaging students through, for instance, project-based activities and states that even though there can be real-life restrictions, the ecological approach, where the learner is taken into consideration as a whole person, can still be applied to teaching and learning under any circumstances. The next section 2.2 discusses English language teaching and teaching materials.

2.2 English language teaching and teaching materials

This section discusses English language teaching and teaching materials. It should be mentioned that this study uses the word "textbook" to also refer to any other possible materials attached to it, such as exercise books, unless the other materials are specified separately. "Teaching materials" is used to cover all kinds of different teaching materials, including traditional printed textbooks as well as digital material, and everything in-between, unless, again, they are specified separately. The

section is divided into two subsections. Subsection 2.2.1 discusses teaching materials and previous research on them in-depth, while subsection 2.2.2 discusses specifically digital teaching materials.

In Finland, the most important documents that guide language teaching are the national core curricula, which define the values and goals of teaching, the contents, goals, and methods of different subjects and the student assessment (Luukka et al., 2008, p. 53). The national core curriculum for basic education (OPS) is one of the most essential tools of education politics, and it aims to standardise and influence teaching (p. 53). OPS is a national frame that is expected to be followed by all towns, schools, teachers, and textbook publishers (p. 53). The curricula combine the philosophical, pedagogical, and administrative aspects, and they also reflect what is considered important and valuable in the society (p. 53). Ruuska (2015b, p. 44) compares OPS to laws, traffic rules and other rules and regulations that help shape up our lives.

The new curriculum for basic education was devised in 2014, and the national core curriculum for upper secondary education (LOPS) in 2015. Both OPS and LOPS state that they are based on the interpretation that learning takes place when the pupil or student is an active agent (Opetushallitus 2014, 2015). They also specify that learning occurs in interaction with other students, teachers, communities, and learning environments. It should be noted that this view seems to support the sociocultural and ecological view of language learning where interaction is integral.

2.2.1 Teaching materials

When it comes to language teaching and learning in Finland, it can be stated that teaching materials play an integral role. In fact, teaching materials are such a self-evident part of teaching that schools that do not use them are presented as exceptional (Karvonen, 1995, p. 11). The traditional textbook has long roots in ELT, but there has also been criticism towards the dominant status it has.

Lähdesmäki (2004) describes textbooks as one of the most important tools of both language teachers as well as learners that very few will admit surviving without, but also something that some describe to be occasionally frustrating, annoying, and even restricting (p. 271). Furthermore, Ruuska (2015, p. 43) states that textbook is a framework that learning is based on. At best, teaching material in language learning is a tool that adapts to the needs of the teacher and the pupil; it is not the only real truth but rather an enabler of learning new things (Vuorinen, 2015, p. 117).

Lähdesmäki (2004) argues that the printed book, and the textbook in particular, still has a strong status in our culture and, thus, it has the power to define what the English language and the studying of it is (p. 273). Moreover, Kubota & Austin (2007) state that teaching materials “both construct and reflect discourses on what is worthy of learning” (p.78). In Finland, even though English teachers are not required to use textbooks, the clear majority uses them as the primary tool of teaching. In a questionnaire for 324 Finnish language teachers, 98% of the teachers said they use textbooks often and the same percentage considered textbooks and exercise books to be their most important teaching material (Luukka et al., 2008, pp. 94-95). Furthermore, other text sources such as non-fiction, fiction, newspapers, periodicals, or texts chosen by pupils were either never or seldom used in lessons by the majority of the foreign language teachers, so the dominance of textbooks was clear (p. 95).

As for the reasons for the popularity of the textbook, Elomaa (2009) suggests that teachers might gladly use textbooks because they do not have the time themselves to prepare appropriate material for their students (p. 31). Similarly, the participants of this present study also recognised the time-saving aspect of using textbooks. This will be discussed further in section 4.1. Another reason could be that they do not have the knowledge on how to use teaching materials that represent new methods, or perhaps they have not received sufficient training in how to act as instructors of the learning process (ibid.). Furthermore, Elomaa points out that not only are textbooks in favour of teachers, pupils also appreciate specifically the traditional textbook. For instance, Luukka et al. (2008) found that out of 1720 Finnish secondary school pupils only 20% disagreed with the statement “textbook is the most important learning material in foreign language studies” (p. 97). Elomaa (2009) suggests that pupils consider the textbook to be more stable and something you can always come back to, whereas, for example, handouts are seen more changeable or disposable (p. 31). However, appropriate extra material can improve and add to the textbook, and it would be desirable that different teaching media are combined during a lesson (pp. 31-32).

Despite the dominant role textbooks have in teaching, there has hardly been any systematic research on them in Finland (Hiidenmaa, 2015, p. 27). In terms of teaching materials in language teaching, Elomaa (2009) states it has only been a few decades that they have been systematically studied (p. 32). In a library database search, Hiidenmaa (2015) found a noteworthy number of 800 studies on textbooks, but out of those 95% are master’s theses, so there is a distinct lack of established and systematic research (p. 27). The majority of the studies have examined the texts in the textbooks, i.e. they have studied the content and the linguistic modes of representation, while a smaller portion

has investigated user experiences by interviewing teachers or students (p. 28). On top of academic research, Hiidenmaa points out, publishing houses have extensively tested their own teaching materials by conducting surveys to teachers and pupils and analysing the results (p. 28). However, these results have never been publicly shared.

Particular aspects of interest in the research of textbooks seem to deal with culture. There has been research on Finnish textbooks to see how cultural themes in them support the principles of intercultural learning and teaching (Lappalainen, 2011), how the culture of the United States is represented in a certain Finnish textbook series (Kinnunen, 2013), and international textbooks have been studied to see how local and international culture are presented in them (Shin, Eslami & Chen, 2011). From the point of view of English as a lingua franca, Kivistö (2005) studied the different accents present in two Finnish upper secondary school textbook series. Rodrigues (2015) studied two Brazilian sixth-grade textbooks from the communicative aspect and found that they both followed the communicative approach quite weakly and textbook writers should design more activities that allow students to interact and produce language in communicative contexts (p. 7). Some research has also been conducted on the attitudes of teachers. For example, in a questionnaire for 15 Swedish in-service teachers and 15 Swedish pre-service student teachers, Allen (2015) studied the attitudes of the teachers towards ELT teaching materials. His results showed that in-service teachers had more negative attitudes and saw the textbook more as “restrictive, controlling, and creativity-blunting” (p. 255). They also saw textbooks as a “contingency”, i.e. they viewed it as a “crutch” or a “survival kit”. On the other hand, for the student teachers textbook was a “facilitator”, “guide”, and “plan” (ibid.). Furthermore, while the pre-service teachers were more content to follow a textbook-driven syllabus, the more experienced teachers preferred a topic-driven approach. In sum, textbooks have been studied especially from a cultural point of view, but in terms of this present study, particularly Allen’s study concentrating on teacher attitudes is of relevance and interest.

Hiidenmaa (2015) notes that more attention could be paid in textbook research to the different ways textbooks are used and different learning styles (p. 38). Furthermore, she states that there is too little knowledge on how exactly teachers utilise textbooks in their work (ibid). Guerrettaz and Johnston (2013) also express their surprise or confusion over the fact that, given the centrality of teaching materials, there has not been more empirical classroom-based research on the role the materials play in the totality of classroom interaction (p. 779). As research has focused more on studying teaching

materials, but not as a part of the classroom life, it has resulted in a lack of “understanding of the relationship between materials and other important components of the classroom experience, including language learning, curriculum, and perhaps most crucially of all, classroom discourse” (p. 781). As a consequence, it is challenging to see the impact of materials “in actual classrooms with actual students and teachers” (ibid.). Kalmus (2004) points out that textual research has been conducted under tacit assumptions such as that the textbook content influences the readers’ mind, or that “meaning is determined by the text itself”, thus giving objective status to the text (pp. 469-470). Stressing the importance of pupils’ point of view, Kalmus states that these assumptions “neglect the reality of interpretation of a textbook’s text by pupils”, which can differ depending, for instance, on the pupil’s ethnicity, gender, social class or personality (pp. 470-471). Furthermore, the assumptions “ignore the relationship between pupils and textbooks” and by “ignoring pupils’ capacities for creative interpretation and strategic handling of the curriculum, researchers underestimate children’s roles as active, resistant, and sometimes cynical readers” (p. 471). In summary, there is a lack of empirical classroom-based research on how teachers actually use textbooks and what kind of role the textbooks play in class, making the present study particularly timely and relevant. Furthermore, especially textual research has been neglecting the learners’ point of view, which presents another topic of interest for future study.

Teaching materials have also been studied from a critical point of view. Tomlinson (2008) states that he is of the view that many ELT materials “are designed for teaching English rather than for learning it” (p. 3). He also argues that a lot of ELT materials contribute to the failure of many learners to acquire even basic competence of English and to the failure of most learners to develop the competence to use English successfully. This is caused by teaching materials focusing too much on the teaching of linguistic items rather than providing opportunities for acquisition and development, which happens because that is expected of teachers by administrators, parents, publishers and even learners (ibid.). Tomlinson notes that his claims most likely do not please publishers but argues that many teachers would probably agree with him. He references a worldwide survey he conducted for teachers where many teachers responded that they chose a particular best-selling global textbook to minimise their own workload in terms of lesson preparation, but that they felt sorry for their students finding the book so boring (pp. 4-7). Furthermore, Tomlinson states that if textbooks do not provide authentic spoken and written texts and “they don’t stimulate the learners to think and feel whilst experiencing them there is very little chance of the materials facilitating any durable language acquisition at all” (p. 4). Moreover, Tomlinson argues that teaching materials follow more the needs and wishes of administrators and

teachers than what would most benefit the learners (p. 7). In a survey of 12 countries conducted for a publishing company, Tomlinson found out that 85% of ELT textbooks were chosen by administrators and 15% by teachers, thus leaving 0% for learners themselves (ibid.). This has resulted in textbook publishers adding features to the books to promote sales rather than taking the pedagogical aspect into account. For instance, colourful photos are placed in the top right-hand corner to attract a potential buyer when they flick through a book, as many words as possible are squeezed onto a page in order to achieve ideal coverage at a reasonable price, and each section is the same length and follows a systematic format to make the workload of the teacher easier when they are planning the lessons or courses (ibid.).

In sum, Tomlinson lists the ways he thinks some teaching materials at present inhibit language learning. Firstly, he thinks teaching materials underestimate learners both according to their language level as well as cognitive ability, through which they impoverish the learning experience “in a misguided attempt to make learning easier” (2008, p. 8, p. 319). Secondly, he claims teaching materials are overusing the “Presentation/Practice/Production”, i.e. the PPP approach, which “simplifies language use and results in shallow processing” (p. 8, p. 319). Furthermore, Tomlinson argues that teaching materials create an illusion of language learning by making sure that most activities can be done by “involving little more than memorization, repetition of a script or simple substitution or transformation” (p. 8). Moreover, teaching materials focus too much on practice of typical examination tasks, which then takes up “valuable class learning time” (p. 319). Finally, Tomlinson states that teaching materials fail in helping the learners to “make full use of the language experience available to them outside the classroom” and, also, that they provide learners too much “de-contextualized experience of language exemplification” and not enough of language in contextualized use (p. 319, p. 8). Especially Tomlinson’s remarks about the importance of out-of-school language use and the significance of context seem to reflect a more sociocultural and ecological approach to language learning and teaching. As Tomlinson’s views are quite critical of big publishing companies and their teaching materials, he puts his hope into local, non-commercial teaching materials “which are not driven by the profit imperative and which are driven rather by considerations of the needs and wants of their target learners and by principles of language acquisition” (p. 9).

Even though Tomlinson’s international experiences of, for instance, textbook publishers or teaching materials in general, are from a variety of countries, it should be noted that the Finnish experience

might be different. In Finland, the groups that create language teaching materials consist of in-service language teachers from around the country and at least one native speaker of English (Vuorinen, 2015, p. 117). They work closely with the publishing editors and together with them they, for example, plan the pedagogical grounds and structure of the material, create the story and manuscript the texts and exercises and any possible extra material, all the while taking into consideration the feedback gathered from teachers about the material at work as well as older material already in use (p. 118). After all this has been done, the illustrator, photo editor and graphic designer join the project to help create the visual appearance of the material. The process of creating language teaching materials from start to finish can take many years and all the work is done in the evenings, on weekends and during the holidays. Vuorinen gives an example of a particular group for whom creating English teaching materials for grades three to six in primary school took around six years (ibid.). But, Vuorinen points out, this means that the finished product has been critically reviewed several times and it offers the user thorough material to support them in their work (ibid.). Even in international comparison, Finnish language teaching materials are unique in the quality of the content and the diversity of the product families (ibid.). However, although the current textbooks are designed by in-service teachers with the Finnish language classroom in mind, the underlying views and assumptions about language learning warrant closer inspection.

In fact, in terms of textbooks and the sociocultural view of learning, Dufva (2013b) points out that the traditional textbook-centred and “only one answer is correct” methods not only do not create any meaningful learning opportunities, but they also do not prepare the learners to face the language outside of school (p. 69). Dufva states that current trends that underline the significance of out-of-school learning environments and aim to fade out the division between school and the outside world offer methods that activate and motivate (ibid.). However, despite more attention being paid to the sociocultural view and interaction in language learning, reality might not always reflect them. In a questionnaire for 116 first-year English majors and 83 first-year Swedish majors, Kalaja et al. (2011) studied the students’ past experiences of learning languages at school and outside of it. The results seemed to support past research where textbook-centrism and the individualism of learning comes up time and time again. The students held the traditional view of language being a material object that can be counted and assessed (p. 72). In terms of learning language at school, the students mentioned textbooks as their most important resource, and, strikingly, classroom interaction, teachers or other peers seemed to have very little significance as resources that advance learning (ibid.). Social resources were only mentioned in reference to out-of-school learning. In sum, the learner themselves plays the lead in their own learning process (ibid.).

What is more, Luukka et al. (2008) found through their study that language teaching in Finnish secondary school is still almost isolated into the classroom (p. 233). The required skills and knowledge have been decided beforehand and they are recorded in the curricula and textbooks. Teacher is in possession and control of the information and the pupil's voice is not heard in terms of planning the content and methods of the teaching or choosing the teaching material (ibid.). In terms of extramural English, it seems there is a large gap between the text and media the pupils read in their free time and at school, and the out-of-school texts that pupils read are very seldom brought into the language classroom (p. 234). Furthermore, pupils can highlight their skills, participation and interest in different things in a far more versatile way in their free time than at school (p. 235). Luukka et al. point out that in order to bring texts of free time and school closer together, both teachers as well as pupils should have the willingness and readiness for it (ibid.). While nine out ten teachers were of the opinion that it is important to discuss pupils' free time media consumption in the classroom, only half of the pupils saw it important to discuss these things in class (pp. 235-236). Luukka et al. suggest that pupils might consider their free time as their own "territory" into which they do not want to grant school any access (p. 236). However, as the majority of the pupils' perception is that most of language learning happens inside the classroom, the significance of out-of-school learning contexts might not be that apparent to the pupils (ibid.). On the other hand, a curious remark is that the pupils' idea of their own language skills is mostly based on practical experiences of using the language outside of school (ibid.). Finally, Luukka et al. raise a critical question of whether we learn at school on the terms of the school and only for school (p. 235).

In addition, in terms of learning English outside of school, an increasing amount of research has been conducted on, for instance, video games and English language learning. For example, Kallunki (2016) studied World of Warcraft and found out that it can be considered an effective way to learn English (p. 68). Lukkarinen (2013) examined nine different video games to analyse how they can help ninth graders to aim at the language proficiency objectives set in the Finnish national core curriculum. He came to the conclusion that all of the games studied can have a positive effect on a learner's language learning, but particularly role-playing games, massively multiplayer online role-playing games and adventure games can help the learner to reach the language proficiency goals (p. 65). What is more, in a rather vast study of 495 Finnish students, Uuskoski (2011) studied the connection between playing video games and upper secondary school students' English grades. In his results, he found that students who played a lot of video games had statistically significantly higher English grades than the ones who did not play (p. 56). Out of the most active gamers, 89%

reported that they felt like their English skills had been improved by quite much or very much with the help of video games, but out of the students who played less, 78% also reported their skills had improved by video games, suggesting that even smaller amounts of time spent playing could be beneficial (ibid.). Furthermore, Uuskoski found that boys had significantly higher grades than girls, and they also played video games a lot more and participated more actively in out-of-school English activities than girls (pp. 56-57). The significance of out-of-school English learning contexts, such as gaming, was also recognised in the present study. This will be discussed further in section 4.6.

In keeping with the ecological view of language learning and teaching, Guerrettaz and Johnston (2013) studied the role of a certain English grammar textbook in an advanced English as a second language grammar class in the US from the point of view of classroom ecology. They state that ecology “presents a vision of classroom as a complex, interlocking set of elements and relationships in which any one element can only be understood in the light of its interactions with other elements” (p. 783). In a classroom, the role of materials is “multiple and complex”, and they “provide structure and content for learning activities, organise curriculum, and frame classroom ideologies” (p. 781). Through observation and interviews, Guerrettaz and Johnston came up with three elements in which materials play an important role: the curriculum, classroom discourse, and language learning (p. 784). Essentially, the textbook used in the course formed the curriculum. Progress and success in the course was characterised by “moving through the materials” and doing the tests and quizzes the book provided, i.e. the book set the tempo of learning (p. 785). Several times the textbook was also seen as “a point of reference to determine what was or was not a good use of class time”, and, for example, other sources apart from the book were referred to as “extracurricular”, further legitimating the textbook as the curriculum of the course (p. 785). In terms of classroom discourse, 83% was related to the materials (p. 785). What is more, Guerrettaz and Johnston noticed that open-ended activities in the book afforded richer language use opportunities than the close-ended ones (p. 788). In sum, the results showed that the ecological significance of the textbook in the class was “immense, reaching into every major aspect of classroom life” but the kind of role it played varied considerably (p. 792). Finally, Guerrettaz and Johnston underline the significance of the materials-discourse relationship in the classroom ecology. Learning and teaching activities took place in the classroom discourse and that class interaction was “tightly interwoven” with the textbook (ibid.). The materials “were brought to life—that is, they fully entered into ecological relationships in the classroom—precisely through the participants’ engagement with them in classroom discourse” (ibid.). In conclusion, Guerrettaz and Johnston found that in terms of classroom ecology and textbooks, the textbook can play a huge role; it can act as the curriculum and

be the subject of the majority of classroom discourse. The next section 2.2.2 will present the current state of digital teaching materials and previous research conducted on them.

2.2.2 Digital teaching materials

As society as a whole keeps getting more and more technologized, it is inevitable that in the future teaching and learning will be based on technology more than before (Tossavainen, 2015, p. 196). At the time of writing this, the matriculation examination system in Finland is in the process of becoming completely digital. The process started in the autumn of 2016, and by 2019 Finland will, as far as is known, become the first country in the world where every part and the checking of the examinations are digital (Ruth, 2015, p. 238). The process is a big change in the Finnish educational system that is happening on a relatively quick schedule and, in addition to the technical execution of the exams, will affect the pedagogic aspects of teaching (p. 245). Pietiäinen (2015) points out that the Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture aims to eventually make all teaching materials digital in the belief that it will create savings (p. 64). However, publishers and textbook writers are not convinced this would be the case (ibid.). What is more, Pietiäinen mentions that while there has been a lot of talk about the use of digital teaching materials, in reality they have not yet had a big impact on the teaching material market (ibid.).

At its best, digital material can be a book enriched with videos, sound, interactive figures, and links (Tossavainen, 2015, p. 188). These features can illustrate and demonstrate different phenomena and concepts and the contexts between them in a far more versatile way than simple still pictures in the text (ibid.). Furthermore, links can provide quick paths to background information. Particularly in foreign language teaching, the exhaustive list of features that can be included in digital material is: text- and exercise books, answers for the exercises, recordings, animations, video clips, and interactive bonus exercises and printable extra material (Vuorinen, 2015, p. 123). Now, whether Finnish digital teaching materials actually are like this in reality is another matter. Tossavainen states that he thinks the teaching materials fit the description in a very fluctuating way (p. 188). On one side, there are some digital books where elements made possible by the technology are skilfully used, but on the other side, there are digital books where, for instance, the videos are low-grade and amateurish, the content is merely copied from existing printed books, and the functionality of technological elements is based on which browser or device you are using (p. 189). Ruth (2015) also mentions that in its simplest form, a digital book is the traditional textbook transformed into a

pdf-file with no added functionalities, which is of no or very little usefulness, especially in terms of the changing matriculation examinations (p. 243). In the year 2014, Tossavainen (2015) states that the development of digital material was in its beginnings in Finland (p. 189).

Hiidenmaa (2015) points out that even though more attention is paid on printed teaching materials, there is an increasing number of studies done on digital material (p. 35). Teaching material preferences of students have been especially studied on university level. For instance, Millar and Schrier (2015) conducted a questionnaire to which they received 190 responses from college students in the US. The results showed that, if the choice was up to the students, 57,4% would choose a printed book over a digital one, 25% would choose an e-textbook, and 18% had no preference (p. 11). For the 109 students that preferred printed books the reasons included: preference for printed books, convenience, and the ability to make notes and highlight things. Furthermore, some students stated that reading a printed book was less distracting and easier than reading a digital one, and one of the downsides of the e-book was that it cannot be recycled after the student no longer needs it (*ibid.*). As for the 47 students that preferred an e-book, they mentioned that e-textbooks are convenient, less expensive, they save paper and weigh less, and it is good to have the required course materials in one place all the time (*ibid.*). In another study of 28 students at a Norwegian university and 56 students at an American college, Robinsen and Stubberud (2012) found that 53% of the Norwegian students would want a printed book, while 76% of the American students preferred a printed book (p. 102). The e-textbook was preferred by 50% of the Norwegian students and by 35% of the students in America (p. 103). Robinsen and Stubberud did not explicitly ask for reasons on the students' preferences, but some students separately mentioned that they would choose e-textbooks as long as they were less expensive than printed ones, i.e. the cost was more important than function to them (*ibid.*).

In a study of 56 undergraduate preservice teacher candidates in the US, Dobler (2015) first asked the students to fill in a questionnaire before using an e-textbook at a college course, and to do the same questionnaire after the course was over. The results revealed that before reading the e-textbook, 22% preferred e-books, 58% preferred printed, and 20% had no preference (p. 486). After using the e-textbook, 50% preferred e-books, 42% remained with printed, and 8% still had no preference (*ibid.*). As it shows, there was a clear increase in preference for digital material after using a particular e-textbook. One of the most mentioned advantages of the e-textbook was the possibility to share notes digitally. Other reasons included ability to search information quickly in the book, lower cost and light weight (p. 488). However, a significant number of people still

preferred printed books even after using the e-textbook. Reasons mentioned by the students were familiarity, eyestrain with screen reading, less distractions than when reading online, and connection to physical movement of page turning and writing notes (pp. 487-488). And so, Dobler reminds that the teacher has the responsibility to “value student choice and honour individual differences, rather than seeking to convert all students to become fans of e-textbooks” (p. 487). In his study, Allen (2015) found that, perhaps slightly surprisingly, in-service teachers were more positive than preservice teachers about “freestanding digital resources compared to course books” (p. 257). The more experienced teachers also saw it more clearly beneficial to use authentic listening material from the internet, especially to expose their learners to different varieties of English (ibid). However, the teachers also expressed concerns for adopting a more digital approach. They included lack of computer access, malfunctioning networks, and a few teachers mentioned a “lack of research evidence demonstrating clear pedagogical benefits of technology” (p. 259). Furthermore, some teachers cited teachers’ inability to integrate technical knowledge into a sociocultural “pedagogical framework in which the teacher and the learners share in the collaborative process of learning” (ibid.).

To return back to the context of Finland, Vuorinen (2015) reports that comments from teachers of the use of digital teaching material have been inspiring (p. 123). Teachers have said that digital materials have made their work easier by giving them more time to acknowledge the students. Mobile devices, such as laptops, smartphones and tablets, are little by little coming a part of language teaching as well. This will have its challenges especially in terms of the technology, what works on computers might not work on smartphones and tablets (ibid.). For now, the development and use of digital materials in language teaching in Finland have been mostly concentrated on upper secondary school due to the changing matriculation examinations (p. 124). When talking about the teaching materials of the future, the public discussion has been marked by the public administration focusing on equipping schools technology-wise, leaving many textbook writers and teachers worrying about the scarcity of resources devoted to developing up-to-date and high-quality teaching material content (Tossavainen, 2015, p. 196). Teachers worry that they might end up responsible for creating the material when the resources of the state and towns will only be enough to equip the classrooms with the technology but not provide printed textbooks to each generation of learners (ibid.). As the whole society becomes increasingly technologized, teaching and learning will have to adapt to it as well, but the aim of teaching should not be to use technology for the sake of it, but rather to only use it as a method that is applied when it is meaningful in terms of learning. The next section 3 will present the data and the method of this study.

3. Data and method

When considering the method for this research, a qualitative approach was seen as the most fitting choice. Tuomi and Sarajärvi (2009) point out that as qualitative research does not aim for statistical generalisations, but rather tries to describe and understand certain phenomenon or action and give them meaningful interpretations, it is important that the chosen informants have a lot of knowledge or experience on the matter under study. As the phenomenon studied in this thesis is the role of textbooks in English language teaching, who better experts on the matter than teachers? It was decided that an interview would be the most appropriate method for finding out teachers' thoughts on the question at hand.

The data for this thesis consists of one group interview conducted in February 2017 with six Finnish teachers of English. The participants were told beforehand that the topic of the interview was the role of textbooks in English language teaching, but no detailed questions were revealed in advance. No preparation was required of the teachers ahead the interview. In order to get as varied opinions and experiences as possible, teachers from elementary school, secondary school and upper secondary school were included. So although the group of participants is rather small, they represent different levels of education as well as experience. To protect the anonymity of the participants, they will be renamed as A, B, C, D, E and F. Participants A, C and E are elementary school teachers, participant B is an upper secondary school teacher, participant D is a secondary school teacher, and participant F teaches both at a secondary school as well as an upper secondary school. No personal information was asked from the participants apart from their years of experience in education which are as follows: A: 32 years, B: 8 years, C: 28 years, D: 11 years, E: 17 years, and F: 7 years.

The interview was conducted as a semi-structured group interview. A semi-structured interview is a mixture of a structured and an unstructured interview (Peer et al. 2012, p. 82). While in a structured interview the interviewer has prepared all of the questions and their order in advance and strongly leads the conversation to follow its pre-chosen path, an unstructured interview is void of a strict order and encourages free-floating conversation among the informants and the interviewer participates as little as possible (ibid.). In a semi-structured interview the interviewer has planned questions beforehand but adapts to the conversation and is ready for spontaneous conversation. Such was the case in this interview as well; the researcher had planned approximately ten questions

in advance, but encouraged the participants to express their thoughts even if they felt like they were not relevant to the question or the topic altogether. A few follow-up questions came up during the interview that had not been planned beforehand. The questions prepared before-hand were somewhat influenced by the theoretical background and previous research on the topic.

A group interview was chosen as the method instead of multiple individual interviews because the hope was that a group setting would stimulate more thoughts and ideas among the participants. Vaughn et al. (1996) point out that a group interview encourages interaction between the participants, instead of only between an interviewer and one interviewee, and through that interaction they can form opinions about the topic at hand (p. 18). A group setting can also offer support because the participants are part of a peer group, and an individual can choose when they wish to share their thoughts and when to withdraw from the conversation (Vaughn et al., 1996; Löffström, 2011).

Ethical issues were taken into consideration when conducting the interview and guidelines listed by, for example, Tuomi & Sarajärvi (2009) and Hesse-Biber et al. (2010) were followed. The participants were given a consent form where they consented to the use of the material, but only for research purposes. They were also made aware that their participation is completely voluntary and they can choose to withdraw from the study or restrict the use of the material at any point of the research process. It was also made clear that the participants would be anonymous and no names would appear in the study, but rather pseudonyms would be used. The only personal information featured in the study was the number of years the participants have worked in education and their current job title. To ensure confidentiality, the audio file of the interview was stored and transcribed only by the researcher.

After the interview was conducted, the data was analysed using content analysis. Tuomi & Sarajärvi (2009) state that the content analysis method aims to make a condensed and general description of the phenomenon under study. The data describes the phenomenon and the purpose of the analysis is to create a verbal and clear account of it through text analysis. Clear and reliable conclusions about the phenomenon being inspected should develop. The purpose of the analysis of qualitative data is increasing the information value because you aim to create meaningful, clear and coherent information from disconnected data.

Following the guidelines of Laine (cited in Tuomi & Saarijärvi, 2012, p. 92), the interview was first transcribed, all the while considering what was relevant to the study and leaving out what was not. After the data was transcribed, it was examined through text analysis and categorised into different themes of relevant interest. As it is uncovered, the analysis is reflected to the theoretical framework and previous research. The interview questions were influenced by the theoretical framework to an extent, but the analysis is still more inclined to be data-driven than theory-driven.

4. Teacher perceptions on the role of textbooks in language learning teaching

In this section, the findings of the interview are presented and analysed. The section is divided into six subsections. Subsection 4.1 discusses what advantages the teachers perceived traditional textbooks to have. In subsection 4.2, the perceived limitations of said textbooks are discussed. Subsection 4.3 investigates the teachers' use of other teaching materials apart from the textbook. In subsection 4.4, teachers' opinions and experiences of digital textbooks are discovered. Subsection 4.5 discusses the teachers' thoughts on written and oral English skills. Finally, subsection 4.6 examines the teachers' perceptions on language learning and teaching.

4.1 Perceived advantages of textbooks

After establishing that all six participating teachers use traditional textbooks, the teachers were asked to think about why they use textbooks. One response that instantly came up was that using traditional textbooks saves the teacher time and effort. Participant C mentioned having taught at a catering college back in the day where there was no material available and she found the workload enormous. The suggestion that teachers might use textbooks because it lessens the amount of work has been quite widely expressed also in previous research (see for instance Elomaa, 2009).

Another notion expressed by the participants was the self-evident role of textbooks.

(1) F: Auskultointi-aikana se perustu jo silloin siihen oppikirjaan ja sitte kun tuli töihin, määki tulin sijaiseksi, niin mää sitte totta kai tein sen mukkaan ku talossa on tapana eikä sitä sitten oikeastaan ooes kyseenalaistanu.

Already in teacher training everything was based on the textbook and then when I started working, I was a substitute at first as well, so of course I followed the practices of the school and I haven't really questioned it since.

(2) A: Niin ei sitä oikeen ole kyseenalaistanukaan, että, olis ilman kirjaa, mieletön työhän siinä olis. Yeah you don't really question it, being without a book, it would be incredible amounts of work.

In example one, participant F, who had seven years of experience as a teacher, stated that as the textbook starts to play such a dominant role early on, starting from teacher training, she has not really questioned it. As many teachers often start their teaching career as substitute teachers, it is quite easy to follow already existing practices and conventions at use in the school. The same view

was also expressed by participant A, the most experienced of the group, who saw the textbook as an unquestionable part of teaching. As we can see, for these participants, regardless of the teachers' age or experience in teaching, the textbook is still an obvious element in their work. The participants' experiences seem to support previous studies where the long tradition and self-evidence of textbooks in language teaching in Finland has been widely established (see for instance Karvonen, 1995; Lähdesmäki, 2004; Luukka et al., 2008; Elomaa, 2009; Hiidenmaa, 2015).

On top of the textbook being a self-evident part of teaching, the participants mentioned that the textbook gave a good structure to teaching.

(3) E: Kyl se kirja antaa semmosen tosi hyvän rungon, et sen ympärillehän voi sit vähän rakentaa muutakin, mutta kyllä se tavallaan sen suunnan näyttää.
The book provides a really good framework, like you can then build something else around it too, but it does in a way show you the direction to go to.

(4) B: Lukio-opinnoissa aika hyvin jäsenelty se, että mitä asioita käsitellään milläki kurssilla ja että varmasti tulee se mitä lukion englannissa pitäis olla, niin tulee niitten pakollisten ja syventävien kurssien aikana, niin pystyy luottaan, ei nyt ainakaan jää mittään siitä pois.
In upper secondary school studies, it has been quite well outlined which things to go through in which course, and you can be sure that everything that should be dealt with in upper secondary school English is included in the obligatory and advanced courses, so you can count on nothing being left out.

Participant E said the textbook provides a good framework for teaching. You can then add to that other elements you see fitting, but, participant E remarks, the textbook does lead the way in a sense. The idea of the textbook being a framework or an outline has also been presented several times in previous research (see for instance Ruuska, 2015). Participant D also remarked that the textbook does have a variety of different styles of exercises so it is useful. Furthermore, participant B stated that as the world has changed, so have textbooks; they have developed and they use different kinds of methods than before. As we can see in example four, participant B also thinks the textbook is a well outlined structure that you can confidently follow. The textbook providing structure and even acting as the curriculum has also been noted by Guerrettaz and Johnston (2013, p. 781) The confidence and trust in textbooks was expressed by the other participants as well.

(5) C: Kyllä sitä aika hyvin luottaa siihen, että kirjan tekijät paneutuu siihen opetussuunnitelmaan ja miettii, että miten se siellä toteutuu, se on oikeesti aika luotettava kaveri.
You do quite strongly trust that the textbook writers have gone through the national core curriculum and thought about how everything is carried out in the book, it really is quite a reliable friend.

(6) A: Ja ehkä Suomessa on jos vertaa muihin maihin, niin laadukasta kirja, ja sitte ku on vaan tavallaan tietyt kustantamot, niin onhan niillä kilpailua, että niillä on laadukkaat ne. Jos aattelee, että muualla voi olla aika villi maailma siellä oppikirjasysteemissä.
And maybe in Finland, if you compare it with other countries, the books are high-quality, and because there are only certain publishing houses, they do have competition, so they are of high quality. In other countries textbook publishing can be a pretty wild world.

As can be seen in examples five and six, the teachers have trust in the textbook writers to create books that follow the national core curriculum. This makes textbooks a trustworthy companion for the teacher, participant C remarks. While some critical views, such as the ones expressed by Tomlinson (2008), see publishing houses as placing sales over the pedagogical quality of the textbooks, it seems that the teachers participating in this study have strong trust in the Finnish textbook industry. This is in concord with Vuorinen (2015) who stated that in the international context, Finnish teaching materials are of high-quality.

In general, the teachers' attitudes towards textbooks was more positive than negative. Another positive aspect of textbooks noted by some of the participants was the inspiring content.

(7) F: Kyllä joistaki teksteistä innostuu iteki, lukiolla varsinki, . . . yläkoululla ehkä vähän harvemmin, . . . mut et onhan ne niin hirveän iso apuväline, että emmää ainakaan pystyis suhtautumaan niihin kauhean silleen negatiivisesti, . . . mutta se on tosi kiva, että sieltä löytyy jotaki semmosta mistä voi innostua.

You get excited by some texts yourself, especially in upper secondary school, . . . secondary school maybe a bit more rarely, . . . but they are such a huge aid, at least I couldn't relate to them that negatively, . . . but it's really nice that you can find something in there to get excited by.

(8) C: Ja sitten varmaan ehkä just joku, että vaikka nelosen kirjat, jossa on semmonen juonellinen kokonaisuus, ja sitte hyvin näyteltäviä kappaleita ja lapset tykkää, niin semmonen innostaa opettajaaki.

And then maybe something like fourth grade textbooks where they have a storyline, and chapters that are great for acting and the children like it, that inspires the teacher as well.

In example seven, participant F points out that especially texts in upper secondary school, which are usually longer and more complex than in secondary school, inspire her and she also mentions that she talks with the students about how interesting she finds the texts. She also talked about how in previous textbook series she had really liked a certain book but almost detested another, so she had definitely noticed differences between textbooks. In example eight, participant C, a primary school teacher, also expresses the same view that texts that are well written and the pupils like also inspire the teacher. This relates back to the high quality of the content in Finnish textbooks and shows how important it is to have texts of good quality to excite and motivate the teacher as well as the learners. Furthermore, as can be seen in example seven, participant F states that as textbooks are such an enormous aid to her, she could not have a negative attitude towards them.

When asked if they could ever not use traditional textbooks at all, the participants saw several obstacles for it. The primary hindrance for not using textbooks at all was the lack of time and the amount of work it would create for the teacher. Participant B, an upper secondary school teacher,

saw that out of eight courses, it would technically be possible to have one course without traditional textbooks, but it would cause a lot of work.

(9) A: Siis tämmönen esiintymistaidon ja keskustelun, väittelyn opettaminen, niin semmonenhan onnistus ilman kirjaa, mutta että tavallaan siihen tarvittas lisää tunteja, tulee heti ensimmäisenä semmonen tunne.

Teaching performance and discussion and debating skills could work without a book, but it would require more lessons, that's the initial feeling I get.

In example nine, participant A talks about how it would be possible to teach communication and oral skills without textbooks, but notes that it would require more hours dedicated to English teaching. Participants C and E also thought it could be possible, and participant C mentioned it would be interesting to have optional lessons for pupils at primary school level where there could be a possibility of not using textbooks. Furthermore, participant A remarks that there should be a course of oral skills at primary school level as well. Participant F mentioned that she has experience from secondary school where she has taught refresher and supplementary short courses for eight-graders where there have been no traditional textbooks. She said that the pupils have made their own portfolios and there has been more focus on oral exercises.

(10) D: Jotenki mä koen, että se perusoppikirja niin se on monelle oppilaalle se turvallinen hyvä vaihtoehto, ne pysyy ne kaikki asiat siellä kansien sisällä, että en kyllä ainakaan tässä vaiheessa ossais aatella ihan normiluokan kans, et yhtäkkiä ruvetas vaihtamaan.

Somehow I feel that the basic textbook is a safe option for many pupils, all of the things stay inside the covers, so at this point, with a regular class, I couldn't imagine suddenly changing away from it.

Participant D, as can be seen in example ten, put emphasis on the pupils' point of view by noting that many pupils find the textbook a safe option that entails all of the information that needs to be learnt. She found it unappealing to suddenly go from using textbooks to not using them with a "regular" class. It was left unknown what a class should be like for her to not use textbooks at all with them. Moreover, participant C also underlined that many, especially younger, primary school pupils find the textbook important and like the fact that it is a concrete object that you can carry around. These views of pupils also appreciating and regarding textbooks as a positive and important thing in English language teaching seem to reflect earlier studies (see for example Luukka et al., 2008; Elomaa, 2009).

In sum, the teachers thought that textbooks play a self-evident role in ELT that, at least some of them, had not really ever stopped to question. One of the primary reasons for using textbooks was the time and effort they save the teacher. Furthermore, textbooks were considered a good framework that gives teaching structure and a guideline to follow. Moreover, the teachers had strong trust in the Finnish textbook publishing industry and felt that they could be confident in the

knowledge that the textbooks follow the national core curriculum. They also thought the books are of high quality and the texts in them can be impressively inspiring at times. What is more, the teachers also pointed out that textbooks can be very important to the pupils and something they consider to be safe and stable. The teachers expressed reluctance to not using textbooks at all and mentioned that, in theory, it could be best made possible when practising communicative and oral skills. All of the views expressed by the teachers were, to a bigger or smaller extent, in line with previous research. As the current section dealt with the teachers' perceptions of the advantages of using textbooks, the following section 4.2 will examine the limitations that the interviewees perceived textbooks to have.

4.2 Perceived limitations of textbooks

The teachers were also asked to think about the possible limitations or negative aspects of textbooks. Several restricting factors came up.

(11) F: Ehkä se on yks huono puoli, . . . että jos siihen tukeutuu liikaa, niin se sitte saattaa sitä omaa luovuutta vähän rajoittaa, että jos ei olis, niin keksiskö sitä sitten vähän jotakin monipuolisempaa enemmän, en tiedä, mutta ehkä voi olla niinki.

Maybe that's one negative aspect, . . . that if you rely on it too much, it might restrict your own creativity slightly, so if it weren't there, would you come up more with something more diverse, I don't know, but that can be the case as well.

In example 11, participant F states that relying too much on the textbook can possibly restrict the teacher's creativity. Furthermore, she wonders whether she would come up with more versatile material if she had no textbook, and concludes that that could be the case. This view seems to support the findings of Allen (2015) where in-service teachers found textbooks "restrictive, controlling, and creativity-blunting" (p. 255). On the other hand, participant F states that, in her opinion, the restrictions on creativity could occur only when the teacher is relying too heavily on the book, i.e. she presumably did not find textbooks restrictive or creativity-blunting in general, which was the case in Allen's study.

(12) B: Ehkä se rajoittaa just semmosia jotaki, jos miettis tehäänpä nyt joku semmonen ryhmäprojekti ja sitte miettii, että no ku ois kuitenkin nää kuus kappaletta pitäs käydä koeviikkoon mennessä.

Maybe it restricts something like, if you think ok we're going to do a group project and then you think well, there are still these six chapters that we should go through before exams.

(13) A: Ja ehkä meillä on kuitenkin . . . semmonen sisäsyntyinen ammatissa tullu semmonen, että nyt ku ne on käyty läpi, millä tavalla tahansa, niin ne on opittu, vaikka tietää, että siellä on aina se, joka niitä ei opi.

And maybe we have . . . developed a sort of intrinsic idea in our profession that now that we have

gone through all the things, whichever way, they have been learnt, even though you know that there's always that one [pupil] who doesn't learn them.

Furthermore, in example 12, participant B notes that activities such as group projects can sometimes be pushed aside because she feels the pressure to go through a certain number of chapters in the book before the exam. Interestingly, all of the other participants concurred with this view, so the feeling of pressure was universal in the group regardless of the level they taught. Participant B also stated that, as there is always something you have to leave out of a textbook, she felt like she could not just leave out half of the chapters because the students would not accumulate enough vocabulary related to specific topics, so she sometimes ends up being “greedy” and going through as many chapters as possible. Putting the textbook ahead of other activities such as group projects, which, according to van Lier (2004, p. 222), are a prime example of an ecological activity in the classroom, contradicts with the ecological approach of language learning and teaching. Van Lier also acknowledges that tests might put pressure on teachers to concentrate more on “drilling” and the textbook content (ibid). Participant F also mentioned that the lack of time and restrictive schedule in upper secondary school results in the teacher being “tied to” the textbook. In example 13, participant A notes that going through the content in textbooks and assuming everyone learns it is almost intrinsic to teachers. These views seem to be similar to progress and success defined as “moving through the materials” and the textbook setting the tempo of teaching that was discovered in Guerrettaz and Johnston’s study (2013, p. 785). Even though Finland has sometimes prided itself in the lack of standardised tests in schools, there is still evidently pressure among the teachers to go through as much of the textbook content as possible before an exam.

Even though the participants, as discussed previously, had great trust in the Finnish publishing houses and the textbook publishing industry and thought the textbooks were of high-quality, primary school teachers A and E had also noticed some more negative aspects. Participant E mentioned that there have been cases where in a book series, the English textbooks for grades three and four were excellent and well thought-out, but with books for grades five and six you could tell they were made in a hurry and not thought through properly. Participant A agreed and noted that schools have to make decisions based on just the books for grades three and four as the other books come out later on, and after the decision has been made, they cannot afford to change the entire book series to another one, so they are “stuck” with what they get. What is more, participant A had noticed that money plays a large role when choosing the books, as the prize might come before the quality of the book. The secondary school teachers had not noticed similar tendencies, but rather

stated that they had been able to make the textbook purchase decisions themselves, no matter what the cost. Participant B noted that the matter does not really affect upper secondary school as students have to pay for their own books, but mentioned a similarity as you have to make the textbook series decision based on two published course books and the rest six or seven books come as a surprise.

(14) F: Vaikka ne kirjat onki hyviä, niin aina joskus tulee etteen sellasia asioita, että joku asia on esitetty tosi huonosti siellä työkirjassa vaikka joku kielioppiasia, niin sitte siihen on vähän pakko keksiä ite jotaki muuta, että siitä saa semmosen järkevän kokonaisuuden.

Even though the books are good, every now and then you come across things that are badly presented in the exercise book, for instance some grammar point, and then you kind of have to come up with something yourself to make it into a sensible whole.

In terms of negative aspects of the actual content in textbooks, participant F mentioned that there have been issues especially with grammar. Certain aspects are not presented in a great way and the teacher has to find other resources or make their own material to compensate for the shortcomings of the textbook. Especially participants B and D concurred with this, and B further remarked that sometimes, even though the matter might be well-presented, there simply is not enough exercises in her opinion and she has to come up with her own.

In conclusion, the teachers found that textbooks can restrict the teacher's creativity to an extent, they felt pressure to go through as much content as possible in the textbooks, a few teachers had noticed negative aspects in the textbook publishing industry, and, in terms of content, problems had arisen especially with grammar. Next, in section 4.3, the teachers' use of other teaching materials will be discussed.

4.3 Use of other teaching materials

When it comes to using other teaching materials, participant D mentioned that she uses quite a lot of "additional" handouts that she has once made herself and continues to use. In terms of making new material, she states that nowadays it is quite rare. For her, one of the primary reasons for using the handouts is the differences between the pupils; some pupils might need easier exercises so the handouts can be used to aid either the ones struggling or, alternatively, the ones that need more demanding activities. Participant F estimated that she uses material outside of the book every week. Participant B mentioned doing her own slideshows for certain grammatical aspects and praised the material done by other Finnish ELT teachers that they share online for other teachers to use. She

also occasionally searches news articles that the students make summaries on. Moreover, she mentioned that she uses and searches for other material especially for the optional oral skills course. However, both upper secondary school teachers B and F cited the lack of time and the tight schedule as restricting factors that do not enable the use of other material than the textbook. Another big factor mentioned by the teachers was online resources.

(16) A: Nykysin on tuo netti semmonen aarreaitta, että sieltä löytyy niin valtavasti, mutta sitä huomaa, että kuinka sinne uppoutuu jos lähtee jotaki hakkeen, sitte yhtäkkiä on sivu sieltä tuolta ja . . . huomaa, että on monta tuntia menny hakiessa jotaki ja syyllistyy ja tulee hirveän huono omatunto . . . Että paljon enemmän, mulla ainaki ittellä semmonen tunne, että vois tehdä, mutta että se, työllistäähän se.

Nowadays the Internet is such a treasure trove, you can find enormous amounts of stuff there, but then you notice how you get lost in it when you search for something, suddenly it's a page from there and one here and . . . you notice you've spent hours searching for something, and you start feeling guilt and get a bad conscience. . . A lot more, I feel, I could do, but, it is a lot of work.

You can spend an enormous time online searching for teaching material, participant A notes in example 16. She talked about how she feels guilty and has a bad conscience about her own work when she sees online how other teachers have even knitted material for the classroom. Moreover, she notes that material that is not the textbook can be motivating and refreshing for the pupils. She states that teachers should “keep their feet on the ground” in terms of the amount of time they spend on their work, but acknowledges that she feels like she could do more, but also notes that it would require a lot more work. Participant C agreed and added that the number of hours a day are limited with which the others also concurred.

Participant E noted that there is a lot of other material available already in the classroom, for instance games, but then she sometimes notices they have laid unused and forgotten about for a long while.

(17) A: Mutta sitä uppoutuu sen kirjan matkaan sillain, että nyt on kiire, tai koe pitäs pittää, niin tavallaan se perusvirhe, että kirja opettaa, kun se ois päinvastanen, että ne oppilaat tekee ite, oppijat sitte.

You get lost in the book, like, we're in a hurry, or I should have an exam, so kind of the basic mistake that the book does the teaching, when it should be the opposite, that the pupils, the learners do activity themselves.

Participant A concurred with E and stated that she sometimes thinks about having one lesson a month that is spent only playing games, but, as can be seen in example 17, she gets lost in the textbook and the tight schedule. She remarks that this is a “basic mistake” where the textbook is doing the teaching rather than the pupils doing the activity themselves. This view seems to support the sociocultural and ecological approaches to language learning where language learning is seen as activity rather than the textbook teaching learners. Furthermore, we can also see how the textbook

can act almost as the curriculum and the how tempting and easy it can be for the teachers to simply move through the textbook systematically and cover as much content as possible.

(18) A: Se riippuu niin paljon ryhmästäki, että minkälainen ryhmä, jos aattelee, että sitä yrittää mennä sitä keskitietä sen kirjan kanssa, ja sitten onki semmonen sakki, jolle ei kerta kaikkiaan voi edetä, että pittää jauhaa niitä samoja asioita, niin silloin tulee se ahistus, että pitäs käyttää omaa järkee, että hei, tähän pittää käyttää enemmän aikaa ja eri materiaalia.

It depends so much on the group, what kind of group, if you think that you try to follow the middle of the road with the book, and then the group is one that you simply cannot move on with, you have to repeat the same things, in that case you get that anxiety, but you should use your own head, like hey, you need to spend more time and different materials with this group.

Participant A also highlights the differences between different groups of pupils. She remarks that with certain groups it is simply not possible to follow the same schedule with the textbook as with other groups since they might need more time. She then expresses that she feels distress about the situation but tries to tell herself that this group will need more time and other material. The distress participant A feels could be caused by the fact that, with this particular group, she cannot follow the same schedule with the textbook and therefore cannot go through the same amount of content as with other groups. This further asserts the role of the textbook as a curriculum where deviating from it can cause distress to the teachers. However, participant A states that she “uses her own head” and acknowledges that the group might need other material than the textbook. This mindset is in concord especially with the ecological perspective. Van Lier states that the teacher has to set the learners’ needs and skills as the most influential aspect of a curriculum (2004, pp. 223-224). What is more, the ecological perspective also takes variability into account, i.e. the teacher should consider the learners’ differences rather than treating everyone exactly the same (p. 7). In this case, participant A taking into account the differences between groups of pupils and setting the needs of a group ahead systematically going through a textbook represents an ecological approach.

Furthermore, participants B and F had experience from recording their students and also filming their oral skills exams. Participant A had also used Ipads so that one pupil films two other pupils talking. Furthermore, she remarks that activities like this would be beneficial for the pupils as the language gets into “real use” instead of just doing one exercise in the textbook. Another example she gives of activities that she feels motivates and excites pupils is them using their own phones to call each other from a different room instead of simply reading from the book. Participant C had also had pupils film videos on their own phone and showing them if they wished to and reported that the pupils had really enjoyed it. Worth pointing out here is participant A’s word choice of language getting into “real use”, with which she referred to pupils doing, presumably oral, exercises

together instead of filling in an exercise in the textbook. This also supports the sociocultural and ecological view where learning takes place particularly in interaction with other people and in meaningful contexts.

To conclude, most of the teachers stated that they use other material apart from the textbook at least from time to time. Especially the secondary and upper secondary school teachers mentioned making their own grammar materials to compensate for the occasional lacking or badly presented materials in the textbook. Another often used material for the teachers was online resources, that you can spend hours on, as participant A remarked. All of the participants acknowledged that, often, due to a tight schedule, it is easy to forget about other materials and simply follow the textbook, even though, as some of them noted, it seems to be motivating and refreshing for the learners to sometimes use other material than the textbook. The next section, section 4.4, will discuss the teachers' opinions on digital textbooks.

4.4 Digital textbooks

Participants B and F, i.e. the upper secondary school teachers, already had had some experience from using digital textbooks. They reported that, at the moment, students can still make their own decision between a digital and printed textbook, and some of them, although still very much a minority, have chosen an e-textbook. The teachers were asked about the pros and cons of the digitization of textbooks.

(19) D: Se kirja on aina siinä, kunhan se on oppilailla mukana, niin sitä pystyy käyttään ja sieltä voi ottaa eri juttuja, ei tarvi aatella, että toimiiko se.

C: Ja kirjasta ei lopu virta, seki on kyllä.

D: *The book is always available, as long as the pupils have it with them, you can use it and do different things, you don't have to think about whether it works.*

C: *And the book doesn't run out of power, that's one thing as well.*

(20) B: Kai ne muuten on ollu ihan tyytyväisiä, mut sitte joskus varsinki alkusyksystä oli paljo käynnistymisvaikeuksia ja sitte on näitä, että se did not kelpaa, mutta didn't ei, tai tämän tyyppisiä, don't on ainoo oikee, sitte ne ihmettelee, että miksi ei käy ja sitten mä käyn sanomassa, että käy se kyllä.

I suppose they have otherwise been quite satisfied, but especially at the beginning of autumn there were a lot of difficulties, like did not is ok but didn't isn't, this sort of things, don't is the only correct answer, then they wonder why this isn't ok and I go tell them that it's completely fine.

The teachers expressed concerns especially about practical things. In example 19, participant D notes that the book is always available and you do not have to think about whether it works.

Participant C adds that a book does not run out of power, unlike technology. Participant B, who was using digital textbooks at the time, reported that students had been quite satisfied with the e-textbooks, but there had been some difficulties at the beginning. Furthermore, she told that the e-

textbooks might accept “did not” but not the contracted form “didn’t”, which confuses the students. The varying quality of and concerns about the functionality of digital textbooks have been pointed out by Tossavainen (2015, p. 188) and Vuorinen (2015, p. 123). As for the slight challenges e-textbooks cause to the teacher, participant B stated that she is very used to “calling out” page numbers but they are not the same for the e-textbook as the printed book so the teacher has to show the students using e-textbooks separately where to find the correct section. Participant F had had similar experiences and agreed. Teachers’ worries concerning the practicalities of digitisation have also been revealed by Allen’s (2015) study. When the other participants, who had no experience from using e-textbooks, were asked how all this sounded to them, participant A’s initial response was “awful”. Furthermore, participant E added that she was glad there were no e-textbooks yet in primary school.

(21) F: Tietenki se nyt on sitte se ruutu-aika lisääntyy aika paljon sitte nuorilla, se nyt ensimmäisenä tulee huonona mieleen, mutta onhan siinä paljo hyviä puolia, et se monipuolistuu hirveesti.
Of course young people’s screen time is going to increase a lot, that’s the first negative aspect that comes to mind, but it does have many positive sides as well, the material gets a lot more diverse.

(22) A: Mää aattelin, että mitenkä alakoulun puolella, että meillä on se ongelma ku meillä on niitä peliriippuvaisia jo nyt, että jos se läksy olis sillä konheella, että jotenki mie aattelen vanhankantasesti, että se on hyvä, että niillä on se kirja kuitenkin, että se on napattavissa matkaan tai tehtävissä missä nyt vaan, että se olis sitä kirjanki kanssa, ne pelaa kyllä niillä konheilla aika paljon muutenkin.
I was thinking about primary school, like we already have a problem with game-addicted pupils, so if the homework is also on the computer, somehow I think in an old-fashioned way that it is good that they have the book, you can grab it with you and fill it in anywhere, that there would be time spent with the book as well, they play with computers enough as it is.

Still on the cons of digital textbooks, participant F mentioned that the first negative aspect that comes to her mind is the increased screen time for the learners. Dobler’s (2015) study revealed that some users of e-textbooks reported eye-strain as one of the cons of digital textbooks. Similar thoughts were expressed by participant A, who was concerned about the pupils who already spend too much time on the computer and how the textbook being digital would only increase their time in front of a screen. Therefore, she was of the “old-fashioned” opinion that it is good that the pupils have a book they can grab with them and read anywhere, as the time spent with the book is time spent away from a computer screen.

On the pros of digital textbooks, one of the most mentioned aspect was the opportunity for more diverse material and extra activities. Participant B mentioned especially the visual side. As the matriculation examination is going to include videos in the future, the new e-textbooks also provide

more video material. This shows the influence of the matriculation examination on the teaching materials in upper secondary school. Also, for instance, the audio recordings of the textbooks chapters are available for all the students online, so she can now tell the students to listen to them at home, something she could not do before. However, if she wanted to give the videos as homework, they would be available only for the students who use e-textbooks, so, for now, they can only watch them during lessons in class. From the student's point of view, participant B notes that the digital textbook often provides all listening material and even solutions to most exercises, so the student can advance at their own pace and they do not have to, for instance, wait for others. The idea that digital material can diversify the material has been remarked in previous research as well (see for instance Tossavainen, 2015; Vuorinen, 2015).

(23) D: Sitä mäki vaan rupesin miettiin just, että onko se sitten kaikilla yhtä lailla mahdollisuus sitten aina käyttää niitä, ja se, että kun se menee sitte siihen, niin sitte kotona täytys olla se laite, ja miten se sitte järjestetään jos ei oo, että tällösiä tulee mietittyä.

That's what I started thinking about, like do the pupils always have an equal access to use them, and because in the end you would have to have the device at home, and how do you arrange it if there isn't, this is the kind of thing I think about.

Another concern voiced by several of the participants was the access to technology. As using digital textbooks requires some sort of technology, for instance in upper secondary school students now need to have a laptop, participant D was worried about the equality of pupils having access to the required technology. Participant A also mentioned that there are still pupils who say that they do not have internet connection or any sort of device at home. To conclude, participant C stated that we are still living in a period of transition and uncertainty where we do not know if everyone will end up using digital textbooks or whether traditional books will survive. Furthermore, she notes that in five years' time they would be talking in a completely different manner as they would be more familiar with all of it.

In summary, the teachers had concerns about digital textbooks especially in terms of practicalities. According to them, the pros of a traditional printed textbook include not having to worry about whether it works or runs out of power. Furthermore, there were concerns about the learners' screen time that an e-textbook would increase or whether all learners would have equal access to the required technology. As for the positive aspects of digital textbooks, the teachers found that they offer an opportunity for extra activities and more diverse material. Next, section 4.5 will discuss the teachers' opinions on whether they think there is more emphasis on written skills over oral skills in Finnish ELT.

4.5 Are written skills valued over oral skills?

The participants were presented and asked to discuss the statement “written skills are emphasised over oral skills in Finnish ELT”. Participant A remarked that there can be differences between the different school levels as the goals are different. For instance, she stated that, for her, the first thing that comes to mind is the influence of matriculation examination and how it affects upper secondary school studies and might put more emphasis on written skills. Furthermore, she highlights, while some primary school teachers might see the goal as getting the pupils into secondary school, some secondary school teachers might set the goal to be getting into upper secondary school. However, she noted that there is increasing emphasis on oral skills nowadays. Participant B mentioned that there has been emphasis on oral skills already when she was in upper secondary school, for instance grammar exercises were occasionally done orally with another student, but she has noted that as the matriculation examination might include oral skills in the future, they are practiced more now. This remark further shows how strongly the matriculation examination affects the content of upper secondary school courses. However, she states, oral skills are not yet systematically tested, apart from one optional oral skills course. What is more, participant B noted that nowadays there are explanations for students in the grammar sections of textbooks that explain why they should study grammar, i.e. it is not to get less teacher’s markings on your essays but to communicate better. It could be presumed that participant B agrees with the textbook’s explanation, which definitely represents a sociocultural and ecological view where it is seen that language is especially communication with others and language learning should be relevant to life, not just, for instance, getting better grades.

(24) F: Mää pikkusen väittäisin, että se alkaa olla vähän vanhentunut jo tuo väittäjä, niin että ei se enää ihan niin pidä paikkaansa, että kyllä tosi paljon korostetaan niissä kirjoissakin jo sitä suullista puolta, että meilläki on joka tekstikappaleesta on suulliset tehtävät erikseen, monet työkirjan tehtävät on suullisia.

I would claim that that statement is starting to be a bit out-dated, it doesn't exactly hold true anymore, like there's a lot of emphasis on oral skills in the books as well, we have oral exercises for each textbook chapter, a lot of the exercises in the exercise book are oral.

(25) D: Ehkä ne on ne kirjalliset tehtävät ja tämmöset, niin ne on oppilailleki semmosia, jotka niitten on helppo tarkistaa ja ne tietää, että onko ne oikein, että sitte tämmöset suulliset ja suullinen kielitaito, niin se on aina vähän semmosta, että ne mieltii, että no menneeköhän tämä nyt oikeen.

Maybe the written exercises and the like are such to the pupils that they are easy to check and they

know whether it's correct, but with oral exercises and oral skills, it's always a bit like, they keep thinking about whether this is correct.

(26) E: Joskus musta tuntuu siltä, että kaikki oppilaat ei aina oikeen sisäistä sitä kuinka tärkeä se suullinen harjoitus on, että ne tekee sen äkkiä, sitte me tehtiin jo tämä, niinku haluaa mennä siihen kirjallisiin juttuihin mahdollisimman nopeasti, tavallaan arvostaa enemmän sitä kirjallista tuotosta kun sitä keskustelu.

Sometimes I feel like not all pupils comprehend just how important the oral exercise is, like they do it quickly, and then are like we already did this, like they want to go to the written exercises as fast as possible, they kind of appreciate the written exercise more than discussion.

In example 24, participant F states that she thinks the statement is outdated and does not hold true anymore. She finds that there is a lot of emphasis on oral skills as textbooks also include plenty of oral exercises now. Participant D agreed and remarked that while written skills are still practiced quite a lot, the pupils are also aware that the tendency is towards emphasising oral skills more. Moreover, in example 25, she notes that practising written skills and evaluating the results is easier for the pupils as they can immediately see if something is wrong or correct. However, with oral skills, the pupils might be more unsure and apprehensive. In example 26, participant E remarks that she feels like some pupils do not realise the importance of an oral exercise and they just rush through them to get to the written exercises. Pupils, she feels, appreciate more the written exercises than discussion. Participant F concurred and noted that some pupils do the exercises just for the sake of writing something and “filling in the empty lines” in books and they are in such a hurry to do that that they do not even stop to read the instructions. The lack of interest by some learners towards oral exercises might suggest that they view learning as something that occurs within the individual, rather than in interaction with others, which would be in conflict with both the sociocultural and ecological perspectives. However, the teachers did not mention whether the learners specifically want to do the written exercises by themselves. Furthermore, the learners’ lack of interest towards practising oral skills and the rush to do them might indicate that the learners are not engaged and therefore learning might not occur, according to the ecological approach. The learners’ attitude towards doing exercises seems to reflect the results of Guerrettaz and Johnston (2013) where progress and success was defined by the learners as “moving through the materials” (p. 785). Moreover, some pupils, according to the participants, seem to think filling in the exercises in textbooks guarantees success and results in learning. Furthermore, participant D’s remark that pupils might prefer doing written exercises as they can quickly check and evaluate what is correct and what is not, might suggest that some pupils view language as a material object that you can count to see “how much” of that language you know. Similarly, participant B also mentioned some upper secondary school students who are so tied to the textbook that they consider all language learning to happen inside it and they base the amount of English they know on which aspects of the

textbook they know. These views are not in accordance with the sociocultural and ecological perspectives but they do, however, support previous research. Kalaja et al. (2011) found that even language major students considered language as something to be counted and assessed and cited textbooks as their most important learning resource, whilst classroom interaction with teachers or other learners was hardly mentioned (p. 72).

The teachers also talked quite in-depth about teaching phonetics and, for instance, the number of phonetic exercises in textbooks, which seemed to focus more on oral skills as learning to produce the correct phonemes. Apart from participant B mentioning holding oral exams, and participants D and F commenting that they sometimes give topics to the learners to talk about, the participants did not discuss how, or if, they practise oral skills outside of the textbook. Practising oral skills outside of the textbook exercises could create affordances for the learners, i.e. possibilities for action that creates opportunities for engagement and participation, through which learning finally emerges (van Lier, 2004). However, as the participants were not explicitly asked about this, it is left unknown just how much and in what ways, or if they incorporate the practise of oral skills without the textbook. Also interesting is the fact that, although the statement presented to the teachers in the beginning did not mention textbooks, the participants related practising written and oral skills almost all the time to how you can practise them in the textbook. That is, they mentioned how the grown emphasis on oral skills can be seen especially, for instance, in the increased number of oral exercises in the textbook. Granted, as the whole topic of the discussion centred around textbooks, it was probably natural for the participants to continue talking about written and oral skill in relation to textbooks. However, the teachers offering virtually no examples on how or if they practise oral skills without the textbook seems to further establish the status of the textbook as a huge influence and almost the back-bone of teaching.

To sum up, the teachers had noticed an increase in emphasis towards oral skills, however, a lot of the focus was still on written skills. They discussed the grown emphasis on oral skills especially in terms of how it shows in textbooks. Furthermore, a few of the teachers had noticed that some pupils seem to value and prefer doing written exercises over oral ones. Moreover, it is worth noting that the participants did not really mention how or if they practise oral skills outside of the textbook. The next section 4.6 will present and discuss the teachers' perspectives on language learning as well as teaching.

4.6 Perceptions on learning and teaching

The participants were presented and asked to discuss two rather opposing statements of “learning occurs in interaction with others” and “English is learnt from textbooks”.

(28) C: No ei ainakaan se jälkimmäinen, kyllä on niin älyttömän paljo opitaan peleistä ja just elokuvista, siis nää pelaajapojat on tullu niin vahvalla enkun taidolla kyllä esiin, että sanasto-osaaminen on ihan huippua, että ei todellakaan pelkästään.

Well not the latter at least, so much is learnt from games and films, I mean these gamer boys have come up with such excellent English skills, like their knowledge of vocabulary is topnotch, so definitely not just from textbooks.

Almost straight after hearing the two statements, participant C’s reaction was to state that at least the latter statement, i.e. English is learnt from textbooks, does not hold true. As can be seen in example 28, she pointed out that there are boys who play video games who have impressed her with their vast vocabulary that they have presumably not learnt from textbooks or at school. This is in line with previous research on video games and English language learning where playing video games has been seen as a positive influence on the player’s English skills (see for instance Kallunki, 2016; Lukkarinen, 2013; Uuskoski, 2011). The study of Uuskoski (2011) revealed that there was a strong connection between actively playing video games and high English grades (p. 56). Furthermore, he found that male upper secondary school students played more video games and also had better English grades than female students (ibid.). Participant C mentioning it is specifically boys who play video games and benefit from it in terms of English skills seems to support the findings of Uuskoski with regard to there still being a disparity between girls and boys in playing video games. Participant C does not mention whether the boys who play video games have high grades, but she does state that they have excellent English skills and a wide vocabulary, which could suggest that they also have great grades. Moreover, she does not specify what “excellent English skills” means, whether she is referring to great written or oral skills, or both. What is more, there is no mention of what kind of games the boys play or if they play alone or possibly with others. Along learning English from video games, participant C also mentioned films as a learning opportunity.

(29) B: Mulla tuli mieleen semmoset pojat, että niillä se ei kyllä se oppiminen tapahdu kirjan kans ku ne voi lukion mennä läpi avaamatta kirjaa kertaakaan, kirjottaa ihan hyvin, että niillä se ei oo kyllä minkäänlainen runko.

Who came to my mind are these boys, for them learning definitely does not happen with the book as they can go through upper secondary school without once opening the book, and they do quite well in the matriculation examination, so for them it’s no kind of framework.

Furthermore, in example 29, participant B mentioned boys who go through upper secondary school

“without opening their books” and still manage to get quite good grades in the matriculation examination, so for them learning does not occur reading textbooks and the textbook does not provide any kind of framework. As the students still manage to get successful grades, it could be presumed that they learn English outside of school in one way or another. Both of these remarks by participants C and B acknowledge the learning opportunities of out-of-school contexts. Both sociocultural as well as ecological views state the importance of learning English outside of school (see for instance Dufva, 2013a; van Lier, 2004). Dufva (2013a) asserts that the school “could – and should” take into consideration more how to combine school practices with the out-of-school learning context (p. 11). What is more, van Lier (2004) argues that when the informal and everyday knowledge of learners is not acknowledged at school, it can cause frustration to the learners, lower their motivation, and hinder their learning (p. 158). The participants did not elaborate if, or how, they take the out-of-school context into account in class, but already the acknowledgment that learning occurs outside of school and textbooks represents the sociocultural and ecological perspectives. On top of participants C and B mentioning that English is not learnt from textbooks, participant A also remarked that learning does not solely happen inside books. Some of the other participants also seemed to voice their agreement by saying “mmhm” but did not elaborate. Thus, it seems at least most of the teachers thought English is not learnt solely from textbooks, which seems to be in accordance with sociocultural and ecological perspectives on language learning. However, as has been established before, the participants agreed that textbooks play a significant role in the classroom, and it would be of interest to find out how exactly, or if, the teachers incorporate the out-of-school learning context and the belief that English is not solely learnt from textbooks into their everyday teaching. For now, it is left unknown.

The opposing statement “learning occurs in interaction with others” did not arouse a lot of discussion from the participants. As the teachers were not told about the sociocultural or ecological perspective before or during the interview, it would be of interest to find out what opinions they would have if they were introduced to the theories and then presented with the same statements. Participant A did remark that social intercourse (“*kanssakäyminen*”) is practised all the time in class, but it seems to refer to learning *how* to interact with others, not necessarily that learning occurs *in* interaction with others. As the interviewer did not further elaborate on the two statements, their meaning might have been left slightly unclear to the participants.

Further, the participants were also asked whether they thought ELT in Finland is textbook-centred. They unanimously agreed that it is, which does not come as a huge surprise after establishing that

they consider the textbook to play a big role in teaching. Worth noting, however, is that participant F added she thought it was a good thing (“*Ja hyvä että on.*”). Furthermore, she remarked that, for her, textbooks provide a framework and a starting point from which she can then expand elsewhere. These remarks seem to reflect that for participant F, textbooks are a big influence and aid, as well as a self-evident part of teaching to which she puts a lot of her trust in. The view that textbook-centrism is a good thing is in contrast with the sociocultural as well as ecological perspective. For instance, Dufva (2013b) argues that language teaching that is centralised around traditional textbooks and “only one answer is correct” methods do not give space for meaningful learning opportunities and do not help the learner to face language outside of the classroom (p. 69). However, even though participant F stated textbook-centrism is a good thing, she did acknowledge that the textbook might have its limitations, which were discussed in section 4.2.

(30) Participant F: Jotenki tuntuu, että lukiossa se opiskelu on hyvin pitkälle sitä, vaikka ite yritän välttää sitä, . . . et sanottiin, että YO-kirjoituksissa, YO-kokeessa tätä, mää sitte koitan korostaa sitäkin puolta, että vaikka luettais sitä YO-koetta varten tai koetta varten tai tehtäis kirjan tehtäviä tai luettaisiin, sehän on aina kuitenkin elämää varten ja se valmistaa, se kuitenkin vie sitä kielitaitoa eteenpäin, että se nyt on ihan sama onko se sitä YO-koetta varten loppujen lopuks.
Somehow I feel like in upper secondary school studying is, to a great extent, even though I try to avoid it, . . . like they said that well in the matriculation exam this and that, I now try to emphasise that even if we are studying for the matriculation exam or for an exam or doing exercises in the book or reading, in the end it's always for life and it prepares, it does advance the knowledge of the language, like ultimately, it doesn't matter if it happens to be for the matriculation exam.

On the other hand, as can be seen in example 30, participant F states that, when teaching upper secondary school students, she tries to emphasise that even though the students are studying for the matriculation examinations, all the studying they do also prepares them for life and improves their language skills. This view seems to be in accordance with sociocultural and ecological perspectives. Vygotsky himself stated that learning must be “relevant to life” (van Lier, 2004, p. 9). Instead of only aiming for success in the matriculation exams or course grades, participant F feels that the studies of the students should have relevance on their lives outside of and after school.

Finally, the teachers were asked to consider whether they have any personal teaching philosophies or perceptions of language learning. The question was met with some bemusement from the teachers and some expressed it was a difficult one.

(31) D: Mä painotan sitä, että teet parhaasi, en voi vaatia, että sulla on siellä kaikki oikein, eikä sitä pidäkään vaatia, ja sitä, että mitä me turhaan täällä edes tarkistettais mitään jos kaikilla ois kaikki oikeen, että sen takiahan me täällä ollaan, että me katotaan yhdessä näitä asioita, mutta että älä jätä tekemättä, tee niin hyvin ku pystyt.
I emphasise doing your best, I can't demand that everything is correct, and you shouldn't demand that, and it would be pointless for all of us to be here and check anything if everything was correct all the time, that's what we're here for, learning these things together, but like don't leave things

undone, do the best you can.

(32) F: Ehkä jos ajattelee sitä omaa opetusfilosofiaa, niin mä jotenki aattelen sillä tavalla, että kielitaidonki pitäis olla kaikkien oikeus, ja että sitte kukin sais tehdä sitä omalla tasollaan.
Maybe if I think about my own teaching philosophy, I somehow think that knowing a language should be everyone's right, and that everyone could practise it on their own level.

In example 31, participant D emphasises that she asks of her pupils that they do their best. She cannot demand that the learners get it right all the time, as long as they do their tasks to the best of their abilities, she is content. The factor that in her comment resembles a sociocultural perspective is the remark that the pupils and the teacher work together in examining the language. Participant F states that she thinks everyone should have the right to know a language and that everyone could practice the language at their own level. Both of these remarks reflect the notion of variability that is present in ecological linguistics. All learners are different, as both participants D and F acknowledge, and a language teacher should be able to take these differences into account (van Lier, 2004, p. 7). However, neither of these participants went into more detail about their perspectives on how language learning specifically occurs.

(36) A: Mie aattelen sen silleen, . . . että se kielen osaaminen ja oppiminen ei oo se kirja ja tehdyt tehtävät, vaan, että pitää oppilaan osata ajatella, että se on se kokonaisvaltaisuus, se, että miten pystyn selviytymään tilanteessa, lähinnä alakoulun tavoitteita ajatellen, että pystyy kommunikoimaan ja saa itensä ymmärretyksi ja osaa toimia.
My perspective is . . . that knowing and learning a language is not the book and the number of completed exercises, but rather that the pupil is able to think that it's the comprehensive nature, how I can get by in this situation, mostly thinking about the goals in primary school, that you can communicate and be understood and know how to act.

Further on language learning, as can be seen in example 36, participant A emphasises that knowing a language and learning it is not the textbook and the number of finished exercises in it. What is more, she states that language learning is not learning the contents of a textbook, but rather learning how to use the language in different contexts, to communicate. Moreover, she highlights that the learner should learn to consider the all-encompassing, comprehensive nature of knowing and learning a language. These views expressed by participant A almost ideally represent the sociocultural and ecological perspectives. The view of communicating in different situations, presumably with other people, mirrors a sociocultural view where learning happens in interaction as well as the ecological perspective which considers language to be about relations. Furthermore, not setting the textbook as the most central part of language learning is in agreement with both of the approaches. Finally, underlining the comprehensive nature of language learning is something that goes along with the sociocultural and ecological perspective.

(33) Participant A: Tavallaan mä lähtisin sillain, että ku lähtee ihan pienten kanssa, että se olis se tunnepuoli se ensimmäinen se, . . . vaikka ne kirjatki tulee aika äkkiä, niin kuitenkin se, että se ois tällöinen ihmisen lähestyminen toista, . . . että se lähtee niinku että se tunne on siinä matkassa jollon se auttaa siihen oppimiseen, . . . semmoinen filosofia olis tavallaan, että tehdään yhdessä niitten lasten kanssa, oppilaitten, nuorten kans, ja sitten se tavallaan se kirja ja ne välineet on siinä mukana auttamassa sitä juttua.

In a way I would go around it like, when you start with young children, the emotional side would be the first . . . even though the books are incorporated quite quickly, but still, that it would be about one human being approaching another . . . it starts off with the feeling being involved which helps the learning . . . that kind of philosophy that you do activity together with the children, the pupils, the young people, and then the book and other materials are there to aid the whole process.

When it comes to language teaching, in example 31, participant A, a primary school teacher, states that with young pupils, the emotional side should come first. She acknowledges that textbooks are quickly incorporated into teaching, but stresses the importance of human interaction, which, in her opinion, helps with the learning process. Furthermore, she underlines that her teaching philosophy includes doing activity together with the learners, and the textbook is there to aid the whole process. What is more, she gives an example of telling pupils to read textbook chapters at home as homework. She requires that the pupil reads the chapter with someone, be it a parent or a sibling or a friend, as long as they have done it together with another person. With doing this, she hopes that, although the teacher cannot check if they have done the homework, the pupils would learn to view reading together with someone as important homework as well. Furthermore, she underlines the comprehensive nature of primary school language teaching. As the learners are young children, the teachers have to take into account educational issues as well, she notes. Even though every lesson with small children cannot always be solely about the English language, participant A remarks that all the activity in the classroom is about learning. She juxtaposes the primary school situation with that of upper secondary school, which she presumes to be vastly different. Again, participant A's views seem to ideally reflect the sociocultural and ecological views. Firstly, the human interaction she wishes language teaching to include represents a sociocultural view where learning occurs in interaction with other people. Moreover, requiring the pupils to do homework with another person also serves as a reflection of the sociocultural approach, as well as the ecological perspective, which has a view of language as a relational one. What is more, the teaching not revolving around the textbook, but rather using it as a tool, or a material artefact, represent both a sociocultural and ecological approach. Furthermore, the notion of activity mentioned by participant A mirrors ecological linguistics, where language learning is seen as various activities that learners carry out (van Lier, 2004, p. 8). Lastly, the mention of the importance of feeling being included in the human interaction, presumably between the teacher and the learner, seems to reflect the ecological

perspective where meaningful context is crucial in terms of language learning.

(34) C: Se kirja auttaa, että se tavote on ehkä se, että sillä vieraalla kielellä, et uskalletaan, on rohkeutta avata suu ja tulla toimeen ja . . . että vähän vaan eri tavalla kommunikoidaan, mutta että kuitenkin ollaan ihmisiä kaikki ja sitte, että tullaan toimeen niitten muitten kanssa, se kirja on hyvä apu, mut että se ei oo tavallaan se avain, se auttaa löytämään sen avaimen, ehkä joku tämmönen.
The book helps, the goal is maybe that, you are brave with the foreign language, you have the courage to open your mouth and get by and . . . we just communicate a bit differently, but we are all people here, and that you get along with others, the book is a great aid, but it's not the key, but rather it helps find the key, maybe something like that.

(35) E: Kyllä minusta opettajan tehtävä on myöski alakoulussa silleen mahdollistaa tai tarjoaa oppilaille erilaisia ja monipuolisia juttuja, siellä on lauluja, pelejä, keskustelua, kuuntelua, tekstiä, kirja musta on aika iso palikka kuitenkin sitä, että sen ympärille rakennetaan sitä juttua.
I think the teacher's responsibility also in primary school is to enable or provide the pupils with different and diverse materials, there are songs, games, discussion, listening comprehension, text, the book, I feel, is still a pretty big block in it, that you build the process around it.

In terms of the role of the textbook in teaching, other participants expressed similar thoughts as participant A. In example 34, participant C states that, in her opinion, the goal of language teaching is for the learner to have the courage to speak and communicate in another language and the textbook is a good aid, but it is not the most integral part of teaching. In her remark, especially the mention of communicative skills and interaction with other people represents a sociocultural approach. Furthermore, not positioning the textbook as the most focal aspect of teaching but rather defining it as a useful tool reflects both a sociocultural as well as an ecological perspective. In example 35, participant E emphasises the primary school teacher's responsibility to provide the learners with diverse and versatile materials. She mentions songs, games, discussion, listening comprehension and texts. The need for versatile material and especially mentioning discussion reflects a sociocultural and ecological approach. Moreover, for instance Elomaa (2009, pp. 31-32) has pointed out that ideally the lesson would include different teaching media. However, participant E does not mention whether the diverse materials come from the textbook or if it includes materials outside of it. Moreover, she notes that the textbook is a rather big part of teaching and something around which the other elements are built. This view echoes the sentiments expressed before by other participants as well, and further establishes the significant role of the textbook in language teaching.

In summary, in terms of the participants' view of language learning, most of the participants seemed to acknowledge that language learning does not occur solely at school, i.e. they are aware of out-of-school English learning contexts. However, the teachers did not specify how, or if, they take the out-of-school context into account in their teaching. Moreover, the participants did not go into

more detail about their perceptions on how exactly language learning occurs. Furthermore, all of the participants agreed that English language teaching in Finland is textbook-centred, which at least one teacher found to be a positive thing, which seems to be in disagreement with the sociocultural and ecological perspectives of language learning and teaching. However, the importance of studying to be relevant to the learners' life outside and after finishing school was also brought up, which is in line with particularly the ecological view. What is more, in terms of language learning, at least one participant emphasised that it should not be about learning the contents of a textbook but rather about learning to use the language in different contexts. On language teaching, several of the participants expressed thoughts that were in agreement with the sociocultural and ecological approaches, such as stressing the importance of human interaction and not placing the textbook as the most central part of teaching, but as a helpful tool.

5. Discussion

This section summarises the findings of the current study and discusses them further. Moreover, the results are linked to previous research in the field.

One of the findings of this present study is that the participating teachers considered the textbook to play a significant, self-evident role in English language teaching in Finland. The teachers acknowledged the long tradition the textbook has in language teaching in Finland, and some even commented that they have not questioned the use of textbooks. As for the reasons for the wide use of textbooks, the teachers cited the amount of time and effort they save the teacher. Furthermore, textbooks provide good structure to teaching, most of the participants found. Moreover, the teachers had quite a lot of trust in the Finnish textbook industry and, in general, found the textbooks to be of high-quality. What is more, they felt they could count on the textbooks to follow the national core curricula and to include all the required aspects in them. All of these remarks support previous research and came as no huge surprise (see for instance Karvonen, 1995; Lähdesmäki, 2004; Luukka et al., 2008; Elomaa, 2009, Hiidenmaa, 2015, Ruuska, 2015; Vuorinen, 2015). What is more, as the role of textbooks was a self-evident one for the teachers, they had not really even considered not using them. They mentioned that particularly oral and communicative skills could be practised without textbooks. However, as all of them pointed out, not using textbooks would create a lot of work, and require more lessons for English in the curriculum, as participant A noted. In addition to the textbooks lessening the workload of the teacher, some of the teachers highlighted that learners themselves might find the textbook a safe and stable figure in their studies. These views have also been present in previous research in the studies of, for instance, Luukka et al. (2008) and Elomaa (2009).

However, while the teachers saw that the role of textbooks was significant in teaching, they also acknowledged that they may have limitations. One of the perceived limitations was the restricting factor that textbooks might have on the teacher's creativity. Moreover, worth noting is that all of the participants felt pressure to go through as much of the textbook content as possible, and participant B mentioned especially leaving out activities such as group projects in favour of the textbook chapters. The teachers mentioned especially exams as the cause of pressure; as much textbook content as possible should be covered before an exam. This is worth pointing out because the teachers feeling pressured to go through as much textbook content as possible might lead to less activities that are in accordance with the ecological perspective. For instance, the afore-mentioned

group projects are an ideal way of conducting ecological activity in the language classroom (van Lier, 2004, p. 222), but, as noted by participant B and agreed with by the others, they might be pushed aside in favour of textbook content. These findings support the results of Guerrettaz and Johnston's (2013) study where the textbook set the tempo of teaching and progress was defined by "moving through the materials" (p. 785). However, setting textbooks ahead of other activities or materials does not particularly agree with the sociocultural and ecological perspectives.

As for the use of other materials than the textbook, most teachers stated they use them at least occasionally. The participants cited the Internet as one notable resource. Interestingly, participant A mentioned even feeling guilt over her own work when she saw online how much effort other teachers put into, for instance, making their own materials. All participants seemed to agree that more could be done in terms of other material than the textbook, but they noted that both the lack of time and the strict curriculum schedule prevent from doing that. It could be noted that the general sense with the participants, more with some than others, seemed to be that, while they felt more materials outside the textbook could be included, there was no urgent need or desire to make sure more materials are incorporated into the teaching. This could be another sign of the contentment the teachers have for the textbooks and the trust they place in them.

When it came to digital teaching material, two of the six participants already had experience from digital textbooks in upper secondary school. However, the number of students using e-textbooks was still very much a minority, and thus not yet reflecting the upcoming change in the Finnish matriculation examination which will be completely digital by 2019. The teachers expressed concerns about digital materials especially regarding practical things. For instance, a few participants noted that, with printed books, you do not have to worry about them working or running out of power. Furthermore, the question of equality was also brought up in terms of learners' access to the technology required to use digital materials. Moreover, several of the participants also expressed apprehension about the increased screen time that digital textbooks would cause. Teachers' concerns about the functionality and quality of digital textbooks as well as remarks about the increasing screen time have also been pointed out by Tossavainen (2015), Vuorinen (2015), Allen (2015), and Dobler (2015) and, thus, the worries of the teachers in this study seem to follow the same path as in previous research.

When discussing whether there is emphasis in Finnish ELT on written skills over oral skills, some of the teachers disagreed with the statement. All of the participants seemed to have noticed that

there is increasing focus on oral skills nowadays. However, a few participants noted that the practise of written skills is still more prevalent in ELT than oral skills. What is more, they also pointed out that some learners seem value written skills over oral skills and do not really appreciate the practice of oral skills. Furthermore, the teachers mentioned that some learners evaluate “how much” of English they know based on the number of aspects they know in the textbook, i.e. they seem to think language learning happens in the textbook. This line of thought seems to represent a view where language is considered a material object and something countable, and, moreover, something mostly learnt only in textbooks. Learners having this kind of view has been found in previous research as well by, for instance, Kalaja et al. (2011). Interestingly, when discussing how the increasing focus on oral skills can be seen, a few of the teachers related it back to the textbooks, i.e. it could be seen in the increased number of oral exercises in the textbooks. Moreover, apart from a few brief mentions, the teachers did not really discuss how, or if, they practise oral skills outside of the textbook, which would have been fascinating to know. However, as they were not asked about this by the interviewer, it remains unknown.

Regarding English language learning and teaching and the sociocultural and ecological perspectives, the participating teachers expressed both views in agreement as well as more in conflict with the two approaches. In line with especially the ecological perspective was the teachers’ acknowledgment of the learning contexts outside of school. The participants mentioned video games and films as examples of out-of-school contexts where learners can learn English. The positive influence of especially video games on English skills has been pointed out before by, for instance, Kallunki (2016), Lukkarinen (2013) and Uuskoski (2011). In general, the teachers seemed to agree that English is not solely learnt from textbooks. The importance of out-of-school language learning contexts is taken into consideration both by the sociocultural as well as the ecological perspectives (see for instance Dufva, 2013a; van Lier, 2004). However, the participants did not really clarify how, or if, they take the out-of-school contexts into account in their teaching. Once again, had they been asked to further elaborate on the topic by the interviewer, it would have been interesting to know their answers. Furthermore, the teachers did not mention how the learners view the out-of-school contexts and if they consider them to be significant in terms of language learning, which would also be fascinating to know.

In contrast with the sociocultural and ecological perspectives was one of the participants’ remark that the textbook-centrism of Finnish ELT is a positive thing. Furthermore, some of the teachers had a view of the textbook being a starting point for them, from which they can then possibly expand

elsewhere and add things to it. The sociocultural view of language learning and teaching sees that when language teaching is centralised around traditional textbooks and “only one answer is correct” methods, they do not give space for meaningful learning opportunities and do not help the learners to face the language outside of school (Dufva, 2013b, p. 69). It could have been intriguing to explicitly ask the participants whether they think textbooks prepare learners to face the language outside of the classroom.

In terms of the sociocultural and ecological perspectives on language teaching, especially one participant expressed views that were in accordance with them. For instance, she emphasised the importance of human interaction in teaching and placed it ahead of textbooks. In addition to the interaction in class, she, for instance, requires that the pupils do homework with another person, further supporting the significance of interaction, which agrees with both approaches. What is more, she underlined that the teacher and the learners should be engaged in activity, which is in concord with the ecological perspective, which sees language learning as various activities that learners carry out (van Lier, 2004, p. 8). As for the role of the textbook in language learning and teaching, several of the participants thought it is not the most integral or crucial part of it, but a great aid.

When it came to language learning, as has already been mentioned, all of the teachers seemed to agree that learning does not solely occur in textbooks. Furthermore, one participant summarised that knowing and learning a language is not about the number of exercises you do in a textbook, but she stressed the comprehensive nature of language learning and the ability to communicate with others. Other participants also stressed that the goal of learning should be to learn to communicate, and in order to reach that, the textbook is a good aid, but not the most important aspect. All of these views sit well with the sociocultural and ecological perspectives. However, it should be noted that throughout the entire interview, regarding teaching and learning, the discussion seemed to include a lot of emphasis on what the goals of teaching are, i.e. what it is that should be learnt or achieved. What seemed to be lacking was specific mentions of the teachers’ perceptions of how learning actually occurs. Again, this could have been emphasised more by the interviewer.

It is of interest to note that all of the teachers agreed that the textbook plays a significant role and has a big impact on teaching and that the ELT in Finland is textbook-centred, but some of them stated that the textbook is not the most crucial part of language teaching or learning. Therefore, it would be of tremendous interest to find out how exactly the teachers use the textbook in class and what kind of role it plays in the totality of a classroom. Furthermore, it should be pointed out, again,

that the teachers were not informed about the sociocultural theory or ecology of language learning before or during the interview. Hence, it would be intriguing to find out the teachers' perspectives when introduced to the two approaches on language learning and teaching. For instance, with the sociocultural and ecological perspectives in mind, it would be interesting to know if they would be more inclined to think that learning happens within the individual or in interaction with other people.

6. Conclusion

The aim of the present study was to discover teachers' perceptions about the role of textbooks in English language learning and teaching in Finland. The approach chosen for the study was a sociocultural and ecological view of language learning and teaching. All of the participating teachers of this study expressed views that were, to a lesser or greater extent, in agreement, but also in disagreement with the sociocultural and ecological perspectives. Furthermore, the findings of this study support previous research in several ways. For instance, the participating teachers of this study thought that the textbook plays a self-evident role and impacts ELT in Finland greatly. For the participants, one of the most important reasons for using textbooks was the saved time and effort. Furthermore, the teachers generally considered Finnish textbooks to be of high quality. All of these views support previous research where similar results have been discovered (see for instance Karvonen, 1995; Lähdesmäki, 2004; Luukka et al., 2008; Elomaa, 2009, Hiidenmaa, 2015, Ruuska, 2015; Vuorinen, 2015). Thus, it can be stated that the present study further confirms the long-lasting tradition and self-evident role of textbooks in Finnish ELT.

The participants also acknowledged that the textbook has its limitations. For instance, they mentioned that it might restrict the teacher's creativity. Moreover, all of the participants reported that, to a lesser or greater degree, they feel pressure to go through as much of the textbook content as possible and might push aside other activities such as group projects in favour of the textbook chapters. This is in conflict especially with the ecological view of language teaching which sees group projects as the ideal way to conduct ecological activity in the language classroom (van Lier, 2004, p. 222). However, the findings support previous research done by, for instance, Guerrettaz and Johnston (2013). In terms using other material than the textbook, all participants seemed to agree that they could make more of an effort, but cited the lack of time and restrictive schedule as inhibiting factors. As for the use of digital teaching material, only two of the teachers had had experience of learners using e-textbooks. They reported varying experiences. Most of the concerns expressed by the teachers towards digital textbook regarded practicalities. For example, they were worried about the functionality and quality of e-textbooks, but also the increased screen time and the equality of the learners' access to the required technology. These results seem to be in line with earlier research as well (see for instance Tossavainen, 2015; Vuorinen, 2015; Allen, 2015; Dobler, 2015). What is more, the teachers' perspectives about language learning that seemed to be in concord with the sociocultural and ecological views were, for instance, the idea that English is not solely learnt from textbooks, with which all of the participants seemed to agree. Furthermore, some

of the teachers' remarks emphasised the importance of human interaction in language learning and teaching and that the goal of language learning should be to use it to communicate with others. Finally, one teacher summarised that knowing a language and learning it should not be defined by the number of exercises you have completed in the textbook.

In conclusion, it could be stated that while textbooks continue to play a significant role in Finnish ELT, teachers also acknowledge their inhibiting or restricting factors. Varyingly, the teachers placed textbooks either as the starting point of their teaching, or merely a helpful tool, but not the centre point of their teaching. In sum, without being informed of the sociocultural and ecological views of language learning and teaching, all of the participants expressed views that were in concord with the two approaches, some more than others. All in all, a common notion that came up during the interview seemed to be that, for the most part, the teachers were content with textbooks and were not going to part with them at least for the foreseeable future.

When it comes to the limitations of the study, it should be mentioned that as the as the number of teachers participating in the study is only six, the findings only represent their personal perspectives and cannot be generalised. Furthermore, it should be noted that the interviewer's actions can influence the findings of the interview. Guiding by the interviewer, even if subconscious, can occur. Moreover, the interviewer's occasional decision not to ask for further questions or more information on certain topics might have left out some relevant information. Finally, as one of the primary approaches in the study was an ecological perspective, and ecological linguistics stress the importance of context, which in this case would have been the use of textbooks inside the language classroom, it should be considered whether a classroom-based research would have presented an ecological perspective more.

For further research, especially the afore-mentioned classroom-based observation study could be of interest. That way, the textbook could be examined in its natural context, and it could be discovered just how exactly teachers use textbooks in the class and what kind of role it plays in the totality of a classroom situation. Further, it could be found out whether the teachers' perceptions of language learning and teaching are carried out in practice. Moreover, teacher interviews could be conducted so that the teachers are made aware of the sociocultural and ecological perspectives and to see if they, for instance, agree with them or even execute them in their teaching. Finally, it would be of particular interest to also study the perspectives of learners themselves and to find out how they view English language learning or the role of the textbook in ELT.

This study could be of use, for instance, for language teachers or upcoming language teachers who are interested in the role of textbooks inside the English language classroom, or the sociocultural and ecological approaches to language learning and teaching and wish to know how they can be present in the language classroom.

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