

Johanna Tolonen

ENGLISH A1-LEVEL LEARNING MATERIALS

A comparison of early English and other A1-level learning
materials

ABSTRACT

Johanna Tolonen: English A1-level learning materials
Master's Thesis
Tampere University
Master's programme in English language and literature
April 2022

The purpose of this thesis is to examine differences in A1-level English learning materials. More specifically, the focus of interest is on the similarities and differences between early English learning materials and other A1-level English learning materials. Moreover, this thesis aims to specify differences and similarities in the phonological, grammatical and vocabulary features highlighted in the learning materials and ponder why some of these features are highlighted in one material but not in the other.

The data for the thesis was formed by using two methods. The first part of the data was collected via an electronic questionnaire, in which respondents answered various multiple-choice and open-ended questions about early language learning materials and other A1-level English learning materials. The questionnaire received 19 responses from teachers around Finland. The second part of the data was formed by analysing three different A1-level English learning materials from two of the biggest publishing companies in Finland. The three learning materials studied consisted of two early English learning materials and one other A1-level English learning material. After analysing each component separately, the results of the analyses were further compared.

The results of the learning material analysis showed that many similarities and differences between the three English learning materials could be found. One of the similarities was that all learning materials consisted of vocabulary that circled around pupils' everyday lives. Vocabulary was also highly emphasized in all learning materials. One of the major differences between the three materials was that no grammatical features were presented in either of the early language learning materials. On the contrary, the other A1-level English learning material introduced a large variety of grammatical features. Moreover, not only were there differences between the early language learning materials and other A1-level learning materials, but differences between the two early language learning materials could also be found. Differences found between the two early language learning materials included, for example, the introduction and presentation of phonological features.

The results of the learning material analysis were mostly supported by the questionnaire analysis. However, some contradicting views were also presented. The questionnaire responses highlighted the importance of learning the sounds and the vocabulary instead of learning grammatical features in early language learning. The majority of the respondents felt that early language learning materials supported the learning of early English, for example, by providing various types of exercises and age-appropriate vocabulary. However, some respondents criticized the presence of reading and writing exercises and the lack of extra materials in early language learning materials.

Keywords: early English learning materials, early English, A1-level learning materials, language acquisition and language learning, foreign language learning

The originality of this thesis has been checked using the Turnitin OriginalityCheck service.

TIIVISTELMÄ

Johanna Tolonen: English A1-level learning materials
Pro gradu -tutkielma
Tampereen yliopisto
Englannin kielen ja kirjallisuuden maisteriohjelma
Huhtikuu 2022

Tämä tutkielma tarkastelee englannin A1-oppimäärän opiskelussa käytettyjä oppimateriaaleja. Tutkimuksen päätarkoituksena on selvittää, mitä samankaltaisuuksia ja eroavaisuuksia varhennettuun kieltenopetukseen suunnatuilla oppimateriaaleilla ja muilla A1-oppimäärän englannin kielenopetukseen tarkoitetuilla oppimateriaaleilla on. Tutkimus pyrkii lisäksi syventymään tarkemmin ääntämisen, kieliopin ja sanaston käsittelyyn eri oppimateriaaleissa ja selvittämään, miksi tietyt kielenpiirteet korostuvat joissain materiaaleissa, kun toiset vuorostaan eivät.

Tutkimuksen aineisto muodostui kahdesta osasta. Ensimmäinen osa aineistoa kerättiin sähköisellä kyselylomakkeella, johon vastasi 19 eri taustaista opettajaa ympäri Suomea. Sähköinen kyselylomake sisälsi monivalinta- ja avokysymyksiä ja toteutettiin kevään 2021 aikana eri opettajaryhmissä sosiaalisessa mediassa. Toinen osa aineistosta muodostui kolmen englannin A1-oppimäärän oppimateriaalin analyysistä. Oppimateriaalianalyysissä tutkittiin samankaltaisuuksia ja eroavaisuuksia eri oppimateriaalien välillä keskittyen tarkemmin ääntämisen, kieliopin ja sanaston käsittelyyn oppimateriaaleissa. Kaksi tutkielmassa analysoiduista oppimateriaaleista oli suunniteltu varhennettuun kieltenopetukseen ja yksi oppimateriaaleista edusti muuta A1-oppimäärän oppimateriaaliaineistoa. Lopuksi oppimateriaalianalyysin tuloksia vertailtiin kyselylomakkeesta saatuihin tuloksiin.

Tutkimuksessa pystyttiin todentamaan monia samankaltaisuuksia ja eroavaisuuksia kolmen tutkitun englannin A1-oppimäärän oppimateriaalin välillä. Kaikissa oppimateriaaleissa oppimisen pääpaino oli sanastossa, joka koostui oppilaiden arkielämään liittyvistä sanoista. Oppimateriaalianalyysissä varhennetun englannin oppimateriaaleissa korostui lisäksi monipuoliset tehtävätyypit ja pelillisuus. Eroavaisuuksia oppimateriaalien välillä löytyi muun muassa kieliopin ja foneettisten äänneominaisuuksien käsittelyssä. Kyselylomakkeen vastauksissa ääntämisen ja sanaston oppiminen puhutun vuorovaikutuksen keinoin korostui varhennetun englannin opetuksessa ja oppimisessa. Vaikka suurin osa vastaajista koki varhennetun englannin oppimateriaalien tukevan oppimista, osa vastaajista kritisoi oppimateriaaleja luku- ja kirjoitustaitoa vaativien tehtävien sisällyttämisestä ja liian vähäisestä lisämateriaalin tarjoamisesta.

Avainsanat: varhennettu kieltenopetus, A1-oppimäärän oppimateriaalit, englanti vieraana kielenä, vieraiden kielten oppiminen

Tämän julkaisun alkuperäisyys on tarkastettu Turnitin OriginalityCheck -ohjelmalla.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1	INTRODUCTION	1
2	THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK	3
2.1	The process of acquiring a language	3
2.2	The process of learning a language	9
2.3	What is early English?	13
2.4	Finnish education system and the national core curriculum	19
2.5	Early language learning research	21
3	DATA AND METHODS	23
3.1	Qualitative or quantitative methods	23
3.2	Data	24
3.2.1	The learning materials	24
3.2.2	Questionnaire.....	25
3.2.3	Respondents of the questionnaire	26
4	ANALYSIS OF THE TEXTBOOKS	30
4.1	General observations.....	30
4.2	Phonology	36
4.3	Grammar	40
4.4	Vocabulary	43
5	RESULTS OF THE QUESTIONNAIRE.....	50
5.1	Textbooks and materials in early English learning (part two).....	50
5.2	Other A1-level English textbooks and materials (part three).....	59
5.3	Differences and similarities in A1-level English materials (part four).....	64
6	DISCUSSION	67
7	CONCLUSIONS.....	71
	REFERENCES.....	73
	APPENDIX A.....	79
	APPENDIX B	83
	APPENDIX C	84
	APPENDIX D.....	86
	APPENDIX E	87

1 INTRODUCTION

In today's world, English is the language of international business, education, and trade. Moreover, Crystal (2006, 425) estimates that a quarter of the Earth's population is able to communicate in English to an understandable level. Not only are adults able to communicate through English, but Butler (2019, 17) states that all over the world, a growing number of children start to learn English at a young age. In 2022, the learning of the first foreign language starts in the first grade in all Finnish primary schools. However, only two and a half years ago, the situation was something rather different. In the beginning of the year 2020, the learning of the first foreign language, which in Finland typically is English, underwent a drastic change. The change in the national core curriculum composed in 2019 made it obligatory for all pupils to start their foreign language studies in the first year of primary school. This arrangement where the learning of the first foreign language begins in the first year of primary school is called early language learning. The purpose of early language learning is to introduce the new language by using alternative methods of teaching and learning and emphasize the use of spoken communication, games, motion, music, and active participation in the learning process. The earlier start of foreign language learning has gained alternating feedback. Some people have concentrated on the benefits of early foreign language learning while others have pointed out its possible disadvantages. One of the most prominent claims supporting early language learning has been the idea that young children learn faster and better than older children. This claim is also commonly known as the critical period hypothesis.

The purpose of this thesis is to study A1-level English learning materials used in Finnish primary schools. Learning materials can have pivotal effects on the learning process and thus research conducted in this field is always important. More specifically, the thesis focuses on the similarities and differences between early language learning materials and other A1-level English learning materials used to teach and learn English in the first and third grades. In the learning materials, similarities and differences in the phonology, grammar and vocabulary will be examined. Moreover, this thesis aims to identify why certain features of language gain more emphasis in one learning material but not in others.

The data of this thesis consists of two complementing parts. First part of the data was collected via an electronic questionnaire which included multiple-choice and open-ended questions concerning similarities and differences in the different A1-level English learning materials. The second part of the data was formed by analysing the similarities and differences in two early language learning materials *High five! 1-2* and *Go!* and one learning material *High*

five! 3 designed for older pupils. Finally, the questionnaire responses and the learning material analysis will be compared to gain a further understanding of the similarities and differences between early language learning materials and other A1-level English learning materials.

This study aims to identify similarities and differences between early language learning materials and other A1-level English learning materials by presenting three research questions. These research questions are:

1. How do early language learning materials resemble and differ from other A1-level English learning materials?
2. What kind of features of phonology, grammar and vocabulary are included in the A1-level English learning materials?
3. Why are certain features of phonology, grammar and vocabulary highlighted in one material but not in the other?

The topic of this thesis was chosen because of the current status of early language learning in Finland. Although the setting for the change in the national core curriculum was given already in 2019, the actual implementation of this change is still happening in Finnish primary schools. There are schools in Finland that have provided early language teaching already before 2020, but most schools have only recently had to adjust their customs and incorporate foreign language studies in the first grade. Due to the newness of early language learning, only a limited amount of research has been conducted in the field of early language learning in Finland. The novelty of early language learning materials and the lack of studies conducted in the field of early language learning influenced the execution of the present study. The novelty of the early language learning materials and the regulations given in the national core curriculum will probably affect the early language learning materials. Therefore, my hypothesis is that the A1-level learning materials will most likely differ in their approaches on features of grammar and that early language learning materials will probably concentrate on pronunciation and spoken communication.

The thesis is divided into seven main chapters. After this introductory chapter, the theoretical framework composed of key theories, terminology and early language learning research will be presented in chapter 2. Chapter 3 introduces the methods and data of the thesis. The analysis of the two early language learning materials and the other A1-level learning material will be the topic of chapter 4, after which the analysis of the questionnaire responses will be provided in chapter 5. The results of the questionnaire and the learning material analysis will be compared in chapter 6. Finally, some gathering thoughts and concluding ideas will be given in chapter 7.

2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In this chapter, the theoretical framework of the thesis is presented. First, the processes of acquiring and learning a language as well as some factors affecting these processes will be discussed, followed by a defining section of the central concept, early English. The differences between second and foreign language learning, Finnish school system and the national core curriculum will also be covered. Finally, earlier research in the field of early language teaching and learning will be introduced.

2.1 The process of acquiring a language

Communication is a crucial part of interaction between living creatures. Although sometimes assumed to only be a human feature, the ability to communicate is not only limited to humans. Animals also communicate with each other in their own special ways. For example, dogs communicate with other dogs by sniffing each other and can signal fear by lowering their ears and tail. However, there are two key features that distinguish human communication from other mammals. These two features are the size and complexity of the human brain and the ability to communicate through speech (Randall, 2007). Although the size of the human brain has been mentioned as one of the key features enabling the use of intricate communication patterns, it is actually not only the size that matters. Loritz (1999, 53) states that both whales and elephants are equipped with a bigger set of brains than humans. Hence when it comes to intelligence, it is not the size but the overall proportion of the brain compared to the rest of the body that matters. Humans have the largest brain when the weight of the brain is compared to the size of the body (ibid.). The parts of the brain most vital for language are located in the left hemisphere just above the left ear. The two areas central to language production and comprehension are called the Broca's area and the Wernicke's area. The production of speech is generated in Broca's area, while the comprehension of speech happens in Wernicke's area (ibid. 7). Damage to either of these two areas compromises the language abilities of an individual massively. Damage affecting Broca's area leads to difficulties in producing speech. A person with damage to their Broca's area might, for example, omit all grammatical inflections and only use nouns and verbs in forming sentences. A person with problems in their Broca's area might also have major difficulties with articulation (Kljajevic 2012, 20). As was previously mentioned, Wernicke's area is responsible for the speech comprehension in the brain. People who have

experienced lesions to their Wernicke's area might be able to produce words effortlessly, but the produced speech comes out as unrecognizable to other people. Although exceedingly pivotal, the areas of Broca and Wernicke are not solely responsible for language production and comprehension. Loritz (1999, 56-67) mentions, for example, a part of the brain called the cerebellum that controls the fine motor behaviour of speaking, the motor cortex, an area close to Broca's area in the frontal lobe that controls the movement of different muscles necessary for language production and the arcuate fasciculus, a bundle of nerves that connects Broca's area and Wernicke's area. All of the above-mentioned brain parts, the Broca's area, the Wernicke's area, the cerebellum, the motor cortex and the arcuate fasciculus in co-operation with even more parts of the human brain, enable the complexity and uniqueness of human languages.

Randall (2007, 1) states that "Language is uniquely human. No other animal has the ability to communicate with anything like the complexity that humans do". As was mentioned earlier, the key feature that distinguishes animal communication from human communication is the ability to communicate through speech. Humans are not only able to form words to communicate with each other but are also able to modify and use language in intricate ways. What makes human languages special is the possibility to use language to refer to past, present and future, to refer to abstract entities invisible to the naked eye, to create new words and modify old ones, to transfer languages from parents to children and to think and talk about the language itself (Yule 2010, 11-15). All these features of language make human languages special and unique. Researchers have discussed that humans have a natural and innate tendency to absorb languages (Randall 2007, 9). Although innate and natural, the journey to a decent language competence is long and laborious. If the innate potential for this special and unique way of communicating truly exists, how do people then actually transform from a babbling baby into a sophisticated individual using complex well-structured language? According to research (Kisilevsky et al. 2000, Oller et al. 2014), the process of mastering a language begins already in the womb. The end goal, the competence to use language somewhat effortlessly, can be reached by two alternative routes, either by acquiring or learning a language. Therefore, when the general concept of language learning is discussed, a distinction between language learning and language acquisition is often made. The process of acquiring a language will be discussed next, whereas the process of language learning will be further discussed in section 2.2.

Language acquisition is the process where children learn their first language in a natural environment by observing their surroundings and interacting with other language users.

There are certain factors that can disturb the language acquisition process. One of the factors is the lack of interaction with other language users. Davis and Bedore (2013, 2) define interaction as "...the kind of observable properties that occur based on the combined or reciprocal action of two or more physical systems". A plain example of a situation where interaction is occurring is, for example, when a mother is talking and playing with her child. However, interaction does not necessarily require the use of speech but also occurs through facial expressions and gestures. In addition to interaction with other language users, Yule (2010, 171) mentions two other factors that can affect the language acquisition process of an individual. In order for children to acquire a language, they need to be physically mature and able. What this means is that children must be physically able to hear the language being used. If the child is unable to hear the language, the language acquisition process of that child will suffer. The third factor affecting language acquisition is the need to communicate with the language. If the child is for any reason unable or forbidden to use the language, the process of language acquisition will not occur (ibid.). This is what happened to a child called Genie. Discovered in 1970, Genie was isolated and prevented from having a normal childhood. Curtiss (1977, preface xii) describes that Genie was "deprived and isolated to an unprecedented degree. . .". The inhumane treatment of Genie led to a severe lack in her language abilities. Curtiss states that Genie was secluded from normal human interaction and communication from auditory, tactile, and visual stimulation as well as rudimentary human necessities like adequate nutrition (1977, 5-7). Apart from occasional bathroom noises, the only auditory stimulation Genie was able to receive was the canine-like sounds produced by her father and brother (ibid.). The end result of the lingering abuse suffered by Genie led to an almost complete obmutescence. Curtiss (ibid. 9) reports that Genie ". . . was a silent child who did not vocalize in any way, who did not even sob when she cried. "The case of Genie demonstrates how important interaction and communication is for the development of language.

If an infant is provided with opportunities to communicate and interact with other language users and does not have any physical challenges affecting language abilities, the process of language acquisition is likely to occur. As has been mentioned earlier, research has suggested that a child's language acquisition process begins already in their mother's womb. Research has proven that human fetuses start to hear sounds in the womb as early as at about 29 weeks of pregnancy (Kisilevsky et al. 2000). Not only are fetuses able to hear voices, but they are also able to differentiate between different sounds. Kisilevsky and Hains (2011) studied how human fetuses react to their mothers' voices in the womb. The study was conducted by monitoring the fetuses' heart rate responses. The study showed that human

fetuses react to the sound of their mother's voice by an increase in their heart rate at 32-34 weeks of pregnancy. After the child is born, the language acquisition process continues among all normally developed children in a rather similar schedule. This acquisition schedule is connected to the maturation schedule of the child's brain. During the first few years of the child's life, the development of language production and comprehension is fast and immense. According to Davis and Bedore (2013, 1) "Between birth and four or five years of age, children's biologically based capacities, embodied in the production and perception systems, allow them to perceive, process, and produce a broadening array of ideas about their world". To demonstrate the fascinating process of speech development, Fletcher and O'Toole (2015, 84) presented an outline of children's speech production in their first year of life. Fletcher and O'Toole's speech production outline contains four stages. The first stage is called *the phonation stage*. The phonation stage occurs in the first two months of the child's life. During the first months of their lives babies mostly cry, sneeze, cough and burp. In addition to these sounds, babies are able to produce brief vocalization sounds similar to the phonation that occurs in speech. These sounds are produced "with the vocal tract at rest, in a relaxed breathing posture" (ibid). The second stage according to Fletcher and O'Toole (ibid.) is *the primitive articulation stage* which occurs up to four months. At the primitive articulation stage, babies start to modify their vocal tracts while phonating. Babies are also starting to produce their first speech-like sounds. This speech-like sound production is called *cooing*. Cooing relates to the vowel-like sounds /i/ and /u/ and the velar sounds reminiscent to /k/ and /g/ that the child is producing. The third stage in Fletcher and O'Toole's (ibid.) outline occurring between three and eight months is called *the expansion stage*. The name of the third stage indicates what is happening to the child's speech. During the expansion stage, babies form new sounds appear rapidly and start to play with sounds resulting in primitive syllables being produced. Babies are also combining vowel and consonant sounds resulting in a type of speech called *babbling*. The last stage described by Fletcher and O'Toole (ibid) is the so-called *canonical stage* that happens between five and ten months. During this stage, children start to produce sequences of syllables, ultimately leading to actual syllables of speech and then actual words of language.

After the child has gained the ability to form sounds, the next step in the language acquisition process is the forming of words and sentences. Yule (2010, 174) describes these next steps in children's speech development starting from twelve months up to two and a half years. Yule (ibid.) describes the next developmental steps happening in three stages. The first stage where children start to produce recognizable utterances is conveniently called *the one-word stage*. At this stage of speech development, children produce single words like *dog* and

milk to refer to familiar objects from their normal everyday life. The one-word stage is then followed by *the two-word stage*, where the vocabulary of the child expands beyond fifty words. The child also starts to use combinations of the familiar words acquired in the one-word stage. The two-word stage typically begins when the child is eighteen to twenty months old. According to Yule (ibid. 175), the two-word stage is followed by *the telegraphic speech stage*, occurring when the child is between two and two-and-a-half years old. Yule describes that the telegraphic speech stage is characterized by “strings of words (lexical morphemes) in phrases or sentences such as *this shoe all wet*” (ibid.). The sentence *this shoe all wet* demonstrates that the child is now able to form sentences. The sentences are not necessarily grammatically correct but can be identified as sentences with a clear meaning and purpose. In addition to sentence forming, children at the telegraphic speech stage of speech production start to use some grammatical inflections in their speech. By the age of three, the child’s vocabulary has expanded to hundreds of words, and the pronunciation of the child starts to resemble that of an adult.

Levey (2019, 86) describes the next steps in the speech development process by reproducing Roger Brown’s (1973, 249-399) model of the development of morphology. Morphology, or the study of the structure and order of words, starts to fully develop when the child is roughly two-and-a-half-years old. The morphological developments of speech usually follow a similar pattern in children. The first morphological feature appearing in the child’s speech is the presence of the present participle *-ing* roughly at the age of 19-28 months (Levey 2019, 86). After the present participle *ing*, prepositions *in* and *on* in sentences start to appear. The present participle and prepositions *in* and *on* are then followed by the plural marker *-s* in regular plural forms. Yule (2010, 176-177) mentions that this addition of the plural marker *-s* is often overgeneralized in the child’s speech, and the child might add the regular plural marker to all types of words whether or not the words are actually regular or irregular. This overgeneralization results in forms that are ungrammatical like, for example, *mouses* or *gooses*. The regular plural marker *-s* is soon followed by the irregular past tense verb forms of verbs like *go*, *fall*, *come* and *break* (Levey 2019, 86). Yule (2010, 176-177) mentions that children typically use irregular past tense forms before adapting the regular past tense *-ed* ending. Roughly at the same time as the addition of irregular past tense verb forms, the possessive inflection *-s* and the use of different uncontractible copula forms of the verb *to be* start to appear in the child’s language. Indefinite articles *a* and *an* as well as the definite article *the* can be detected when the child is roughly 28 to 46 months old. According to Levey (2019, 86) the last morphological features to appear are the addition of the third person singular present tense *-s*

in verbs, the third person singular irregular verb forms *has* and *does*, uncontractible auxiliary forms of the verb *to be* and the contractible forms of copula and auxiliary *be*.

When the natural development of morphology in children acquiring their first languages is compared to the order in which people learning their second language acquire grammatical morphemes, some major differences can be found. Cook (2016, 31) describes the typical order in which grammar features are taught to beginner level adult second language (from now on L2) learners of English. First the present forms of the verb *to be* are taught, followed by indefinite articles *a* and *an*. After the indefinite articles *a* and *an*, subject pronouns like, for example, *she* in a sentence *She is from Finland* and prepositions *in* and *from* are presented. Only after these four features of grammar, are regular plural forms presented to the L2 adult learners of English. The order in which some of the grammatical features, such as the use of the regular plural ending *-s*, are taught, differs greatly from the way children acquiring their first language (from now on L1) encounter the language. As mentioned earlier, L1 children start to use regular plural forms rather early in their speech. However, according to Cook (ibid.), adult L2 learners of English learn the regular plural ending only after the present tense forms of the verb *to be*, indefinite articles, subject pronouns and some place prepositions are taught. Another difference is that indefinite articles *a* and *an* are taught almost immediately in second language context, whereas in natural speech acquiring process, indefinite articles start to appear rather late. Cook (ibid. 34) continues by presenting Dulay and Burt's 1973 study on how and in which order second language learners learn grammatical morphemes. Dulay and Burt showed Spanish L2 learners of English pictures and asked them to describe in English what the learners saw in the pictures. Dulay and Burt (as cited in Cook 2016, 34) discovered that the first morpheme used was the plural marker *-s*. The second easiest morpheme for the Spanish L2 learners was the present participle *-ing* form. Copula forms of the verb *to be* came third, followed by the auxiliary forms of the same verb. Next the definite and indefinite articles were produced. Irregular past tense forms came sixth in difficulty, followed by the use of the third person *-s*. The last and also the most difficult grammatical morpheme, according to Dulay and Burt's study (ibid.), was the possessive *-s*. The way Spanish L2 learners use morphological features is much closer to the way L1 children use morphological features than what Cook (2016, 31) described to be the typical order within adult beginner level L2 books. Of course, there are some minor differences in the order in which certain morphological features appear in Spanish L2 learners and L1 children. Nevertheless, the morphological features seem to appear relatively at a similar phase. For example, the first three morphological features in both Spanish L2 learners and L1 children are the present participle, the regular plural marker *-s* and

the copula forms of the verb *to be*. However, the order of these three morphological features is different. L1 children use regular plural marker *-s* later than L2 learners. The biggest difference between Spanish L2 learners and L1 children is that L1 children begin to use the possessive *-s* as, for example, *the girl's cat* much earlier than L2 children. In Dulay and Burt's study the possessive *-s* was the most difficult grammatical morpheme for the L2 children to learn and use. These findings underline and support the view that language acquisition and language learning processes do differ from each other and also raise the question of the most beneficial manner and order in which features of language should be taught.

The last feature of language to develop is the syntax or the formation of sentences and phrases. Yule (2010, 178) talks about the development of syntax in the first language acquisition process. The development of syntax advances in three stages, the schedule of which can differ from child to child. Yule (*ibid.*) discusses that the first stage generally occurs between 18 and 26 months, the second stage between 22 and 30 months and the third and last stage between 24 and 40 months. Yule (*ibid.*) specifies the formation of two syntactic structures, the formation of questions and the formation of negatives. When children first start to form questions, they do it by adding a question word like *who* or *where* to the beginning of the sentence or raises the intonation at the end of each sentence. At the second stage of forming questions, more complex questions with more question words are formed, yet the rising intonation at the end of the sentence remains. In the last stage of question forming, the child starts to use auxiliary verbs, and gradually the questions begin to resemble those of adult speakers. The second syntactic structure mentioned by Yule (*ibid.* 179) is the forming of negative sentences. Negatives are first formed by simply adding the negation word *no* or *not* at the beginning of the sentence. The addition of negative forms *can't* and *don't*, and the addition of the words *no* or *not* in front of verbs are developments that happen in the second stage. In the last stage, auxiliaries, such as *won't*, *didn't*, and lastly *isn't* are used in forming questions. As has been discussed, for the most part the process of language acquisition happens naturally, and for the majority of children, in a rather similar manner. However, the process of language learning is something rather different.

2.2 The process of learning a language

There have been multiple different theories on how people should learn and be taught languages. The behaviouristic view of language learning thought that languages are learn

through responding to stimuli and then imitating what was heard (Leslie 2002, 17). The grammar-translation method that has its roots in the traditional teaching methods of Latin, encouraged the use of vocabulary lists, memorization, grammar rules and preferred written language over spoken language (Knapp & Seidlhofer 2009, 345). What can be seen as the opposite of the grammar-translation method is the audiolingual method that became popular in the 1940s and 1950s and through which the spoken language and oral drills became the centre of language learning. The audiolingual method highlighted the importance of native-like pronunciation and rejected the teaching of different grammar rules (Keck and YouJin 2014, 9-10). The latest of the approaches and the one closest to today's teaching methods is the learner-centred approach concentrating on all the form, the structure, the meaning, and the function of the language and also emphasizing learning by doing. This approach is called the communicative approach. The communicative approach accepted learner mistakes as a natural part of the learning experience and placed emphasis on problem solving and learner participation (Shastri 2009, 40). The communicative approach can thus be seen as mimicking the natural language acquisition process more than the other methods mentioned above. However, all the above-mentioned methods differ from the natural way of acquiring languages.

There are some key factors that distinguish the language learning process from the language acquisition process described in the previous section. As was discussed in section 2.1, the process of becoming a competent language user takes both time and effort. This rule of thumb applies to both language learning and language acquisition. However, when the time and effort are placed mostly in an artificial environment, among other language learners, for a limited, often short periods of time, it is evident how language learning and language acquisition processes differ. The word *learning* in the term language learning reveals the manner in which language is encountered in the language learning process. Unlike in the language acquisition process, where the development of language abilities relies on authentic communication situations and the language is used almost unconsciously with other native language users, language learning process demands conscious effort and motivation from the learner. Moreover, in the language learning process, the progress of learning is often measured by different kinds of tests and exams that are designed to measure the amount of knowledge the learner has in each language topic or feature. Another key feature distinguishing language learning and language acquisition processes is that language learning often happens later in life after the learner has already acquired their native language. Therefore, the bases for language learning are different in first and second language learning. If a learner has already acquired their first language, the language learning process of another language can be influenced by the

first language. The influence can have either positive or negative effects on the language learning process of another language. The effects of the influence depend heavily on how much the two languages resemble each other. In addition to differences in time, effort, motivation, authenticity of the learning situations, measurement of progress, and the age of the learner, the learning of a new language is affected by the person in charge of the success of the language learning process and the environment where the language learning process is taking place. The person in charge and responsible for the success and progress of the language learning process is usually a qualified teacher. The influence and purpose of the teacher in the language learning process will be further discussed in section 2.3. The environment of the language learning process has a strong impact on the learning process. When the language that is being learnt exists and can be heard in the surrounding environment of the learner, the learning process is amplified by the constant authentic input provided by the environment. Because of the strong impact of the surrounding environment on language learning, two language learning terms, second and foreign language learning, the definitions of which heavily depend on the surrounding environment, should now be discussed.

The terms second language and foreign language can sometimes be difficult to differentiate. These two terms can even be used interchangeably, but for the sake of this study, it is important to state how these terms are understood here. If we think about the status of the English language in Finland, two different viewpoints can be detected. One way of looking at the status of English in Finland is the famous Three Circle model by Kachru (1992) discussed by Alsagoff (2012, 109-110). In Kachru's 1992 model English is distributed into three circles *Inner Circle*, *Outer Circle* and *Expanding Circle*. The Inner Circle of the model includes countries where English is an official language. Countries belonging to the Inner Circle include, for example, Canada, Australia, and the United States. The Outer Circle contains postcolonial countries of the British Empire, for example, India, Singapore and Nigeria. English has spread to these countries through colonization. In these countries, English has the status of being the language of law, government, and education. Being the language of government, law, and education, English is treated as a second language in these countries. The last circle in Kachru's model is the Expanding Circle. The Expanding Circle countries do not have geographical or historical connections with the English language and primarily only use English when talking with foreigners. In the countries belonging to the Expanding Circle, English is also often taught in schools. In Finland, English is taught in schools. English is not an official language nor is it the language of education, government, and law, thus in Kachru's Three Circle model, Finland belongs to the Expanding Circle and has the status of being a foreign language. However, for

some people, the term foreign language might sound strange considering the fact that English is not exactly that foreign in Finland. This leads to the other viewpoint on the terms second and foreign languages. According to the Official Statistics Finland survey on the English language abilities of Finnish people conducted in 2017, 92 percent of women and 88 percent of men claimed to know at least little English (OSF 2017). One third of the respondents claimed to be a skilled user of English. Moreover, the number of independent users was roughly 36 percent of all respondents. Based on the Official Statistics Finland 2017 survey, it is safe to claim that the English language abilities are at a good level in Finland. Therefore, it can be said that the majority of Finns speak English. Not only are the English language abilities generally good in Finland, but English can also be heard more. Hence people are also more exposed to English. However, the most exposure to English still happens through television, social media, and the Internet. These arguments support the claim that for many people, a more accurate term to describe the status of English in Finland might actually be the term second language as the second language they have learnt. This realization then leads to the second, broader sense of the term second language. In fact, in the broadest sense, the term second language can refer to the order of the learnt languages. Although the status of English might not be that pivotal for ordinary language users, research often distinguishes between second and foreign language learning. As was described in Kachru's model, the term second language in its narrower sense refers to languages that are part of a country's official languages. In Finland, Swedish is taught as a second language because of its status as the second official language of Finland. However, in real life the situation is far more complex. The same Official Statistics Finland 2017 survey that studied the English language abilities in Finland also studied the Swedish language abilities of Finnish people (*ibid.*). The differences in the English and Swedish language abilities are immense. From all the respondents, only 3 percent reported of being a skilled user and 17 percent reported of being an independent user of Swedish. 39 percent of men and 27 percent of women reported to not having any Swedish language abilities. These results support the claim that the official status of a language does not secure a stable position for that language among people. In fact, in many parts of Finland, Swedish is rarely heard and used. Although the second official language of Finland, Swedish is mostly used and heard in the western and southern coast of Finland. Another issue further complicating the status of English is that although both Swedish and English are taught in the Finnish school system, the learning of English starts usually earlier than the learning of Swedish. This then makes the question of what is considered second language and what is considered foreign language even more complicated. In this thesis, English will be treated and discussed as a foreign language.

However, because the vast majority of research and theoretical framework conducted in the fields of language learning and early language learning is dedicated to second language learning, research and theories considering second language learning have been used and referred to in this thesis. Although different, many similarities in second and foreign language learning can be spotted, and thus theories dealing with second language learning can be utilized here as well. As was mentioned, the learning of English starts earlier than the learning of Swedish in Finnish primary schools. The earlier start of English will be discussed next.

2.3 What is early English?

The term early English in the Finnish context refers to the concept where the learning of A1-level English starts in the first grade in Finnish primary schools. In the autumn of the year 2019, the Finnish government decided to add two weekly lessons per year for A1-level language studies in the first and second grades. What this meant was that by spring 2020, every first grader in Finland had to start their A1-level language studies in the first grade. For years, age has been considered as one of the key factors in the ability to master a language. As mentioned in the introduction, a common belief in the field of language learning has been that the earlier a person starts to learn a language, the better the outcome will be. This claim is one of the core reasons for the decision to move the start of A1-level language studies earlier. The early language teaching and learning model differs greatly from the earlier executed model of language teaching and learning, where the learning of a new language starts in the third grade. It is important to clarify that in this thesis, terms normal and other language learning are used to describe the conditions where children have started their A1-level language studies in the third grade. The pupils in early language learning are not only younger, but they are also equipped with a different set of previous educational knowledge. The methods of early language teaching and learning are also different. In early language learning, the focus of learning is on spoken language, which is introduced through playing, singing, and games. Consequently, the focus of early language learning is more on the communicative side of learning, and the first two years of language learning act as a basic introduction to the new language. Although similar features can be seen in the teaching of third graders, learning in the third grade is more goal-oriented than in the first two years of primary school. The guidelines for teachers on what and how to teach their pupils in their first two years of primary school are given in POPS, which is the National Core Curriculum for primary schools. The national core

curriculum will be further discussed in section 2.4. Although the change in the national curriculum has made the earlier start of A1-level language studies mandatory in all Finnish primary schools, some schools in Finland have been teaching pupils foreign languages in the first grade already before 2020. According to Vipunen (2015), an electric database collecting varying data on education and controlled by Statistics Finland, the Ministry of Education and Culture, the Finnish National Agency for Education, and the Centre for International Mobility, in the year 2015 approximately 4194 pupils started their A1-level foreign language studies in their first grade. This is 6.9 percent of all children that started first grade in 2015. 4 percent of the first graders that started language studies chose English as their first foreign language (ibid.). In 2016, the number of foreign language learners had increased to approximately 6957, and in 2017 the number increased further to approximately 8601 (Vipunen 2016, 2017). A starker increase in the number of first grade foreign language learners could be seen in 2018. In 2018, approximately 14 934 pupils started to learn foreign languages in the first grade (Vipunen 2018). Out of the 14 934 pupils, 10 983 chose English as their first foreign language, which is 17.9 percent of all the first graders in 2018 (ibid.). In 2019, the number of pupils learning foreign languages in their first grade had almost tripled. In 2019, approximately 40 008 pupils started their language studies in the first grade (Vipunen 2019). Once again English gained the largest number of pupils with 35 274 pupils and 57.7 percent choosing English as their first foreign language in Finland (ibid.). What the statistics conducted by Vipunen suggest, is that an interest in early language learning has existed already before the change in the national core curriculum. In other words, there have been people, most likely teachers, and other educational professionals, in Finland who have regarded an earlier start in foreign language learning important while others have not found it necessary.

Early language learning has raised many questions and while others are content that the onset of language learning has been preponed, others are hesitant or strongly against early language learning. It is important to note that changes in the national core curriculum do not happen hastily and the decision to prepone A1-level language studies has been supported with multiple different arguments. The decision to move the start of foreign language studies earlier has been defended by arguing that younger children are less shy and more open to, for example, vocally express themselves without consciously thinking about the possible judgement of others. That is to say that younger children do not feel the pressure of their peers as strongly as older children. Younger children are also often more open to try and test the language independently and less afraid to make mistakes. The older the children grow, the more self-conscious they tend to become. When children are open and eager to learn new languages, and

they do not feel the peer pressure, learning happens more effortlessly. Of course, it is important to note that there are exceptions to this rule, and not all children behave in the previously described manner. In addition to the easier learning enabled by the openness of the younger children and the lack of peer pressure, there are also other reasons why an earlier start to language learning can be seen beneficial. Generally, when people learn languages, they automatically learn about the cultures of the languages as well. Thus, by learning new languages, the children's views of the world broaden simultaneously with the knowledge of the language. One of the defending claims relies on the previously mentioned view that young children learn faster and better than older children. This proposition is the core idea of the critical period hypothesis. The well-known hypothesis in language learning, claiming that the younger a person starts to learn a new language, the better the outcome will be, is called the critical period hypothesis. The critical period hypothesis refers to the notion that young children acquire new languages easier and that the ability to learn new languages decreases rapidly with age. The critical period hypothesis has faced a lot of controversy over the years. However, other research has offered supporting arguments for the critical period hypothesis. One of the supporting arguments is Bley-Vroman's fundamental difference hypothesis first proposed in 1989. Bley-Vroman's fundamental difference hypothesis (2009) claimed that when adults are learning new languages they need to rely on general problem-solving procedures because the children's inborn mechanisms are no longer working in adulthood. In other words, Bley-Vroman's fundamental difference hypothesis claims that adults do not have access to Chomsky's universal grammar which then results in failure in learning languages in adulthood. Bavali and Sadighi (2008, 12) define Chomsky's Universal Grammar as ". . . not an account of the grammar of an individual language (e.g. English, or French). It is, more precisely, a theory of grammar. . . ". The idea of universal grammar is usually understood as a set of universal rules that humans possess and are able to utilize when learning languages. This innate, genetically determined set of universal grammar rules help children learn languages faster and easier. In the background of the critical period hypothesis is the idea that if a person starts to learn a new language after a certain age, it is nearly impossible to gain native like proficiency in that language. The summary of this claim is that pronunciation is easier to learn at a younger age. The better possibilities in achieving native-like proficiency and pronunciation are also arguments that have been used to rationalize early language learning in the Finnish primary school. However, the "younger thus better" argument has been questioned by Singleton & Lengyel. Singleton & Lengyel state that ". . . the 'younger = better in the long run' version of the CPH in respect of second language learning needs to be seen in the perspective

of a general tendency and not as an absolute, immutable law” (1995, 4). Singleton & Lengyel (ibid.) continue that an early start does not guarantee a natively like proficiency in a second language and thus could not be seen as a universally adequate requirement. After all, there are people in this world that have mastered languages even in later stages of life.

As was said earlier, the critical period hypothesis has evoked discussion among researchers for decades. Some researchers think that the critical period is crucial in achieving native like proficiency, while others have a more critical standpoint to the hypothesis, and question the effects and influence the ending of the critical period truly has on people’s ability to learn new languages. Although the critical period hypothesis has been widely studied, researchers have failed to determine the age when the alleged critical period ends. Nevertheless, some estimations have been made. Research has suggested different ending ages for the critical period varying from five years to fifteen years (Hakuta et al. 2003, 31). For some people, the fact that researchers have not been able to agree on the ending age of the critical period has influenced the credibility of the entire hypothesis. In addition to the ending of the possible critical period, researchers have also identified other influential factors for the decreasing language learning abilities in older learners. Hakuta et al. (ibid.) mention that one major factor affecting person’s ability to learn new languages is the social circle of that person. As was mentioned earlier, people tend to become more self-conscious when they get older. The need to belong to a social group and the importance of maintaining your status in that group have an immense effect, especially among teenage language learners. Hakuta et al. (ibid.) also mention education as one of the factors that can affect people’s ability to learn new languages. Hakuta et al. (2003) studied how the age of language acquisition affects second language proficiency. The native Spanish or Chinese participants of the study had been exposed to English in variety of ages and had been living in the United States for at least ten years. The results of the study contradict with the critical period hypothesis. The results showed that there was no clear evidence for the existence of critical periods, and that the ability to learn languages declines steadily throughout a person’s life (Hakuta et al. 2003, 37). Hakuta et al. (ibid.) added that in the study, the most important factors affecting the language learning of an individual were the age of immigration, formal education, and socioeconomic factors, and conclude that although second-language proficiency decreases with increasing age of initial exposure, the pattern of decline did not follow the constraints of the critical period hypothesis. Snow and Hoefnagel-Höhle (1978) studied English speakers’ ability to learn Dutch in the Netherlands. The purpose of their study was to test the critical period hypothesis. Snow and Hoefnagel-Höhle’s (ibid.) study showed that two groups of the participants, the adult group and the 12-15 years olds’ age

group progressed the fastest during the first few months. The most surprising discovery was that after the first year of learning Dutch, the 8-10 and 12-15-year-olds had gained the best knowledge of Dutch, and the youngest group, the 3-5-year-olds, had the slowest progress in all of the groups. This study also contradicts with the whole idea of critical periods. Whether or not age is the determining question in language learning, the reality is that age does have an effect on people and especially on the brain. Nikolov (2009, 2) mentions two ways how age affects the acquisition of implicit competence, biologically and cognitively. Nikolov (ibid.) describes that age affects language learning biologically because “the plasticity of the procedural memory for language gradually decreases after about age five. . .” .Nikolov (ibid.) continues that from the age of seven, the reliance on conscious declarative memory starts to increase. Although, the existence of a critical period for language learning has not been proven, researchers are unanimous that the general learning abilities do decrease with age.

The reliability of the critical period hypothesis is not the only issue that has made people doubt early language teaching and learning. Other issues have also made people question the importance of early language learning. One of the reasons objecting early language learning is the fact that first grade pupils are very young and only just starting their school journey. The first grade has typically admitted resources from subject education to behaviour and social education. Another worrying factor, especially among parents, is the amount of work and pressure first grade pupils have to face and also the amount of new information their children have to learn already in their first year of school. First grade teachers have also been vocal about the workload placed on first grader pupils and about the realities of learning a new language when you are still learning to read and write in your first language. Some people might even think that learning a new language is not that important and subjects like mathematics, reading and writing should be favoured in the first years of primary school. Moreover, because of the growing number of subjects to learn, there are time restriction that need to be solved. Parents and teachers are worried that there is not enough time in a school day to learn all the necessary things, and thus the starting of the language studies should stay in the third grade. What makes matters even more complicated is the fact that there is an ongoing debate over who should teach early English classes to children. In Finland, teachers can be roughly divided into classroom teachers and subject teachers. There are also other kinds of teachers, like special education teachers, but they will not be discussed here. Classroom teachers have a master’s degree in education, and they specialize in all subjects that are taught in the Finnish primary school. Classroom teachers’ education focuses specifically on how certain aspects of different subjects should be taught to young children. The general principle

in the basic education act is that graduated classroom teachers are qualified to teach their pupils everything that is demanded in the national core curriculum, including English and Swedish. Regardless of this, some people argue that only subject teachers, whose degree and education concentrates on the peculiarities of language learning and teaching, should teach early English. This claim is supported by the fact that subject teachers have a master's degree in a specific language, for example, English or German, and are trained and educated to know more about that specific language. University students, who master in languages, have the possibility to study education as their minor subject to gain the proficiency to teach and become subject teachers. The question of who should teach early language is made even more complicated by the fact that in some cities in Finland, only subject teachers are allowed to teach English, while in other cities, classroom teachers are allowed to teach English. One argument favouring classroom teachers is that their education specializes in different ways of teaching small children, unlike subject teachers' training, which concentrates more on the language rather than teaching. On the other hand, an argument favouring subject teachers is the fact that because the mastering of the pronunciation of a language has been linked to young age, the readiness of the teacher to speak the language is crucial in learning the correct pronunciation. Classroom teachers might lack the readiness and skills to teach pronunciation. Nevertheless, whether the early language curriculum is taught by a classroom teacher or a subject teacher, the contents of early language are straightforward. The goals and purpose of early language teaching and learning are written and controlled by the national core curriculum. The Finnish national core curriculum will be discussed next.

2.4 Finnish education system and the national core curriculum

In Finland, children start their twelve-year basic education in the autumn of the year they turn seven. Before describing the national core curriculum in connection with early English, the structure of language syllabi in the national core curriculum should be discussed. As was mentioned in the introduction, the teaching of the first foreign language has traditionally started in Finnish primary schools in the third grade. The first foreign language syllabus, which is called the A1 syllabus, is mandatory for all children. As was discussed in section 2.3, the first foreign language chosen by Finnish pupils is usually English. According to Vipunen database, in 2019, roughly 90 percent of the third graders in Finland studied English as their first foreign language (Vipunen 2019). Although the majority of Finnish children start to learn English as their first foreign language, other languages can be chosen as well. The choice of the mandatory A1 language syllabus depends on the resources schools have to offer and the pupils' own interests. After the start of the mandatory A1 syllabus, the pupils have a choice of starting another language syllabus called the A2 syllabus in grades 3-6. The A2 syllabus languages have traditionally been German, Russian or French. However, the language options vary greatly depending on the resources each school has to offer. Some general unfairness with the choosing of the A2 language syllabus can be detected. One of the issues generating unfairness is that often the smaller the city, the fewer selection of languages possibilities are available. One factor affecting the language repertoire of smaller cities is that smaller cities might have difficulties finding competent language teachers. For years, people have been moving to larger cities which then inevitably leaves the countryside empty. This then leads to the inevitable problem of shortage in competent teachers and further to narrower language possibilities in smaller cities. Another issue affecting the A2 language choices is the decrease in the interest in learning multiple languages. A common situation is that there just are not enough pupils interested in learning smaller languages and together with the lack of resources, schools will not provide a syllabus for that language. Unfortunately, the above-mentioned factors place pupils in unequal positions. Luckily, efforts in raising the interest in language learning have already been made. The early language syllabus along with other projects targeting smaller languages are trying to tackle the problem in the lack of interest in learning languages. Although some language syllabi may not gain the same number of pupils as before, the execution of some language syllabi have been secured by the national core curriculum. As has been mentioned earlier, Finland has two official languages, and hence, in addition to the A1

syllabus, another mandatory language syllabus exists in the national core curriculum. The other mandatory language syllabus in the Finnish basic education is called the B1 syllabus. The change in the national core curriculum affected both the A1 syllabus and the B1 syllabus. Before the change in the national curriculum, the mandatory B1 syllabus started in the 7th grade in many Finnish schools. Now the B1 syllabus starts in the 6th grade and is usually the second official language. This means Swedish for Finnish children and Finnish for the Swedish-speaking Finns. Lastly, in addition to A1, A2, and B1 language syllabi, the option of another additional language syllabus, the B2 syllabus is possible in the upper comprehension school in grades 7-9. The B2 syllabus languages can include, for example, French or Spanish. Unfortunately, similar problems with the lack of interest and resources mentioned in connection with the A2 syllabus also apply to the B2 syllabus.

The national core curriculum sets the framework for teaching and learning in the Finnish school system. There are some aspects of language learning in the national core curriculum that are repeated in every grade in the Finnish primary school. One of core values recurring in the national core curriculum is the purpose of language teaching and learning. The purpose of language teaching is to help the pupils become residents of the multicultural world and encourage them to use language freely in different authentic language situations (POPS 2014, 242). There are similarities in early language learning and other language syllabi. The purpose and goals for early language learning have been lined in the additional part of the national core curriculum published in 2019. In the 2019 addition to the national core curriculum, it is said that the purpose of early language teaching is to evoke and strengthen the pupils' attitudes toward language learning, support pupils' views in their abilities to learn languages and encourage pupils to use their language skills proudly (POPS 2019, 25). Although the purpose of teaching and learning is rather similar, the contents and methods in early language learning differ greatly. The teaching of early language highlights varying ways of learning as well as joyfulness, playing and verbal interaction (ibid.). The addition to the national core curriculum (ibid.) also emphasises that reading and writing skills are not required in early language learning. The ability to learn and understand basic level vocabulary, the ability to use the learnt knowledge in verbal learning situations and the ability to learn about the pronunciation of the language are goals mentioned for early language learning (ibid.). When the early language syllabus is compared with other A1-level syllabi, the goals for language learning are somewhat different. In the third grade, the knowledge of language features and topics is expanded overall. Moreover, one of the major goals for language learning in, for example, third grade is to use language in all kinds of situations by using hearing, reading,

speaking, and writing skills (POPS 2014, 244). The notion of written language is thus added to the language learning process. Moreover, the features and topics of grammar are increasingly added to be a part of the teaching and learning from the third grade onward.

2.5 Early language learning research

Research on foreign and second language learning is always beneficial for the future generations. Particularly now that the interest in language learning has been decreasing in the last years, research on language learning has a pivotal role in trying to turn the curve upwards. Nikolov (2009, 1) mentions that in recent years more and more studies have turned their focus on foreign language teaching and learning in contexts where most of the learning happens in a controlled environment, for example, in a classroom. Early language learning and the age of immersion have increasingly interested researchers for years all over the world. Already in 1981, Genesee studied how the age of immersion of French affected students in Canada. The study was conducted in Canada where both English and French are official languages. The study included three groups of students, early immersion students, one-year late immersion students, and two-year late immersion students. The results of the study showed that from these three student groups, two had reached a higher level of proficiency in French (Genesee 1981, 115). The student groups that reached the higher level of proficiency were the early immersion students and two-year late immersion students. However, in the higher grades the differences between the three student groups started to decrease (ibid.). This study proves that the age of immersion is always not an affecting factor in the language learning process. Other interesting studies in the field of early language learning not concentrating on the age factor have also been conducted. One of the methods of teaching supported by the national core curriculum in early language learning is the use of music. Fisher (2001) studied the effects of music in early language learning by studying four teachers. Two of the teachers in Fisher's study used music in their teaching while the other two did not. The results of the study showed that music had positively influenced the pupils reading and oral language skills (Fisher 2001, 46-47). Research on early language learning is especially important in order to gain further knowledge of the advantages and disadvantages the earlier start may have on the pupils' knowledge of the language.

Although, early language teaching and learning has interested researchers for decades, only a handful of research on the subject has been published in Finland in the recent years. The

lack of studies in the field of early language teaching and learning has been one of the key reasons for conducting the present study. However, some studies in early language learning have been conducted also in Finland. A large portion of the studies have concentrated on teachers' and pupils' attitudes towards early English. Impilä and Heilä's (2020) master's thesis studied classroom teachers' attitudes towards early language learning. The results of Impilä and Heilä's study showed that the overall attitude towards early English among classroom teachers is positive. 67 percent of the respondents in Impilä and Heilä's study felt that the earlier onset of foreign language learning is a good and positive change (ibid.). Moreover, 72 percent of the respondents thought that early language learning has an effect on pupils' language learning abilities in the future (ibid.). The results of the study support the positive impacts early language learning can have on young children. Lahdenoja (2019) studied in her bachelor's thesis how Finnish children experience the teaching of English and Swedish in preschool. Lahdenoja (ibid.) discovered that Finnish preschool pupils thought that foreign language learning is meaningful. In addition, the pupils' overall attitude towards language learning in preschool was positive, and the pupils were eager to learn new languages. Lastly, Nieminen (2021) studied in her master's thesis teachers' views on different early English teaching materials. Nieminen (ibid.) found that there is no straightforward answer to which early English teaching material is the best alternative and that teachers' perceptions on the learning materials vary immensely. Moreover, Nieminen (ibid.) discovered that the choosing of teaching materials is most heavily influenced by the pupils. Although the above-mentioned studies have provided interesting ideas in the field of early language learning, there is still room left for the current study.

3 DATA AND METHODS

In this chapter, the methods and the data of the thesis are presented. The study is a mixture of both quantitative and qualitative methods. The research methods will be first discussed in section 3.1. The data of the study consisted of two parts, the analysis of the learning materials and the analysis of the responses on the questionnaire. The data of the thesis will be discussed in section 3.2. Section 3.2 is further divided into two individual sub-sections. Sub-section 3.2.1 depicts the learning materials, and section 3.2.2 describes the questionnaire part of the data. Finally, in section 3.2.3 a definition of the respondents of the questionnaire will be provided.

3.1 Qualitative or quantitative methods

The decision of which methods one should use in one's research depends on many aspects. When choosing suitable research methods, one has to ponder what the main purpose of one's research is. Müller (2012, 88) states that "there are maximally emergent and methodologically flexible qualitative studies that furnish detailed investigations of complex, contextually embedded (and context-dependent) phenomena." Moreover, O'Dwyer and Bernauer (2014, 36-37) state that ". . . qualitative research can provide a rich and deep understanding of complex phenomena." Because the purpose and the goal of the present study was to not only examine various A1-level English learning materials but also further understand the reasons for the possible similarities and differences between the learning materials, the study can be seen as representing qualitative research. Müller (2012, 89) continues that in qualitative research the basis of research lies in the observations made by examining the data, and further explains (ibid. 100) that qualitative studies often utilize multiple data sources like, for example, interviews, conversations, and questionnaires. As stated by Müller (ibid.), qualitative research is based on examining and observing the research data. The core of this study was formed by analysing different English A1-level learning materials as well as the responses to the questionnaire. The results of the two analyses were then examined and compared by using qualitative methods. However, the study does not solely present qualitative research, and methods of quantitative research were also used. In quantitative research, the research methods differ from those of qualitative research. O'Dwyer and Bernauer (2014, 45-46) summarize the difference between qualitative and quantitative research by stating that ". . . qualitative methods tend to generate theories (inductive), while quantitative methods tend to test theories or hypothesis (deductive)." Moreover, O'Dwyer and Bernauer (ibid. 5) define quantitative

research as a form of research that “seeks to discover new knowledge by simplifying complexities in setting that tend to be more contrived.” When qualitative research collects data by interviewing and conversing, quantitative research often relies on different sets of statistics that measure the phenomena under examination. The usual way of collecting data in quantitative research is through surveys and questionnaires. In the present study, quantitative methods like the use of multiple-choice questions in the self-administered questionnaire and the use of figures and tables demonstrating some of the results of the learning material and questionnaire analysis were used. However, the analysis of the open-ended questions of the questionnaire as well as the further description and deliberation of the two analyses present qualitative research methods in this study. Thus, the study can be classified as a mixture of both qualitative and quantitative research.

3.2 Data

The data of the thesis consisted of two main parts, the analysis of the learning materials and the analysis of the responses to the self-administered electronic questionnaire. First, the learning materials were analysed in order to gain an insight in the differences and similarities between early language learning materials and other A1-level learning materials. The analysis of the learning materials examined in the study consisted of three digital coursebooks from two of the largest publishing companies in Finland, SanomaPro and Otava. After the learning materials were examined, the responses to the questionnaire were analysed. The results of the two analyses were then compared, and further conclusions were made.

3.2.1 The learning materials

The term *learning materials* can be used to refer to multiple different kinds of materials designed for learning purposes. Learning materials can consist of games, PowerPoint presentations, videos, and more conventionally coursebooks. The emergence of digital learning materials is also something that has to be considered in the 21st century. The number of English learning materials available for language teachers and pupils saw an increase in the late 1980s and 1990s (Arnold and Rixon 2008, 39), and hence a myriad of different kinds of materials can be found both in stores and online. Arnold and Rixon (ibid.) explain the increase in the variety of different English learning materials with politico-economic factors, due to which many countries started to favour English as the global language of communication, education, and

business. Learning materials are not only tools for visualizing and distributing knowledge but can also have an enormous effect on the language learning process. If the learning materials are designed to support the language learning process in an age-appropriate and interesting manner, the positive influence can further push the learning experience and the overall motivation to study. On the contrary, if the learning materials do not support the learning process by, for example, providing inadequate challenge or tedious exercises, the learning process and the motivation of an individual can greatly suffer. Nowadays one of the thriving forces in the production and development of learning material is the use of authentic texts and speech. The importance of authentic content in language learning is also highlighted in the national core curriculum (POPS 2014, 219). Mishan (2003, 21) also highlights the importance of authentic texts in language learning and states that the use of authentic texts strengthens and supports the language learning process.

The learning materials examined in this study included coursebooks *High five!* 1-2, *High five!* 3 from Otava and *Go!* from SanomaPro. As mentioned previously, two of the books have been designed and marketed for early language learning purposes, and the third coursebook represented other A1-level English learning materials. Out of the three coursebooks, *High five!* 1-2 and *Go!* represented the materials for early language learning, and *High five!* 3 represented learning materials for third graders. All of the above-mentioned coursebooks were examined in their electronic form by utilizing the digital materials provided by the publisher. *High five!* and *Go!* learning materials were selected because of the fact that both series contain learning materials for both early language learning and other A1-level learning purposes. From the three A1-level English learning materials general observations regarding the structure, contents and the teachers' materials were first examined. After the examination of the general qualities of the learning materials, features of phonetics, grammar, and vocabulary were studied and compared.

3.2.2 Questionnaire

Iwaniec (2020, 325) talks about the use of questionnaires as a fast and efficient way of gathering answers from large groups of people. Iwaniec (ibid.) mentions also other advantages in questionnaires, like the anonymity of the respondents and the overall convenience of questionnaires. The need to reach teachers all around the country and gather data anonymously served as some of the motivating factors for choosing questionnaire as a method of data collecting in this thesis. The questionnaire of the study was a self-administered electronic

questionnaire that consisted of four separate parts (see Appendix A). As was mentioned in section 3.1, the questionnaire contained both multiple-choice and open-ended questions. In the first part of the questionnaire, the respondents were asked to provide some basic demographic information like age, region, profession, nationality, and teaching experience of each themselves. Any identifying information, such as the name of the respondents, were not collected to ensure the complete the anonymity of the respondents. The second part of the questionnaire included questions concerning early English learning materials, and the questions in the second part handled exclusively early English learning materials. In the second part, the respondents were asked, for example, if they teach grammar to their early English pupils and what they think is emphasized in the early English materials they use. The third part of the questionnaire was similar to the second part but this time the questions concerned other A1-level English learning materials. The last part of the questionnaire consisted of open-ended questions about early English in general and also questions about the possible differences between early English and other A1-level English syllabi. A section where the respondents were able to freely express any other opinions was also provided. The questionnaire was submitted into six teaching and learning groups in the online social networking service Facebook. The six Facebook groups where the questionnaire was submitted included *Alakoulun aarreaitta*, *Toiminnallinen kielenoppiminen*, *High Five!*, *Englannin opettajat*, *Alakoulun kielenopetus*, *Varhennettu kielenopetus ja kielirikasteinen oppiminen*.

In addition, it is important to note that in the questionnaire the respondents were advised not to answer the questions that did not concern them. For example, if a respondent did not have experience in early English, they were asked to skip the second part of the questionnaire, which solely handled early language learning. Thus, in the questionnaire results, the number of respondents can vary from one question to another. The respondents of the questionnaire are further discussed next.

3.2.3 Respondents of the questionnaire

The questionnaire yielded 19 responses altogether. From the 19 people who answered the questionnaire, 18 were women. One respondent chose the option “prefer not to say”. The respondents were asked to provide information about their age. The ages of the respondents ranged from 36 years to 57. All except one of the respondents reported being Finnish and also speaking Finnish as their mother tongue. In the questionnaire, the respondents were also asked to choose the residential area they inhabit. From the responses, it can be noted that the

questionnaire reached teachers from different parts of Finland. However, little over half of the respondents (52.6 percent) stated to be living in the capital region. The distribution of the regions can be seen in Figure 1.

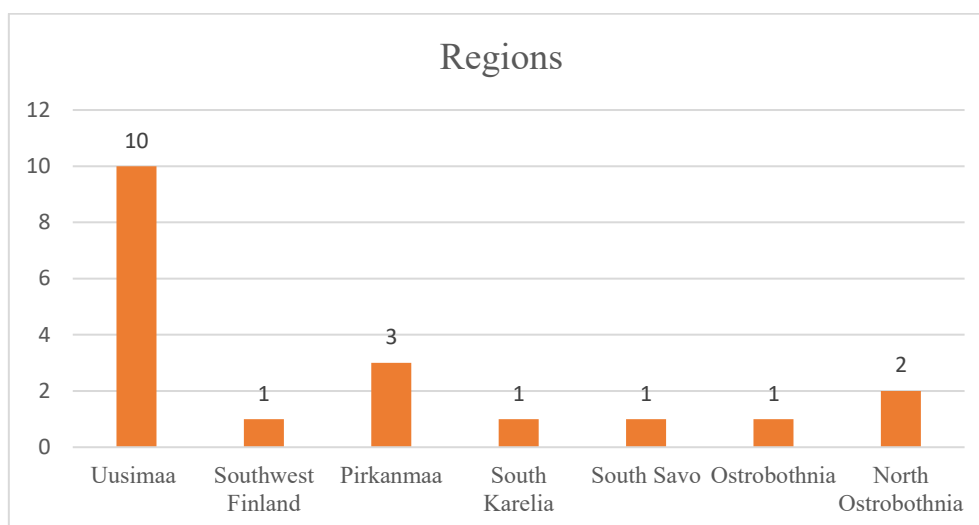


Figure 1. The distribution of respondent's domicile

In the questionnaire, the respondents were also asked about their education and teacher experience. The respondents had the option of choosing from three education options which were classroom teacher, subject teacher, or both. 33 percent of the respondents chose the option 'classroom teacher', 56 percent chose the 'subject teacher' option, and 11 percent chose the option 'both'. The 'both' options included the education of both classroom and subject teacher. One respondent did not choose any option. The distribution of the respondents' profession can be seen in Figure 2. In addition to their profession, the respondents were asked about other teaching subjects. The majority of the respondents (16 out of 19) reported of having other teaching subject along with English. The quantity of other teaching subjects relates to the notion of profession and clarifies the division of the classroom teachers and subject teachers. What is meant by this is that in the responses, other teaching subjects can roughly be divided into two classes, other languages such as German, Spanish, Russian, and Swedish taught by subject teachers, and humanities and natural science subjects like religion and science, art, and skill subjects like crafts and mathematics taught by classroom teachers.

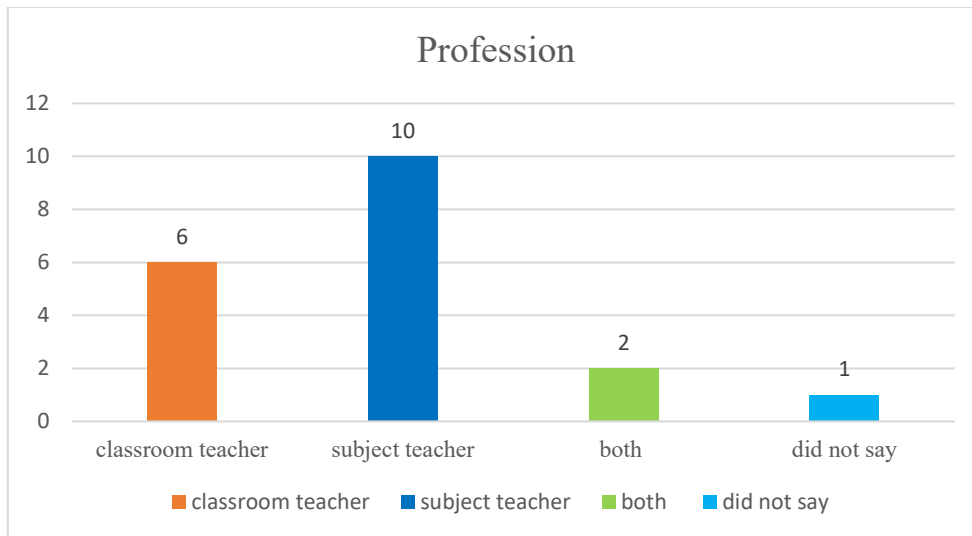


Figure 2. The distribution of the respondents' professions

In Figure 3, the experience of the respondents can be seen. The experience of the respondents varied greatly. However, none of the respondents were first year teachers. The lack of first year teachers might be based on the realisation that first year teachers typically find the first year very challenging and time-consuming and thus might not find it necessary to answer questionnaires. Out of the respondents, 5 percent had been teaching for 2-4 years, 16 percent had been teaching for 5-10 years, 10 percent had been teaching for 11-15 years, 11 percent had been teaching for 16-20 years, 42 percent had been teaching for 21-25 years, and finally 16 percent had been teaching over 25 years. Thus, the majority of the respondents (95 percent) had a long history in teaching, and over half of the respondents (58 percent) had been teaching for more than 21 years. The high level of experience does highlight that the respondents were well experienced and adds to the reliability of their responses.

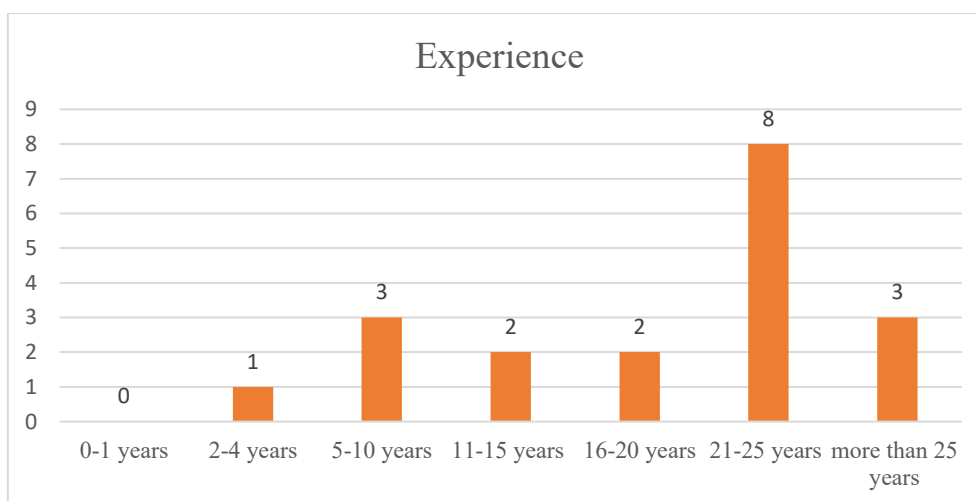


Figure 3. The distribution of the respondents' teaching experience

When asked about the grades the respondents were teaching 26.3 percent answered 1st grade, 52.6 percent answered 2nd grade, 42.1 percent answered 3rd grade, and 15.8 percent choose the option all of the above. In 84.2 percent of the schools the onset of A1-level English was in the 1st grade autumn. In 10.5 percent, the studying of the A1-level English started in 1st grade spring, and in 5.3 percent it started in 3rd grade autumn. The fact that most of the respondents answered that the A1-level English studies start in the 1st grade autumn was not surprising considering the change in the national core curriculum that made the earlier start obligatory. What is more surprising is the notion that still in the spring of 2020, there was one school where the teaching of A1-level English had not started in the first year of primary school.

4 ANALYSIS OF THE TEXTBOOKS

In this chapter, the analysis of the three coursebooks *High five!* 1-2 and *High five!* 3 from Otava and *Go!* from SanomaPro will be presented. All of the learning and teaching materials were analysed by using the digital versions of the abovementioned coursebooks. The decision to use digital versions instead of printed versions was made in order to gain an all-encompassing view of the learning materials from both pupils' and teachers' viewpoints. First in section 4.1, some general observations of the three learning materials will be presented. In section 4.2, an analysis of the phonetical features found from the materials will be provided, followed by analyses of the grammar features in 4.3 and the vocabulary features in section 4.4.

4.1 General observations

The overall appearance of both early language coursebooks, *High five!* 1-2 and *Go!* is very colourful, and the books are filled with age-appropriate pictures, which stimulate learning. *High five!* 3 textbook continues the same colourful and playful theme as the early language materials. *High five!* 3 textbook contains pictures, which can be divided into cartoonish looking representations of the characters of the texts and authentic real-life pictures of, for example, London. Unlike *High five!* 3 textbook, *High five!* 3 activities book does not continue the colourful and playful theme. Opposite to the early language materials and *High five!* 3 textbook, *High five!* 3 activities book is coloured with varying shades of blue, grey, and white and lacks interesting pictures to look at.

When the overall structure of the learning materials is examined, some clear differences and similarities can be seen. One of the major differences in the coursebooks is that both early language learning materials consist of only one book. In both *High five!* 1-2 and *Go!* everything is presented in a single book, whereas *High five!* 3 has two books; a textbook and an activities book. Based on other familiar coursebooks from other A1-level English coursebook series, the general train of thought seems to be that after early language learning, the materials are divided into separate textbooks and activities books. One reason for the division could be that when the pupils grow older and advance in their studies, the number of topics and features to learn and the length of texts increase. This then inevitably leads to more pages and could result in an impractically heavy coursebook to carry.

As was mentioned above, *High five!* 1-2 consists of a single book containing 95 pages. The book starts with a compulsory contents page, followed by an introduction chapter titled *Hi!*. The first chapter of the book works as an introduction to the new language. All in all, there are twelve main chapters in *High five!* 1-2 book located on pages 6-77. The chapters are separated from each other by colour themes, for example, chapter one is coloured light blue and chapter eight is pink. The chapters follow a simple and clear pattern. Each chapter starts with a two-page spread titled *Ready, steady, go*. The *Ready, steady, go!* pages work as an introduction to the theme of the chapter. In the *Ready, steady, go* section, the key words and phrases of each chapter are introduced to the learners. The *Ready, steady, go* pages only include minor listening, speaking or repetition exercises. The first part of the introductory spread, the *ready* section, serves as a general introduction to the theme and includes pictures related to the theme. For example, in the *ready* section of chapter one, the theme of the chapter is numbers hence pictures of different number of tomatoes can be seen. The number of tomatoes increases up to twelve, which suggests that the pupils are meant to learn numbers from one to twelve in this chapter. The *steady* section then continues the introduction of the theme by deepening the notion of numbers by presenting different pictures accompanied by English words. In the pictures, the same number of objects as the number in question is pictured. For example, with number six, six footballs can be seen in the picture. In the *steady* section of chapter one, the number theme is expanded by adding English written words to pictures. Moreover, the *steady* section has two levels of which the pupils can choose. In the level one recording, students can only hear the phrases and words central for each chapter. In the level two recording, the students are first advised to repeat the words like in the level one recording but after that to copy the words and discuss the pictures in English with a pair. In the *go* section of chapter one, a large picture of a schoolyard with pupils in school uniforms can be seen. This section is once again further introducing and explaining the theme of the chapter. Because there is no text in the *go* section, the pupils have to rely only on their hearing. Actually, from the three introductory sections, two (*ready* and *go*) place emphasis almost completely on the pupils' abilities to listen. There are no written words in the *ready* and *go* sections of the book. The reliance on listening exercises complies to the norms of early language learning but I cannot help but wonder what the teaching and learning of early English with pupils who have difficulties with their hearing would look like. After the *Ready, steady, go* section, the chapter continues with a two paged exercise section. There are roughly four exercises with varying instructions in each chapter. Three of the four exercises can be seen as participatory exercises where the pupils have to, for example, draw, colour, or connect dots, and the fourth exercise in the exercise pages is typically

a song relating to the general theme. As was mentioned, the exercises rely heavily on listening, drawing, colouring, and joining dots. The ability to write is not needed in most of the exercises. This lack of writing exercises is in level with the national core curriculum's views of spoken language as the main focus of early language learning. Finally, as a concluding part of each chapter, a spread with a game and a section where the pupils can test what they have learnt in each chapter is provided. After the twelve main chapters, a *Go ahead* section with extra exercises for each chapter, a section of pages dedicated for the four seasons of the year, and a section titled *My words* where pupils can draw and write what they like are provided. All in all, a very limited amount of written text can be seen in the early language learning material *High five!* 1-2.

The structure of the second early language learning material, *Go!* from SanomaPro is also clear and simple. However, the structure of the book is not as well organized as *High five!* 1-2. The early language material published by SanomaPro consists of a single book that has 96 pages. The book starts with a contents page from which the number of chapters and the overall structure of the book can be seen. There are fifteen main chapters in *Go!*. This is three chapters more than in the other early language learning material *High five!* 1-2. Like the chapters in *High five!* 1-2, the chapters in *Go!* are also coloured with different colours. Other similarities with *High five!* 1-2 include the starting of the coursebook with an introductory spread. *Go!* starts the learning of the English language by providing an introductory spread titled *Hello!*. In the introductory spread *Hello!* a two-paged picture of London can be seen. The picture is accompanied with a recording that has a small discussion from an ice-cream buying situation. In the picture of the introductory spread, many objects and items related to the British culture can be seen. Objects like the flag of the United Kingdom, black cabs, double decker busses, and familiar tourist attractions can be seen. After the introductory section, the first of the main chapters starts on page six. The fifteen main chapters in *Go!* are located on pages 6- 96. Unlike *High five!* 1-2, *Go!* does not separate the contents of each chapter any further. The chapters start with a page sized picture that introduces the theme of the chapter. For example, in chapter one, the main characters are pictured in the backyard of their house. After the picture page, chapter one continues with exercises where the pupils are instructed to listen and repeat. In addition to exercises, songs are added to introduce the key vocabulary. The emphasis on listening and hearing exercises at the beginning of each chapter is repeated through the entire coursebook. An exercise type where the pupils are instructed to write single letters of the alphabet is provided in all of the main chapters except for the last chapter. This type of exercise cannot be found from *High five!* 1-2 book. The addition of such an exercise supports the

learning of alphabets and is an age-appropriate challenge for the early language pupils. Although a lot of the exercises in the early language book *Go!* favour listening and speaking, there are also exercises where the pupils are instructed to use pencils and mark their answers on the pages. Like *High five!* 1-2, *Go!* also utilizes numbering, joining lines, and circling in answering the questions in the exercises. Contrary to *High five!* 1-2, *Go!* uses considerably fewer drawing exercises. In each chapter, the exercise pages are followed by a game page. At the end of each chapter, an exercise testing what the pupils have learnt in this chapter and an exercise where the pupils can self-evaluate what they have learnt are provided.

The other A1-level English learning materials are represented by *High five!* 3 in this thesis. *High five!* 3 course material consists of two books, the textbook with texts, games, and key vocabulary, and the activities book with the exercises. First, *High five!* 3 textbook will be discussed. There are 124 pages in *High five!* 3 textbook. This is roughly thirty pages more than what the previously discussed early language learning materials, *High five!* 1-2 and *Go!* have. In the same way as the other two coursebooks, *High five!* 3 textbook starts with a contents section and three introductory chapters titled *Hello!*, *Colourful London* and *Welcome!* Altogether, *High five!* 3 course material consists of sixteen main chapters divided into four units on pages 12-91 in the textbook. Like the previously discussed early language materials, *High five!* 3 textbook also follows a clear and simple pattern throughout the book. As a matter of fact, *High five!* 3 follows a very similar structure to *High five!* 1-2. First the *Ready, steady, go!* pages introduce the theme of the chapter and set the scene for the upcoming text. The *ready* section often includes a song or a short rhyme utilizing words related to the theme of the chapter's main text. The *steady* section introduces the main words used in the upcoming text accompanied by colourful pictures of the words. The *go* section introduces important core phrases in each chapter. Like in *High five!* 1-2, a section titled *Go ahead* providing extra material can also be found in *High five!* 3. According to *High five!* 3 teachers' material, the *Go ahead* section introduces more words and is designed for pupils who advance faster and need extra exercises in class.

There are a few distinct structural features that differentiate *High five!* 3 from the other two learning materials examined in this study. The first difference is that after the *Ready, steady, go* section, the main text of the chapter is introduced. There were no texts in either of the early language learning materials and hence the structure of *High five!* 3 is different. The texts in *High five!* 3 are rather short and consist of short sentences that mainly use main clauses. The main text section of each chapter is then followed by either a section called *Action* that introduces a grammar topic or a section called *Sounds good* that introduces phonetical features

of the English language. The presence of these two sections is the other difference between the early language learning materials and the other learning materials. There are no sections purely dedicated to grammar or phonetic topics in the early language learning materials. The *Action* sections use rhymes which helps the pupils to remember the grammar topics better. After the *Action* section, a game is usually provided. As was mentioned earlier, the textbook is divided into four differently coloured units, each of which contain three basic texts and one revising text formed in a shape of a comic. The colour of unit one is light blue, the colour of unit two is light green, the colour of unit three is red, and the colour of the last unit is purple. This colour division helps the pupils distinguish between the units. Like *High five! 1-2*, *High five! 3* textbook also provides extra material for faster learners on pages 92-99 of the textbook. Moreover, a separate grammar section called *Fingertips* with a more detailed description of the grammar topics is provided towards the end of the textbook on pages 100-116. After the *Fingertips* section, the textbook provides four thematic pages dedicated to seasonal celebrations, page 96 to Halloween, page 97 to Christmas, page 98 to Valentine's Day, and page 99 to Easter. Finally at the end of *High five! 3* textbook, two glossaries can be found. A Finnish-English glossary is located from page 118 to page 124, and an English-Finnish glossary from page 110 to page 117.

The other part of *High five! 3* course material is the activities book. There are 214 pages in *High five! 3* activities book. The number of pages in *High five! 3* activities book outnumbers all the other books. Moreover, if the number of pages in both *High five! 3* textbook and activities book are counted, compared to the 95 pages in *High five! 1-2* and the 96 pages in *Go!*, the 338 pages in *High five! 3* is quite an increase. The increase in the number of pages can be explained with the growing number of language features and the addition of texts. The *High five! 3* activities book consists of different kinds of written and spoken exercises as well as listening exercises for the pupils to practise their English. The structure of the activities book is rather simple and straightforward and complements the textbook. Like the textbook, the activities book starts with a contents section, followed by exercises for the pre-chapters on pages 7-12, a section titled *This is how you learn English* on pages 13-14, and finally exercises for the main chapters on pages 15-181. In the beginning of each chapter, sections titled *I can* and *I'll learn* are presented. The *I can* sections work as a reminder of the matters the pupils have already discussed and learnt earlier in the book. The *I'll learn* sections tell the pupils in advance what they will learn in this chapter. The *I can* and *I'll learn* sections are then followed by *Ready, steady, go* exercises that consists of different kinds of exercises that utilise the core words and phrases of each chapter. The *Ready, steady, go* exercises are differentiated from

other exercises with a deeper blue colour. As one might expect, the *Ready, steady, go* exercises in the activities book are designed to work together with the *Ready, steady, go* pages in the textbook. After the *Ready, steady, go* exercises, the activities book introduces exercises that utilize the text and the main vocabulary of the chapter. This section of the activities book contains a vocabulary list, pair exercises as well as different listening and text comprehension exercises. A stark difference between *High five! 3* activities exercises and *High five! 1-2* exercises can be seen. Generally, in *High five! 3* many of the exercises require writing skills because the pupils are asked to write down their answers. As was previously discussed, *High five! 1-2* mainly uses exercises where the answer is given in some other way. After the text exercises, the book introduces exercises titled either *Action*, *Fingertips* or *Sounds good* where grammatical or phonetical features are practised. In the *Action* and *Fingertips* exercises, grammatical topics also found in the main text are trained. Before the *Fingertips* exercises, a short introduction to the grammar topic of each chapter is provided. If the chapter does not have grammatical topics, this part of the activities book contains *Sounds good* exercises that train the phonological features of each text. After the *Fingertips* or *Sounds good* exercises, a section titled *Now I can* is provided where the pupils can evaluate their learning by doing different exercises that summon what has been learnt in the chapter. After every three chapters, the book summarises what has been learnt with revision exercises. Like most of the other coursebooks, the activities book also introduces extra exercises titled *Go ahead!*. In the activities book, these extra exercises for the faster learners are placed after each chapter. Complementing *High five! 3* textbook, *High five! 3* activities book also contains special exercises for Halloween, Christmas, Valentine's Day, and Easter on pages 199- 202. The final pages of the activities book, pages 203-214, are empty pages for the pupils to make notes, draw or write on.

In addition to differences in the number of books included in the course materials, the number of pages in each book, the layout and some general content differences in the books, differences in the ways the three books assign and give instructions can be seen. In *High five! 3* activities book, all introductions and instructions to exercises are written in Finnish. *High five! 3* textbook does not have written instructions on any of the exercises. The instruction in *High five! 1-2* are not only written in Finnish, but they are also syllabified. The decision to syllabify the instructions in the early English learning material *High five! 1-2* has probably been based on the pupils' still developing ability to read. Because children start to learn how to read and write Finnish at roughly the same time as they start to learn the A1-level English, the decision to syllabify the instructions makes the reading task much easier. Of course, there

are some pupils that have learnt how to read already before coming to school but the reading skill is not required when children start their first grade. An interesting observation can be made in the other learning material designed for early language learning purposes. In *Go!* the instructions have been written in Finnish, but they have not been syllabified. Although not syllabified, some similarities in the ways the two early language learning materials present the exercise instructions can be seen. In both *High five! 1-2* and *Go!*, the instructions are accompanied by an icon demonstrating further the nature of the exercises. In *High five! 1-2* the icons demonstrate whether the exercise is a listening, writing, colouring, or speaking exercise or a game, a song, or a so-called briefcase exercise. These so-called briefcase exercises are extra exercises that are meant to further develop the learners' language skills. In *Go!*, the icons imply whether the exercise in question is a listening, functional, challenge, game, or self-evaluation exercise. The use of icons helps the pupils gain knowledge of the nature and type of the exercise without requiring the reading skill. There are also some icons demonstrating the nature and type of the exercise in *High five! 3* activities book. However, the number and the variety of icons is not as vast as in the two early language learning materials. Some of the exercises in *High five! 3* are marked with a set of headphones to mark a listening exercise, while others are marked with a paper and a pen to mark a writing exercise. *High five! 3* activities book also includes these longer more productive briefcase exercises where pupils are advised to, for example, introduce their families by writing a text, taking a photo, video, or drawing a picture. Moreover, in each *High five! 1-2* exercise, the pupils are given a recording of the instructions in Finnish, so the pupils do not have to only rely on their reading skills. The games in *High five! 1-2* also have a recording of the game instructions given in Finnish. *High five! 3* does not give instructions to the games in recording, nor does it provide a recording for the exercises unless the exercise involves a listening exercise. An interesting difference between the two early language learning materials is that *Go!* also does not provide recorded instructions to the exercises, not even if the exercise is a listening exercise.

4.2 Phonology

As was mentioned earlier, spoken exercises familiarizing the sounds of English should be in a key position in early language learning materials. Moreover, as discussed in sections 2.3 and 2.4, most of the learning in early language context should be based on listening and use language in different authentic and age-appropriate situations. In the centre of the favouring of spoken exercises is not only the crucial fact that early language learners are still learning to

read and write in their L1 language but also the claim that young learners acquire L2 better than older learners (Lengeris 2012, 26). Phonology, the study of the sound patterns of a language, is one of the sectors that has been said to benefit from an earlier onset. This is why the teaching of phonology is a crucial part of early language learning. The field of phonetics studies the sounds used in human languages and the production of these sounds in the human body (Rogers 2000, 1). Lengeris (2012, 25) argues that teachers neglect the teaching of suprasegmental features of language i.e. intonation in the classrooms. According to Lengeris (ibid.), reasons for neglecting the teaching of suprasegmental features could be the lack of ability or confidence among non-native language teachers and the belief that suprasegmental features cannot be learnt after the critical period.

When the presentations of phonological features are examined in the three coursebooks, some clear differences can be found. In the early language learning material *High five!* 1-2, a large variety of phonemes are introduced. The phonemes introduced in *High five!* 1-2 include plosives /t/, /d/, /p/, /b/, /g/, /k/, fricatives /f/, /ʃ/, /ð/, /z/, affricate /tʃ/ and liquid /r/. Both voiceless and voiced phonemes are introduced, although the number of voiceless phonemes is higher. In *High five!* 1-2, phonemes are introduced in each chapter starting from chapter one, where the first phoneme /t/ is introduced on page 9. In the electronic version of *High five!* 1-2 coursebook, each phoneme introduction is complemented with a recording, in which the speaker describes what the phonemes should sound like. For example, in the case of the voiced dental fricative /ð/ in chapter twelve, the speaker advises that the phoneme should sound similar to a baby who is learning to talk. This verbal description of the way the phoneme should sound can be extremely important and useful to the pupils. By describing the sound with laypersons' terms and by providing examples from the pupils' own world, the imitation of the correct sounds is much easier for the children. After the verbal description of the phoneme sound, the phoneme is produced multiple times in the recording. Repetition has been proven to enhance learning and strengthen the memory trace in the brain. The repetition of the phoneme is then followed by example words containing the phoneme like *this*, *there*, *a brother* and *a smoothie* in case of /ð/ in chapter twelve. The recorded models of each phoneme are an important part of the learning experience. However, there is one major disadvantage with the recordings in the electronic materials. Most of the pupils in Finnish elementary schools use physical copies of the coursebooks. This means that the electronic recordings are not accessible for the pupils. In other words, the decision to use these recordings is left completely to the teacher. If the teacher for any reason decides not to use the recordings in class, the pupils are denied the possibility of gaining knowledge of the phonological features of language, and a

large part of the language will be neglected. Thus, it would be beneficial for the pupils to have access to the recordings or at least have short descriptions of the sounds also printed in the coursebooks. This way, the pupils would not be so heavily dependent on the teacher and could also practice the pronunciation of the sounds at home.

The other early language learning material *Go!* has a rather different approach to teaching phonological features to early language learners. Like in *High five!* 1-2, in each chapter of *Go!* a phonological section can be found. In these phonological sections, exercises where the pupils are instructed to repeat or identify certain sounds of the English language are provided. One dividing factor between the early language learning materials is that in *Go!*, the phonological exercises are linked to the practising of alphabets. In these exercises, the pupils are first instructed to practise the writing of letters and then instructed to listen and repeat how the alphabets are produced. *Go!* also includes some tongue twister exercises among the phonological exercises. For example, in chapter 10, in connection with the phoneme /p/, a tongue twister “a pig plays the piano” is presented (Kanervo&Laukkarinen 2022, 62). By repeating this tongue twister, the pupils will automatically practise the pronunciation of the phoneme /p/. Another major difference in the two early language learning materials is connected to the presentation of actual phonemes. There is a huge difference in the number and type of phonemes introduced in *Go!* and those introduced in *High five!* 1-2. The representations of consonant sounds /b/, /s/, /g/, /p/, /t/ can be found from *Go!*. Unlike *High five!* 1-2, *Go!* also introduces vowel sounds /e/ and /ai/. The only phonemes presented in both of the early language learning materials are /b/, /p/, /g/ and /t/. In addition to the previously mentioned phonemes, *Go!* also addresses *a, d, j, q, r, w, x, y* and *z* sounds in the phonological exercises. However, the difference is that these sounds have not been presented phonetically inside two forward slashes. The fact that some sounds are placed inside slashes while others are not is rather peculiar. Moreover, some phonemes in *Go!* are presented in groups of two or three, while others are presented alone. For example, chapter one introduces the *a* sound, chapter 10 sounds *p* and *q* and in chapter 14 sounds *w, x* and *y* are presented.

Like the two early English learning materials, *High five!* 3 also introduces phonological features in five colourful and playful *Sounds good* sections of the course material. Each *Sounds good* section introduces one phoneme pair. The phonemes introduced in *High five!* 3 are bilabial sounds /p/ and /b/ in chapter six, velar stops /k/ and /g/ in chapter 7, alveolars /t/ and /d/ in chapter 9, alveolar /s/ and palatal /ʃ/ in chapter 11, and finally dentals /θ/ and /ð/ in chapter 15. In the *Sounds good* sections, words containing the phonemes are presented. For example, in the *Sounds good* section of chapter six, words written in both orthographic and

phonetic alphabets and containing one of the two bilabial stop sounds /p/ and /b/, like *a boy, a ball, a book, blue, brown, balloons, bubbles, popcorn, pizza, present, purple* and *pink* are used (Korpela et al. 2022a, 42). In addition to words containing the phonemes under discussion, the *Sounds good* sections include short rhymes that repeat the phonemes introduced. For example, in chapter six a short rhyme playing with *b* and *p* sounds “Hap, hap, happy, b, b, birthday. Pink presents, purple presents, black and brown and blue” (ibid.).

Like was mentioned in the general observation part of the analysis, *High five! 3* textbook and *High five! 3* activities book complement each other and are meant to be used together. *High five! 3* activities book introduces the same phoneme pairs /p/ and /b/, /k/ and /g/, /t/ and /d/, /s/ and /ʃ/, /θ/ and /ð/ that are introduced in *High five! 3* textbook. When the phonemes presented *High five! 1-2* and the phonemes presented in *High five! 3* are compared, some differences can be seen. As was previously discussed *High five! 1-2* introduces phonemes /t/, /d/, /p/, /b/, /g/, /k/, /f/, /ʃ/, /ð/, /z/, /tʃ/ and /r/ and *High five! 3* introduces phonemes /p/, /b/, /k/, /g/, /t/, /d/, /s/, /ʃ/, /θ/ and /ð/. Phonemes /p/, /b/, /k/, /g/, /t/, /d/, /ʃ/ and /ð/ are presented in both of the books. However, phonemes /f/, /ʃ/, /tʃ/ and /r/ that are presented in *High five! 1-2* are not presented in *High five! 3*. Moreover, in *High five! 3* activities book each phoneme introduction is reinforced with a phonological exercise. Similar exercises can be found from *Go!* but not from *High five! 1-2*. In the exercises, the pupils hear different English words pronounced, and they have to choose which sound is produced.

Overall, there are some similarities and differences in the presentation of phonological features between the three coursebooks. *High five! 3* textbook introduces phonetic alphabets, but rather surprisingly, in a different way from the early English learning material from the same publisher. However, the presentation of phonemes is similar to the second early language learning material from a different publisher. The similarities in *High five! 3* and *Go!* relate to the presentation of phonemes in pairs. *High five! 3* differs from the two early language learning materials also by providing a phonetic representation of the most meaningful words in each chapter. In other words, core words in *High five! 3* like numbers, colours, family members and animals are written in both orthographic and phonetic alphabets. Other word groups written in both orthographic and phonetic alphabets include snacks, treats and adjectives, foods, drinks and basic verbs, prepositions, rooms and furniture, days of the week, time related words like *a week, an hour* and *a month*, hobbies, body parts, and clothes. This introduction of complete words written in phonetic alphabets differs greatly from both *High five! 1-2* and *Go!* where the vocabulary is only written in orthographic alphabets, and no phonetic alphabets can be seen in complete words.

As mentioned in the beginning of this section, Lengeris (2012, 25) talks about the neglecting of suprasegmental features in the classroom. The neglect of the teaching and learning of suprasegmental features can also be seen in the three learning materials. In *High five!* 1-2, only one suprasegmental feature intonation is slightly discussed on page 42 in chapter seven. Intonation is introduced in connection with intonation questions used to form simple questions in the English language. In the exercise presenting intonation questions, the pupils are taught to raise the ends of words or sentences when forming questions. However, in the exercises, only the model for intonation questions is presented, and the pupils are merely asked to repeat what they hear. Much of the actual forming of intonation questions is left to the teacher. Like *High five!* 1-2, *Go!* also presents a model for the intonation question. However, the forming of intonation questions is similarly left untreated when the pupils are merely asked to repeat what they hear.

4.3 Grammar

“The concept of grammar is a wide-ranging notion and comprises a plethora of meanings and references lending itself to a multitude of interpretations” (Mystkowska-Wiertelak & Mirosław 2012, 1). Grammar is undeniably a crucial part of any language. Mystkowska-Wiertelak & Mirosław (ibid. 2) define grammar as a set of rules that help people understand the structure of language and arrange it into smaller, more easily comprehensible pieces. The teaching of grammar topics to early language pupils has gained both defensive and offensive views. When some people argue that grammar is not important in the early stages of language learning, others strongly support the teaching of grammar features. When it comes to early language learning, the national core curriculum does not talk much about the teaching of grammar topics and features. Thus, it can be easily understood that the focus of early language learning is not on grammar. However, to fully understand and learn the language, at least some minor features of grammar have to be introduced. The two early language learning materials studied have similar views on the teaching and learning of grammar topics and features. If only separate clearly grammatical topic introductions and exercises are examined, the results are clear. There are no individual grammar topics or structures of grammar taught in the early language learning materials. However, some key structures of English grammar, for example, question forming, are presented in both early language learning materials. In addition, both coursebooks have some grammar related structures that are practised verbally in the exercises. Grammar structures practised include the forming of questions with the auxiliary *do*, for example, *Do*

you like red? and forming of questions that start with a question word, for example, *What is your favourite colour?*. However, the actual process of how the questions are formed is not discussed any further. In other words, the learning materials do not provide an active teaching model for these grammar topics. The answers to these questions are also merely one-word answers like, for example, a name of a classmate, a colour, or a number. In addition, most of the time the book does not require written answers and the answers are given, for example, by crossing the right answer. Thus, the grammatical forming of answers to these questions is also not required. This of course complies well with the methods of early language learning but leaves an important part of the language to be studied in the later stages of the language learning process. As was mentioned earlier, some grammatical features of language are introduced through spoken exercises and hence, for example, the word order should become familiar to the pupils. Therefore, although grammar is not consciously taught in early language learning, the memory trace gained through hearing the grammatical features used, might make the learning of grammatical features easier in the future.

There is a peculiar choice of contents in chapter 9 of the early language learning material *Go!*. The chapter introduces a phrase *I play* in connection with different words relating to sports (Kanervo&Laukkarinen 2022, 55). This introduction of a simple sentence can be seen as a feature of grammar teaching. Without any emphasis placed on the phrase, the book teaches how, by adding the first-person singular subject *I* and the predicate verb *play* in front of sport words, a sentence indicating the act of playing in English can be formed. However, this introduction of subject verb object word order can only be found from chapter 9. In the next chapter which introduces different snacks, a suitable subject predicate phrase could have been *I eat*. Yet, no phrases are introduced in chapter 10 or in any other chapter. The introduction of the phrase *I eat* would have been a natural continuation after the *I play* introduced in the previous chapter. Moreover, the introduction of these simple phrases would have been an easy and effortless way of adding some basic sentence structure rules to early language learning.

On the contrary to the extremely limited amount of grammar topics and features taught in the early language learning materials, *High five! 3* introduces a large variety of grammar topics. The learning of grammar topics starts already in the first chapter in *High five! 3*. As was already mentioned in section 4.1, grammar topics in *High five! 3* activities book are presented in seven individual *Fingertips* sections found from chapters one, two, three, five, ten, thirteen and fourteen. In addition to the *Fingertips* sections, *High five! 3* books introduce other smaller grammar topics, like preposition phrases and ways of asking and telling the time. The first grammar topic to be introduced in chapter one is the verb *to be*. In the first chapter, the first

three copulative forms of the verb *to be* and the way the verb is inflected according to person are presented. In chapter one, the verb forms for the pronoun *I, you, he* and *she* are presented. Moreover, chapter one introduces the negative form for the first-person singular *I'm not*. What is noticeable is that all the verb forms are presented in their abbreviated forms. At this stage the book does not present the verbs in their full forms. In chapter two, *High five! 3* introduces simple question sentences that start with the verb *to be*. Chapter two also demonstrates how these questions should be answered. An example of a question sentence presented in chapter two is, for example, a question *Are you happy?* which is replied by either *yes, I am* or *no, I'm not* (Kanervo et. al. 2022b, 34). Chapter three of the book introduces two individual grammar topics; the topic of regular plural forms and the verb *to have*. The book demonstrates the use of singular and plural forms in the English language with words like *a dog, dogs* and *a football, footballs* and thus demonstrates the addition of *-s* in plural forms (ibid. 45). Chapter three also introduces how ownership in the English language is displayed by using the verb *to have*, which is then used in positive, negative, and question sentences. Simultaneously, another way of forming question in the English language, questions starting with auxiliary *do* are presented. In chapter three, the verb *to have* is showcased in positive sentences like *I have a goldfish* and in questions like *Do you have a pet* (ibid. 39). The correct way of answering a question starting with the auxiliary *do* is also presented by presenting sentences *Yes, I do* and *no, I don't*. In chapter five, the verb *like* is presented for the first time. The book introduces how positive sentences with the verb *like* (*I like*) and negative sentences (*I don't like*) are formed. In addition to positive and negative sentences with the verb *like*, question sentences utilizing the auxiliary *do* and the verb *like* (*Do you like. . . ?*) are introduced in chapter five. In chapter ten, the auxiliary verb *can* is presented in positive like *I can swim*, negative like *I can't fly*, and question sentences like *Can you swim?* (ibid. 114). The correct response to a question sentence with the auxiliary *can* is also taught. Chapter thirteen expands the knowledge of the verb *to have* by presenting the third person singular form *has* in positive sentences. The last grammar topic presented in chapter fourteen of *High five! 3* is the first-, second- and third-person plural copula forms of the verb *to be* by providing examples of the abbreviated forms of pronouns and verbs *we're, you're* and *they're*. In addition, chapter fourteen introduces the s-genitive form of expressing ownership.

As discussed in section 2.1, Cook (2016, 31) outlined typical grammar features in beginner level books for adult learners of English. These grammar topics included the present form of *to be*, the use of indefinite articles *a* and *an*, subject pronouns, prepositions *in* and *from* with places and noun plurals. Out of the grammar topics mentioned by Cook, two are also

presented in *High five!* 3 materials. This once again showcases that there are differences between the order of which grammar topics are taught to beginner level language learners. Of course, it is important to remember that the beginner level English coursebooks studied by Cook were targeted to adult learners, and this can have an effect on the order of grammatical features. When the early English learning materials *High five!* 1-2 and *Go!* are compared to the other A1-level material *High five!* 3, a clear distinction in the learning materials ways of presenting grammar topics can be seen. As was mentioned previously, the absence of grammatical topics or features in the early English materials supports the idea and purpose of early language learning. Although the early language learning materials studied conform to the goals and guidelines of early language learning, some potential issues with the absence of grammatical features can be seen. The consequence of the absence of grammar in early language learning materials will be further discussed in chapter 6.

In *High five!* 3, larger portion of the focus and emphasis of learning is placed on grammatical features and topics. However, the two early language learning materials focus and emphasize a different sector of the English language. In the two early language learning materials the focus is drawn on words and vocabulary. The similarities and differences in the vocabularies of the three learning materials will be the topic of the next section.

4.4 Vocabulary

The learning of the vocabulary forms the basis of language learning. Carter (1998, 2) describes that vocabulary is traditionally learnt by memorizing single words. Traditionally vocabulary has been introduced in coursebooks through vocabulary lists where single words are listed and accompanied by translations of the target language. This presentation of the vocabulary, sometimes also including short sentences and phrases, is still widely used in English coursebooks. The understanding and knowledge of vocabulary is pivotal in the ability to use and communicate with the language. Without the knowledge of the vocabulary, communication with other language users is extremely difficult and arduous. The importance of vocabulary can also be seen in the fact that if the grammatical structure of a sentence is somewhat strange or incorrect, a native language speaker is most likely able to figure out the message. However, if the words are wrong, the message might turn into something entirely different.

Vocabulary is one of the divisions of language that is presented relatively comprehensively in all of the learning materials examined in this study. The distribution of the vocabulary themes included in the three learning materials can be seen in Table 1 found from

Appendix B. The hyphens in Table 1 indicate that the chapter was not included in the coursebook. All learning materials cover vocabulary that circles and concentrates around young pupils' everyday lives. The vocabulary found in the learning materials is mostly familiar, simple, and most importantly useful for the pupils to know. In this study, the most emphasized words, also known as core words, were studied in each learning material. Core words consisted of words that were emphasized the most in the learning materials. In the two *High five!* coursebooks core words are introduced in the *steady* sections of each chapter. In *Go*, core words are presented in the first page of each chapter. There is variation in the number of core words found in each learning material. In the early language learning material *High five!* 1-2, 131 words are treated as the most important for the pupils to know and are thus highlighted in the coursebook. The second early language learning material examined in this study *Go!* contains 124 core words highlighted in the coursebook. The learning material representing other A1-level English learning materials *High five!* 3, has the largest number of core words, amounting to 167 words. The similarities in the vocabulary among the three learning materials can be seen in Table 1 found from Appendix B. All three learning materials start with words and phrases related to greeting people. In addition to similar vocabulary themes, other similarities include the coverage of numbers from 1-10, colours, animals, toys, foods and drinks, clothing and basic verbs, and adjectives. Although there are similarities, many differences can also be found between the three learning materials. The early language learning material *High five!* 1-2 and other A1-level learning material *High five!* 3 both introduce numbers from one to twelve, whereas the second early language learning material *Go!* only introduces numbers from one to ten. Moreover, *High five!* 1-2 and *High five!* 3 both introduce body parts and furniture, which are also not presented in *Go!* On the other hand, *High five!* 3 and *Go!* both introduce days of the week which cannot be found from *High five!* 1-2. In addition, some words found in the two early language learning materials cannot be found in the other A1-level learning material *High five!* 3. The vocabulary missing from *High five!* 3 include words for school supplies like, for example, *a pencil*, *a pencil case*, and *a notebook*. Contradicting the shortage in the school supplies vocabulary, many words solely found from *High five!* 3 should be mentioned. The words and vocabulary only found in *High five!* 3 include prepositions *in*, *on*, *under* and *behind*, rooms in the house *a bedroom*, *a living room*, *a bathroom*, and *a kitchen*, telling the time *It's ten o'clock*, *it's eight o'clock* and *it's three o'clock*, numbers from thirteen to twenty, big numbers *thirty*, *forty*, *fifty*, *sixty*, *seventy*, *eighty*, *ninety* and *a hundred*.

When the words presented in the learning materials are examined in more detail, some more specific similarities, and differences in the word classes of the presented words can be

seen. Most of the vocabulary covered in the learning materials belongs to the class of nouns. In *High five!* 1-2, 65 words from the 131 core words are nouns. This is roughly 50 percent of the core words in *High five!* 1-2. In *Go!*, 59 words from the 124 core words, meaning roughly 48 percent, are nouns. In *High five!* 3, 78 words from the 167 core words, roughly 47 percent, are nouns. As was mentioned previously, most of the words introduced in the learning materials come from the pupils' everyday lives and are familiar objects, places, and items. This notion of usefulness and familiarity of the vocabulary also applies to the nouns included in the learning materials. The distribution of nouns introduced in the learning materials can be seen in Table 2 found from Appendix C. In Table 2, nouns found from the coursebook are marked with the letter *X* and nouns that could not be found are marked with a hyphen. Slashes in Table 2 indicate that the noun was found in the text vocabulary or extra words of the learning materials but is not interpreted as a core word. When the nouns of the three learning materials are compared to each other, some similarities and differences can be found. The most notable difference between the three learning materials is that there are only a few nouns that can be found from all three learning materials. The nouns found from all three learning materials are *milk, juice, water, a cap, a skirt, shoes, socks, a teddy bear, and a game*. Although there are only a couple of nouns found from all three learning materials, more similarities in nouns between two learning materials can be found. In the two early learning materials *High five!* 1-2 and *Go!* words *a sharpener, a pencil, a pencil case, a notebook, a book, a schoolbag, an apple, a banana, a carrot, a sandwich, milk, juice, water, a cap, a skirt, a jacket, shoes, socks, a teddy bear, and a game* are introduced. Some similarities in the vocabularies found from the two *High five!* coursebooks can also be mentioned. *High five!* 1-2 and *High five!* 3 both introduce body parts like *a mouth, a head, a nose, hair, eyes, hands, ears*, and also family members like *a mum, a dad, a sister, a brother, a granny, and a grandad*. These vocabulary classes cannot be found from *Go!*. The fact that *Go!* does not include body parts and family members is rather strange considering the importance of such words.

Although some similarities could be found, there are more differences in the vocabularies of the three learning materials. Differences in the choice of dialect, vocabulary themes, and general approaches can be found from the three learning materials. Dialectal differences can be found from the two early language learning materials. *High five!* 1-2 introduces words *a rubber* and *pants*, whereas *Go!* uses *an eraser* and *trousers*. Moreover, the vocabulary introduced in *Go!* differs from the other two learning materials in that it introduces many words that are generally more associated with British English, for example, food and drink items related to full English breakfast like *an egg, bacon, a sausage, tea, and toast* and

other words like *crisps*, *a biscuit*, and *trousers*. Other differences in the vocabulary themes are the introduction of hobby words like *football*, *basketball*, *tennis*, *badminton*, *the piano*, *the guitar*, and *computer games* in *Go!*. Neither the words relating to British English nor the separate hobby words could be found from *High five! 1-2* and *High five! 3*. In addition, *Go!* approaches animal words differently than the other two learning materials. Whereas *High five! 1-2* and *High five! 3* introduce animal words like *a cat*, *a dog*, *a sheep*, and in *High five! 3 a rabbit*, *Go!* introduces words like *a kitten*, *a puppy*, *a bunny*, and *a lamb* which are normally used to refer to the babies of the animals introduced in the other two learning materials. This difference in the general approach to words is interesting and rather surprising. Words like *a kitten* and *a lamb* used in *Go!* are more specific, subordinate words for the animals introduced in *High five! 1-2* and *High five! 3*. Cook (2016, 70) discusses that “The most important early words are basic level terms.” Cook (ibid.) continues by explaining that humans naturally start the learning of new words from concrete level. In the light of Cook’s (ibid.) argument, one might assume that the words *a cat* and *a sheep* should be introduced first in early language learning, and thus *Go!*’s order of presenting words contradicts this claim and is against the natural way of learning vocabulary.

Possibly the largest difference between the two early language learning materials and other A1-level English material *High five! 3* is that *High five! 3* provides additional words for the pupils. These additional words belong to the same vocabulary family as the core words of each main chapter and are meant for pupils that have advanced faster and need more activities in class. Therefore, these additional words are not meant to be covered with the whole class. The additional nouns in *High five! 3* are family members *a mother*, *a father*, *a grandmother*, *a grandfather*, *an uncle*, *an aunt*, *a cousin*, toys *a train*, *a monster*, *an action figure*, *a card*, *a tablet*, *a frisbee*, *a skipping rope*, animals *a mouse*, *a pony*, *a lizard*, *a spider*, *a monkey*, *a crocodile*, foods and drinks *toast*, *muffins*, *cookies*, *crisps*, *hot dogs*, *coffee*, *tea*, *cola*, *hot chocolate*, *rice*, *soup*, *carrots*, *tomatoes*, *meatballs*, *sandwiches*, *bananas*, *ice tea*, furniture and items *a carpet*, *a shower*, *a toilet*, *a tv*, *a laptop*, *a door*, *a wall*, *a window*, *a watch*, *a bell*, units of time *a minute*, *an hour*, *a week*, *a month*, *a year*, body parts *a back*, *a tooth*, *teeth*, *fingers*, *shoulders*, *knees*, *toes*, *paws*, *a tail*, and clothing *a dress*, *a jacket*, *a sweater*, *a backpack*, *shorts*, *sandals*, *boots*, and *sweatpants*. Additionally, *High five! 3* introduces even more words in the text vocabulary lists of each main text in the activities book. In the text vocabulary lists nouns *a family*, *a name*, *a rat*, *a friend*, *an animal*, *a zoo*, *a football*, *a girl*, *a boy*, *a drink*, *a cook*, *a dinner*, *a child*, *children*, *a dessert*, *a kid*, *a page*, *a house*, *a castle*, *a knight*, *a home*, *a curtain*, *a dragon*, *a tea party*, *a party*, *sugar*, *a cupcake*, *a cuckoo clock*, *a clock*, *a star*, *time*,

tea, a dancer, an elf, a picture, a room, music, a football field, a team, a night, a thing, a morning, a bookshop, an idea, a torch, a shadow, a turn, a spider, a day, a toy, clothes, sunglasses, a place, and the world could be found.

After the nouns, the second largest word class found in the three learning materials is verbs. However, when the number of verbs is compared to the number of nouns, a clear difference can be noted. In the three learning materials, the number of verbs introduced is lower than the number of nouns. All in all, in *High five!* 1-2, twenty verbs can be found. Out of the 131 core words, the percentage of verbs amounts to approximately 15 percent. In *Go!*, the number of verbs introduced is 24, thus approximately 19 percent of the core words in *Go!* are verbs or verb phrases. The core words of *High five!* 3 consist of 32 verbs. This is also approximately 19 percent of all core words. The fact that verbs only make a fraction of the core words in the three learning materials is surprising albeit understandable considering the fact that with a handful of basic verbs, a large variety of sentences can be formed. The distribution of verbs found in the three learning materials can be seen in Table 3 found from Appendix D. Once again, the verbs found from the coursebook are marked with the letter *X*. Slashes indicate that the verb was found from a text vocabulary list or extra words but was not treated as a core word. The verbs found in the three learning materials were also examined more specifically. Like the nouns, also the verbs had similarities and differences between the learning materials. However, more differences than similarities could be found from the learning materials. Only a few verbs could be found from all three learning materials. The verbs found from all of the materials are *jump, run, read, draw, drink, sing, eat, and write*. The verbs found in all of the learning materials are basic verbs and words that the pupils truly need when, for example, talking about their days.

There are many differences in the introduction of verbs in the three learning materials. As was discussed earlier, *Go!* includes words of school yard games as core words. School yard games are either not found at all or are not core words in the other two learning materials. In addition to the school yard related verb phrases, verbs *sit, skate, ride, and listen to* can only be found from *Go!* There are also verbs that cannot be found from *Go!* but can be found from *High five!* 1-2. Verbs and verb phrases solely found from *High five!* 1-2 are *climb, stop, start, play, speak English, wash my hands, and colour*. As can be expended based on the nouns discussed earlier, *High five!* 3 once again contains more verbs than the two early language learning materials. Verbs and verb phrases that cannot be found from the early language learning materials but are introduced in *High five!* 3 are *fly, go to bed, play floorball, play disc golf, watch a film, go swimming, go shopping, play with your friends, play computer games,*

play the piano, play football, ride a bike, ride a horse, go to the cinema, go to the park, and go home. In the additional words, verbs *play the recorder, play the guitar, play badminton, play basketball, play ice hockey, go to the library, have a picnic, play hopscotch, play tag, have a party, walk the dog, dive, cook, bake, ski, skate,* and *paint* could be found. In addition to core words highlighted in *High five! 3* textbook, activities book and the additional words for faster learners, more verbs from the text vocabulary lists of each chapter could be found. Verbs found from the text vocabulary lists include verbs *look, open, love, listen, close, come, have, know, want, like, guess, take, fix, speak, teach, go, see, sleep, tidy up, need, help, travel, try on, try,* and *visit.*

The smallest class of words introduced in the learning materials is adjectives. Generally, there are not that many adjectives introduced in the three learning materials. Out of the 131 core words introduced in *High five! 1-2*, 25 words are adjectives. Thus, adjectives form 19 percent of all core words in *High five! 1-2*. Eleven words from the 25 adjectives are colours. Out of the 124 core words in *Go!*, only 18 words or 14.5 percent of all the core words presented in *Go!* are adjectives. Moreover, out of the 18 words more than half are colours. In *High five! 3*, out of the 167 core words twenty are adjectives, eleven of which are colours. The percentage of adjectives in *High five! 3* is roughly 12 percent of the core words. The fact that adjectives form the smallest portion of the vocabulary included in the learning materials is not that surprising because adjectives can be seen as additional words that can be added to sentences when the core structure is formed. Thus, the favouring of nouns and verbs which form the core structure in sentences is justifiable. The distribution of adjectives found from the three learning materials is presented in Table 4 found from Appendix E. In Table 4, adjectives found from the coursebook are once again marked with the letter X. The hyphens in Table 4 indicate that the adjective could not be found from the learning material. Slashes indicate that the adjective can be found from the text vocabulary list or extra words but is not treated as a core word. When the adjectives found from the three learning materials are examined in more detail, some similarities could be found because adjectives are presented rather similarly in all of the three learning materials. All three learning materials introduce basic colours *white, black, pink, brown, grey, yellow, blue, green, orange, red,* and basic short adjectives *big* and *small*. In addition, the two early language learning materials both introduce adjectives *happy, sad, fast,* and *slow*. Moreover, *High five! 1-2* and *High five! 3* both introduce adjectives *purple, long,* and *short*. *Go!* and *High five! 3* both introduce adjectives *hungry* and *thirsty*. Although there are many similarities in the presentation of adjectives, some differences could also be found. Some adjectives could only be found in one of the learning materials. Adjectives *tall, hot,* and *cold*

could only be found in *High five!* 3 and adjectives *pretty, ugly, old, young, good, and bad* could only be found in *High five!* 1-2. Moreover, as has been discussed earlier, in addition to the core words introduced in the *steady* sections of each chapter in *High five!* 3, the learning material also provides text vocabulary lists in each chapter. In these text vocabulary lists adjectives *pretty, happy, ready, great, fantastic, old, new, good, big, angry, wild, friendly, yummy, amazing, super, awesome, strange, small, soft, hard, sweet, full, poor, beautiful, broken, right, funny, the best, dark, and dear* can be found.

5 RESULTS OF THE QUESTIONNAIRE

In this chapter, the results of the questionnaire will be analysed. The first part of the questionnaire, which collected the general and demographic information of the respondents, has already been discussed earlier in section 3.3 and thus will not be discussed further here. Consequently, this chapter of the thesis will concentrate on the remaining parts of the questionnaire, parts two, three, and four. Part two, which handled the textbooks and materials in early English is discussed in section 5.1, part three, which concentrated on the questions relating to other A1-level English materials in section 5.2, and finally part four of the questionnaire, which provided open-ended questions about the differences and similarities in all A1-level English learning materials in section 5.3.

5.1 Textbooks and materials in early English learning (part two)

The second part of the questionnaire concentrated exclusively on the textbooks and materials used in early English. First, the respondents were asked whether they had noticed any problems with the early English books they use in their teaching. Question one of part two received seventeen answers. A dichotomy, portrayed in Figure 4, could be seen in the results. 52.9 percent of the respondents reported to have had some problems with the textbooks they use. On the contrary, 47.1 percent of the respondents had not noticed any problems with the books they use.

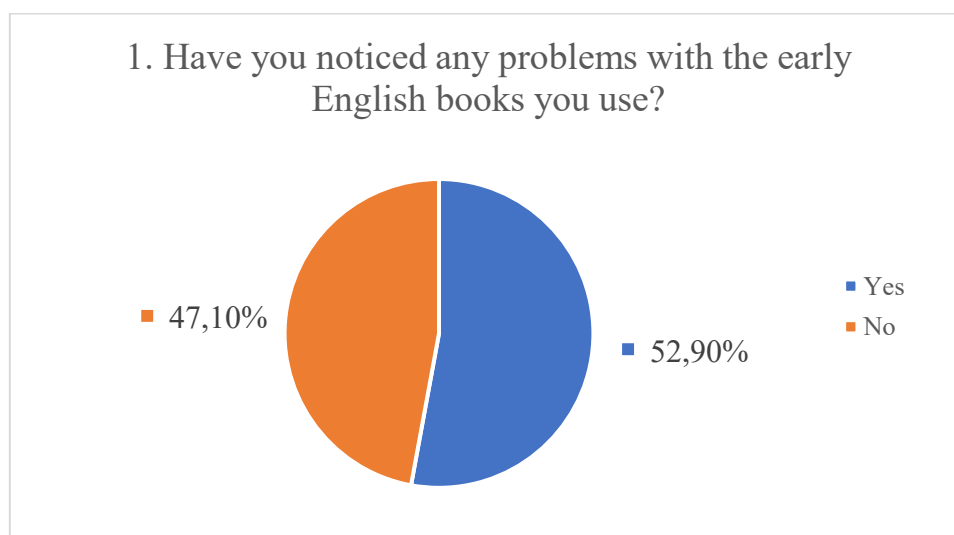


Figure 4. The distribution of responses of problems noticed in early English books used

When asked to specify the problems noticed in the early English books, respondents reported that although designed for smaller children, the materials require at least some level of reading and writing skills from the beginning. The analysis of the two early language learning materials confirms this claim to a certain point. The analysis confirms that the reading skill was most notably needed in exercise instructions of the textbooks. In other words, the reading skill was necessary for the pupils to understand what they were instructed to do in each exercise. Of course, it is important to note that the pupils are not alone in the classroom and the teacher most likely gives all the instructions also verbally and hence the pupils do not solely have to rely on their reading skills. However, if the pupils need to check the instructions, they must rely on their reading skills. The learning materials did try to make instructions easier for the young pupils to read and understand, for example, by syllabifying them in *High five!* 1-2. Another way of helping the pupils understand the exercise instructions were the addition of icons. Both early language learning materials utilized different icons that symbolized the type of the exercise in questions. As was discussed in section 4.1, the use of icons and syllabified instructions aid those pupils who are still developing their reading skills and works well in the early language learning context. The ability to read was not the only skill required in the exercises because in some of the exercises writing skill was also required. Although the two early language learning materials studied in this thesis consisted of a large variety of different types of exercises, some exercises instructed to give the answer by writing. For example, in *High five!* 1-2, exercises where the pupils had to write names could be found. More exercises where the writing skill was needed could be found from *Go!*. In *Go!*, the writing skill was needed in basic exercises, for example, when the pupils were asked to write names, single words, or guess what the main characters are planning to do in the next chapter. In addition to basic exercises, *Go!* also included exercises where the writing of single letters was practised. However, because the alphabets are basically the same in both English and Finnish, this type of exercise can be seen as reinforcing and supporting the process of learning to write and utilizing the skills that the students are actively learning. Thus, this type of exercise can be seen as age-appropriate in the context of early language learning. In addition to the main exercises in the chapters, in *Go!* writing skills were also needed in some of the end of the chapter exercises where the pupils were instructed to self-evaluate what they have learnt. In these exercises, the pupils were instructed to, for example, write the English words they have learnt in the chapter. Apart from the above-described exercise types, most of the exercises in both early language learning materials confirm to the ideas of early language learning by providing exercises where the answer is given either verbally or by drawing, colouring, or joining dots.

In addition to the requirement of reading and writing skills, the respondents reported problems with the lack of teacher instructions, pronunciation exercises and vocabulary as well as the paucity of different kinds of simple songs, videos, nursery rhymes, and games bases. Based on the analysis of the two early language learning materials, some of these problems mentioned by the respondents could also be seen in the two early language learning materials. Both early language learning materials provide teachers' materials where in addition to exercise instructions, instructions on how to proceed in the materials are given. Thus, the lack of teacher instructions could not be supported by the learning material analysis. Because the focus of early language learning is on spoken language and verbal communication, the demand for more pronunciation exercises is understandable and justified. Although especially in *High five!* 1-2, phonemes are rather well presented, a very limited amount of pronunciation exercises exist in the book. Moreover, the exercises that do exist in the book, do not truly test the learning and understanding of phonological features but merely ask the pupils to repeat what they hear. However, there are differences in the amount and quality of pronunciation exercises between the two early language learning materials. Although the second early language learning material *Go!* did not introduce as a large variety of phonemes as *High five!* 1-2, more pronunciation exercises could be found in *Go!*. In *Go!*, a large number of pronunciation exercises where the pupils are, for example, asked to practise certain sounds by simply repeating the sound or repeating words containing the sound can be found. Moreover, exercises where the pupils are instructed to choose which word contains the sound in question exist in *Go!*. These types of exercises test the pupils' ability to distinguish between different sounds of the English language and have a true element of learning in them.

In the responses of the questionnaire the shortage in game bases, songs, videos, and nursery rhymes was reported. The lack in game bases could not be seen in either of the early language learning materials studied in this thesis. In fact, quite the opposite could be seen in *High five!* 1-2 and *Go!*, where a large variety of different game bases could be found at the end of each chapter. Thus, the lack of game bases cannot be supported by the learning material analysis. However, the claim reporting a shortage in songs, videos, and nursery rhymes in the early language materials is supported by the learning material analysis. Some songs and nursery rhymes were provided in the materials but because the sole purpose of early language learning is to teach features of language through play and by using music and songs, more songs and nursery rhymes should be provided. An interesting observation made by one respondent (R17) was that the book they use did not cover all the necessary information needed for each grade. This response clashes with the general idea of early English where focus is placed on simple,

limited features of language. It would have been interesting to ponder this view more, however, the respondent did not give any further information on the matter.

The second question in part two of the questionnaire asked whether something that should have been included is missing from the books. 41.2 percent of the 17 respondents answered affirmatively, while 58.8 percent answered negatively. If the answers to question one are compared to the answers to question two, minor differences can be seen. Although in question one, 52.9 percent of the respondents reported having had problems with the books, some respondents clearly did not see the problems big enough to report them in question two. The distribution of the responses to question two can be seen in Figure 5.

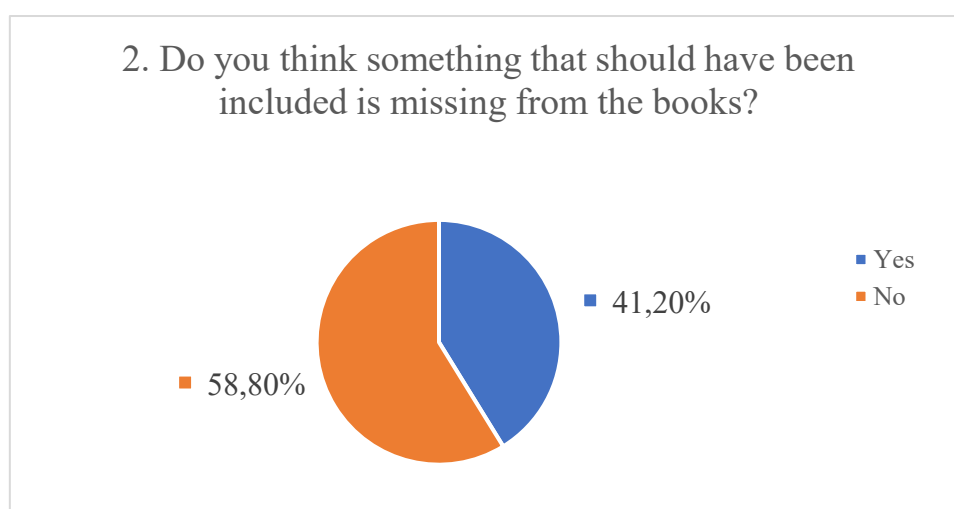


Figure 5. The distribution of responses on information missing from the books

However, many of the issues raised in question were repeated in question two. Moreover, the respondents reported that early language learning materials lack in providing enough active learning tasks, picture cards that could be used in vocabulary teaching and training and picture and audio activities. The lack of active learning tasks could be seen in *High five!* 1-2. However, in *Go!* all chapters included at least one active learning task. Therefore, the number of active learning tasks seems to depend on the learning material used. The respondents also demanded more learning materials for gifted students, and on the contrary, more exercises and activities that do not require reading skills for less skilled pupils. The shortage in extra exercises was visible in the early language learning materials examined in this thesis, however, like the number of active learning tasks, the number of extra exercises and activities seems to vary between the early language learning materials. The lack of extra exercises could be seen mostly in *Go!*, which did not contain any extra exercises. Some extra exercises for gifted pupils could

be found from *High five!* 1-2. However, the extra exercises were located in the back of the book and hence can be difficult for both the teacher and the pupils to notice.

Questions three and four addressed the most and least emphasized features in early English coursebooks. Both questions received sixteen answers. First, the respondents were given the task to select the most emphasized feature in the early English books they use. The respondents were given four choices to choose from. These four choices were ‘phonetics’, ‘grammar’, ‘vocabulary’ and ‘texts’. The distribution of the responses to question three can be seen in Figure 6.

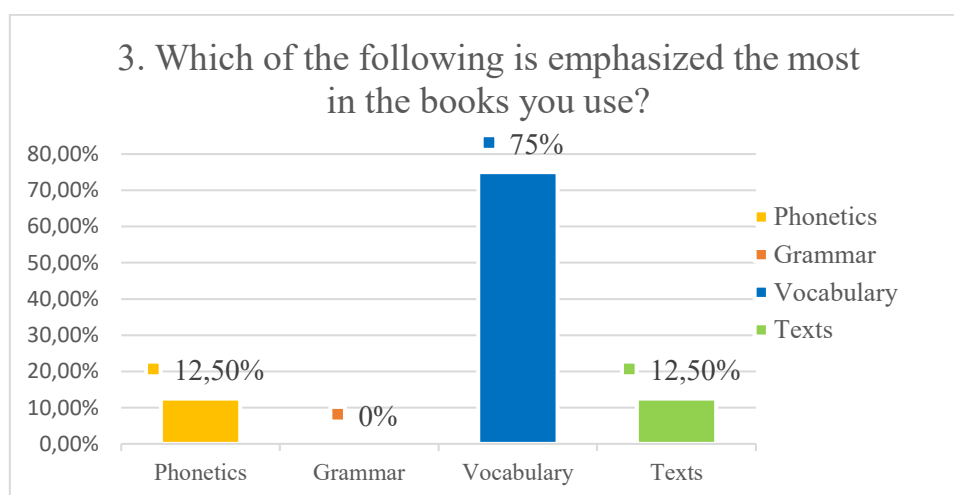


Figure 6. The distribution of responses on the most emphasized feature in the books

The majority of the respondents, which is 75 percent, chose the option ‘vocabulary’. The analysis of the two early language learning materials also confirms this claim. When the vocabulary of the early language learning materials was studied, the importance of the vocabulary was notable. Both ‘texts’ and ‘phonetics’ received 12.5 percent of the answers. The fact that some respondents selected ‘texts’ as the most emphasized feature in early language learning materials is rather surprising. The analysis of the early language learning materials proved that texts were not emphasized in early language learning materials. In fact, the early language learning materials studied in this thesis did not contain any text sections. However, the favouring of texts might be seen in other early language learning materials excluded from this study. None of the respondents chose ‘grammar’ to be the most emphasized feature in the early English books. The favouring of other features of language over grammar could also be seen in the analysis of the learning materials. The notion that there are no grammar features actively taught in the early language learning materials and the fact that none of the respondents chose grammar as the most emphasized feature, support the overall idea of early English as

concentrating on introducing the vocabulary and sounds through spoken language and play. After the respondents had chosen which feature of language is most emphasized in the early language learning coursebooks they use, in question four the respondents were asked to select the feature that is least emphasized. The same four options as in question three were given to the respondents. The distribution of the responses to question four can be seen in Figure 7.

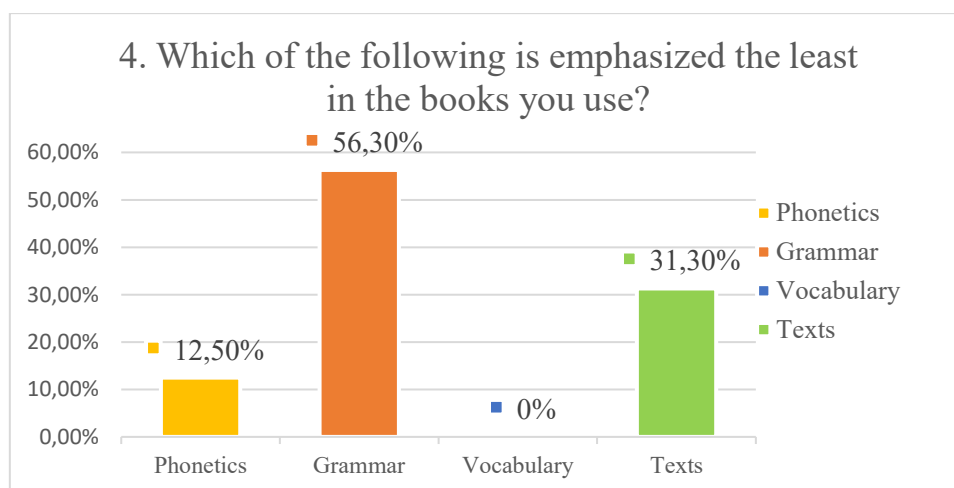


Figure 7. The distribution of responses on the least emphasized feature in the books

As could be assumed based on the results of question three, ‘grammar’ was the feature that was reported being the least emphasized in the early language coursebooks used by the respondents. However, only 56.3 percent of the respondents chose ‘grammar’ as the least emphasized feature in the early English books they use. Almost one third of the respondents chose ‘texts’ as the least emphasized feature. The selection of either ‘grammar’ or ‘texts’ as the least emphasized feature in early language learning materials correlates with the results of the learning material analysis. Both of these features of language were rejected in the two early language learning materials studied in this thesis. ‘Phonetics’ received 12.5 percent of the responses. As has been discussed earlier, the representation of phonological features varies immensely in different learning materials. The fact that none of the respondents had selected ‘vocabulary’ as being the least emphasized feature in the early English books they use, supports the respondents’ answers given in question three and the observations made in the learning material analysis.

In question five of part two, the respondents were asked whether the early English books they use have taken the pupil’s age into consideration. Question five received sixteen answers. From the sixteen answers collected, twelve answers could be interpreted as saying ‘yes’. The respondents that answered affirmatively to question five explained that the early English books they use have taken the pupils’ age into consideration by including colour codes,

colourful pages and illustrations, easy exercises, fantasy, games and songs, simple vocabulary, and an easy structure throughout the materials. Moreover, the catchiness of the songs and nursery rhymes was appreciated among the respondents. The catchiness of songs and nursery rhymes supports the learning of the core vocabulary by adding a simple yet effective memory trait in the brain. By repeating a catchy song or nursery rhyme, the knowledge of certain words and phrases is more easily accessible and retrievable. In the questionnaire, two of the sixteen respondents did not think that the early English books they use had taken the pupils age into consideration. One respondent could not decide but said that the pictures are age appropriate, but they would prefer more songs and rhymes(R4). This answer was interpreted as a 'no' answer. One respondent also reported not to use any books and was hence unable to answer question five. (R6)

Questions six and seven in part two of the questionnaire dealt with grammar teaching in early English. In question six, the respondents were asked whether they teach grammar to their early english pupils. If the answer was affirmative, the respondents were asked to explain how they execute the teaching of grammar to their early language pupils. Most of the respondents responded that they do not teach grammar to their early english pupils. However, they did admit to teaching phrases, questions, and sentences which the respondents perceived as features of grammar. The teaching of grammar through phrases, questions, and sentences could also be seen in the analysis of the early language learning materials. In section 4.3, features of grammar found from the early language learning materials were discussed. Similarities in the results of the learning material analysis and the responses to question six can be seen. In both of the early language learning materials grammar was introduced merely through forming questions and sentences. There were no exercises solely concentrating on grammar topics in the two early language learning materials studied in this thesis. According to the respondents, most of the phrase, question, and sentence teaching they perform in early english learning is executed through methods of early language learning, ergo through singing, playing, and active learning. In question seven, the respondents were asked whether they thought that teaching grammar to early english pupils is important. Once again the respondents were asked to justify their answers. Fourteen respondents did not see the teaching of grammar topics necessary or important for the early language pupils and considered, for example, speaking, pronunciation, and communication more important. However, some of the fourteen respondents thought that it is important that the teacher provides a grammatically correct example for the pupils and that although the grammar is not consciously taught, some parts of grammar could and should be hinted on. Although the majority of the respondents did not

consider grammar teaching important in early language learning, a couple of respondents regarded the teaching of grammar important already in early language learning. The importance of grammar teaching in early language learning was argued by claiming that grammar provides the core structure to the language. The grammar teaching was also supported by claiming that some grammar features, like the forming of plurals, are usually easy to teach and learn in connection with the vocabulary. The notion of age was also raised in some of the responses considering the teaching of grammar. One respondent (R13) mentioned that because younger children learn faster, features of grammar should be taught to early language pupils. However, another respondent (R5) argued that early language pupils are too young to be able to think analytically, and thus the teaching and learning of grammar features should be postponed to later grades when the pupils' brains have developed enough.

Finally, in question eight and nine, the respondents were asked about extra materials used in teaching early English. In question eight, the respondents were asked if the books they use have extra materials provided by the publisher. If the answer was 'yes', the respondents were asked to choose how often they use these extra materials provided by the publisher. The respondents had to choose from five options. The options were 'every day', 'once a week', 'sometimes', 'rarely' and 'never'. The distribution of the responses on how often extra materials are used in early language learning can be seen in Figure 8.

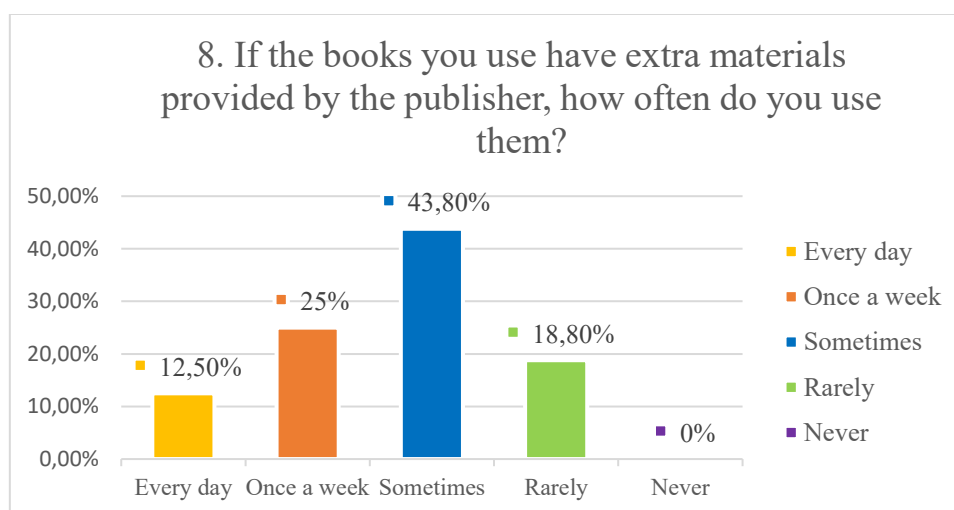


Figure 8. How often extra materials are used in early language learning

Sixteen respondents reported to utilize available extra materials provided by the publisher. Three respondents did not provide an answer to question eight. The fact that all of the respondents that did provide an answer reported to utilize extra materials can indicate multiple things. The use of extra materials can simply indicate that the contents of the

coursebooks are not enough, and a need for more exercises or activities exists. The lack in the extra materials in early language learning materials was also reported in questions one and two, and thus it can be assumed that often extra materials are used to cover shortages in the coursebooks. However, extra materials are not only used to patch the shortage of extra exercises in the coursebooks but are also used to reinforce the coursebook exercises. For example, sometimes teachers want to change an exercise in the coursebook to another type of exercise or provide a different approach to the teaching topic. Extra materials are also sometimes used in the forming of tests and exams.

In question nine, the respondents were asked how often they use self-created materials in their teaching. The respondents were given the same five alternatives as in question eight to choose from. The distribution of how often the respondents use self-created materials can be seen in Figure 9.

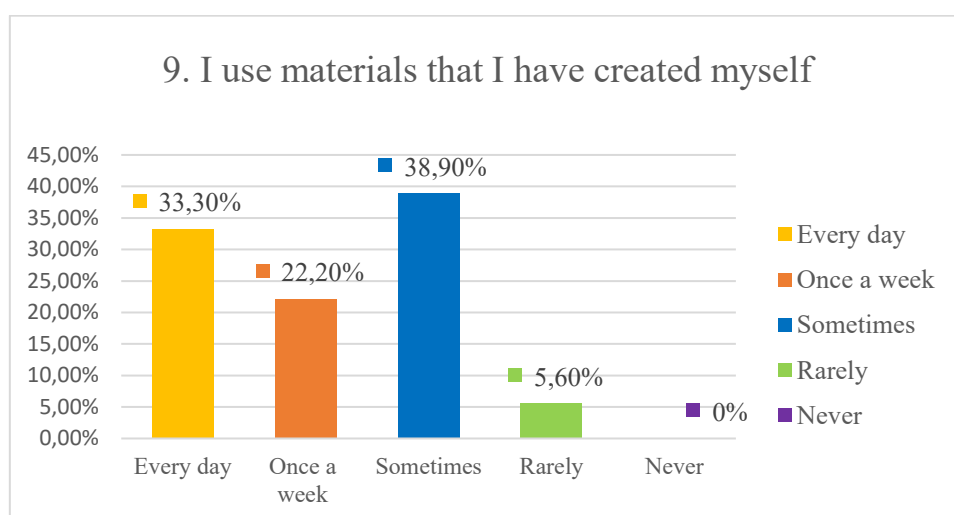


Figure 9. How often self-created materials are used in early language learning

Eighteen respondents reported to use materials they have created themselves. One respondents did not provide an answer to question nine. One third of the respondents reported to use self-created materials ‘every day’, 22.2 percent reported to use self-created materials ‘once a week’, and 38.9 percent reported to use self-created materials ‘sometimes’. The fact that teachers complement the learning materials by creating extra materials themselves is not that surprising. Every teacher has their own way of teaching and a variation in the methods and approaches applied by teachers exist. These personal preferences affect, for example, the selection of exercises performed in class. However, the fact that teachers feel the need to use self-created materials so often is rather surprising and raises questions on the adequacy of the

early language learning materials. The need for extra materials in early language learning will be further discussed in chapter 6.

5.2 Other A1-level English textbooks and materials (part three)

The third part of the questionnaire dealt with the other A1-level learning materials used in learning and teaching English. In part three, the respondents were asked similar questions that were asked in connection with early language learning in part two, but this time the questions concentrated only on other A1-level English teaching and learning materials. First, the respondents were asked if they had noticed problems in other A1-level English learning materials. The distribution of the responses to question one can be seen in Figure 10.

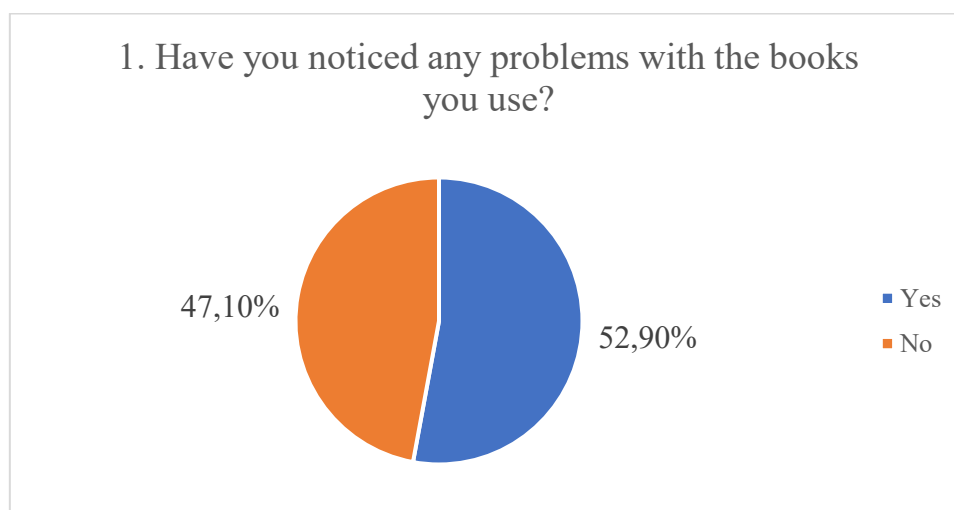


Figure 10. The distribution of responses of problems noticed in other A1-level materials

From seventeen respondents, 52.9 percent had noticed problems with other A1-level English learning materials. The respondents reported having problems with too much material, too many chapters and texts, and too complicated grammar topics. The lack of games and other activities was also highlighted in the responses. One respondent (R18) also acknowledged the fact that the third graders book starts from the beginning and repeats what has already been learnt in early language learning. This response alludes to the possible problems teachers face in the future. The problem of the repetition will be further discussed in chapter 6. There were also some contrasting answers when one respondent (R15) claimed that the exercises in the books they use are too easy, while other respondents (R7, R2, R17) reported that the exercises or grammar topics are too difficult. This difference in the degree of exercise difficulty can be explained by the variety of different A1 learning materials provided by multiple different

publishers. As has been noted earlier, learning materials differ considerably and some of the differences could be explained by personal preference of the publishers. The second question of part three asked whether something that is missing should have been added to other A1-level learning materials. Question two received sixteen answers. The distribution of responses to question two can be seen in Figure 11.

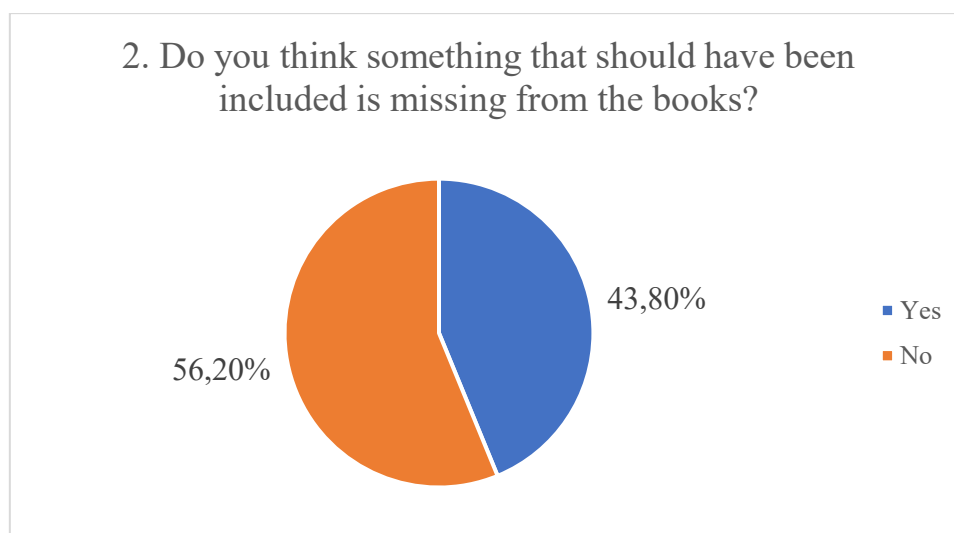


Figure 11. The distribution of responses of information missing from the books

56.2 percent of the respondents did not think that anything was missing from the coursebooks they use to teach English. However, 43.8 percent thought that the coursebooks they use were lacking, for example, in basic exercises as well as active learning and audio-based exercises. A shortage of games was once again reported. One respondent (R2) reported that the coursebook they use does not include numbers from twenty onwards. The fact that a coursebook targeting third graders only introduces numbers up to twenty is rather surprising and highlights the differences between English A1-level materials well. *High five!* 3 introduces numbers from one to one hundred, which is very different from the coursebook used by respondent number two.

In questions three and four of part three, the respondents were asked to choose which features of language are most and least emphasized in the coursebooks they use in teaching A1-level English. The respondents were given the same four choices ‘phonetics’, ‘grammar’, ‘vocabulary’ and ‘texts’ as in questions three and four of part two of the questionnaire. Both questions received fifteen answers. The distribution of the responses to question three can be seen in Figure 12, and the distribution of the responses to question four can be seen in Figure 13.

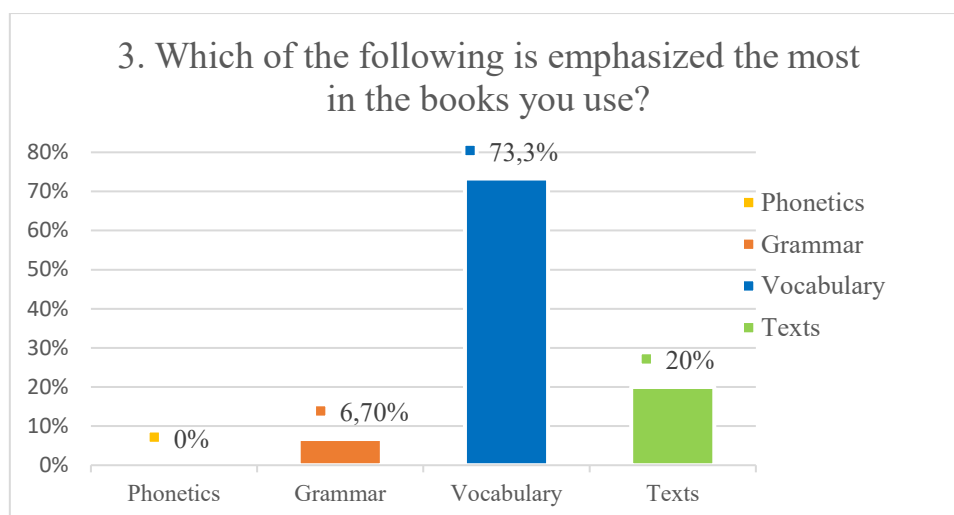


Figure 12. The distribution of responses on the most emphasized feature in the books

According to the results of question three in part two, the most emphasized feature in the early language coursebooks was ‘vocabulary’. ‘Vocabulary’ was also the most emphasized feature in other A1-level English coursebooks. The fact that vocabulary is the most emphasized feature of language in both early language and other A1-level learning contexts highlights the importance vocabulary learning has in the language learning process. If a person knows the grammar but not the words of the language, obvious difficulties arise, and conversation with other language users is challenging. 20 percent of the respondents chose ‘texts’ as the most emphasized feature. The large quantity of chapters and texts reported in question two support this claim. In part two of the questionnaire dealing with early language learning materials, none of the respondents chose ‘grammar’ as the most emphasized feature in early language coursebooks. With other A1-level coursebooks, 6.7 percent of the respondents chose ‘grammar’ as the most emphasized feature. Although grammar is clearly still not the most emphasized feature in the third grade, the importance and amount of grammar features seem to be increasing in other A1-level learning materials. Based on the results of question four, ‘vocabulary’ was considered well represented and emphasized in other A1-level coursebooks. Rather surprisingly when asked about the least emphasized feature in other A1-level English materials, 73.3 percent of the respondents chose ‘phonetics’ as being the least emphasized feature.

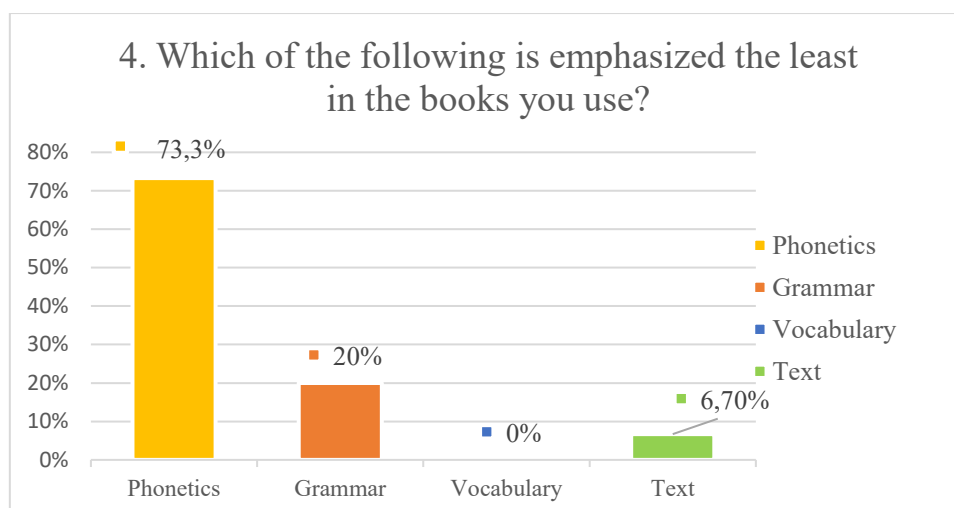


Figure 13. The distribution of responses on the least emphasized feature in the books

When the least emphasized feature in early language learning is compared to the least emphasized feature in other A1-level language learning, a clear distinction can be noted. In the early language learning materials, the least emphasized feature was ‘grammar’. Based on the national core curriculum and the analysis of the learning materials, this result could be expected. However, the fact that the majority of the respondents considered ‘phonetics’ as the least emphasized feature in other A1-level language learning materials is rather surprising. In *High five! 3*, a large variety of phonemes were presented in the textbook. *High five! 3* activities book also includes phonetic exercises. However, in *High five! 3* only five out of the sixteen chapters introduce phonemes, and hence when the overall picture is considered, phonology can be seen as being underrepresented. 20 percent of the respondents chose ‘grammar’ as the least emphasized feature. Based on the analysis of *High five! 3*, which included a large number of grammar topics, the fact that some respondents thought that grammar was the least emphasized feature in the coursebooks they use seems strange. If the teaching and learning of grammar topics and features was not seen in the early language learning materials and is also not seen in the other A1-level learning materials used in the third grade, when will be the suitable time for grammar teaching and learning?

In question five of part three, the respondents were asked to report how often they use extra materials provided by the publisher and in question six, the respondents were asked to tell how often they use self-created materials in their teaching. The respondents were given the same five options as in part two from which to choose. Questions five and six both received sixteen answers. The distribution of the responses to question five can be seen in Figure 14 and the distribution of responses to question six can be seen in Figure 15.

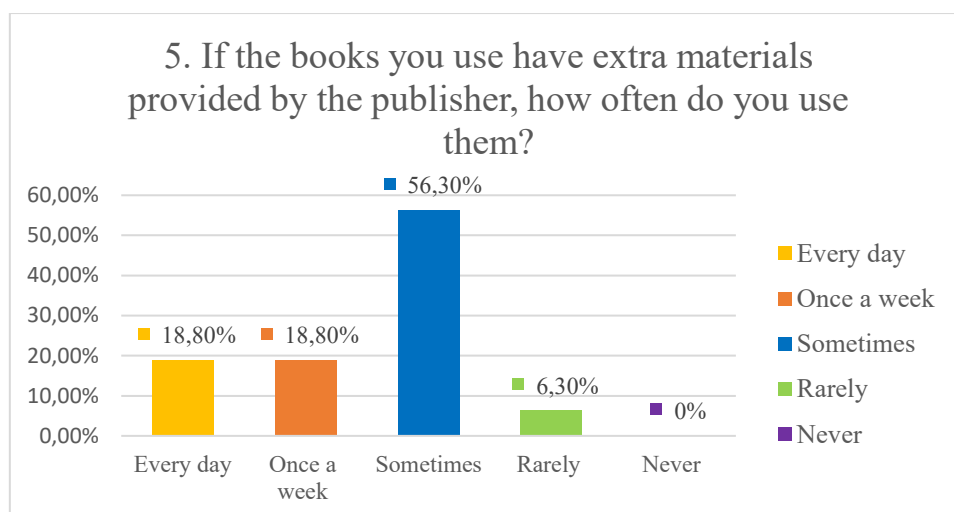


Figure 14. how often extra materials are used in other A1-level English learning

There are some similarities in the responses in the use of extra materials in both early language learning and other A1-level English learning. Like with early language learning, also with other A1-level language learning context, all of the respondents that provided an answer stated to be using extra materials provided by the publisher. The difference is that in the other A1-level learning context extra materials were used more often. With other A1-level learning materials, 56.3 percent of the respondents answered to use extra materials ‘sometimes’, 18.8 percent of the respondents reported to use extra materials ‘every day’, and 18.8 percent reported to use extra materials ‘once a week’. In the early language learning context, 18.8 percent of the respondents reported to use extra materials ‘rarely’. However, only 6.3 percent answered to use extra materials ‘rarely’ with other A1-level coursebooks. As was stated earlier, in question six the respondents were asked to report how often they use self-created materials in other A1-level English teaching and learning.

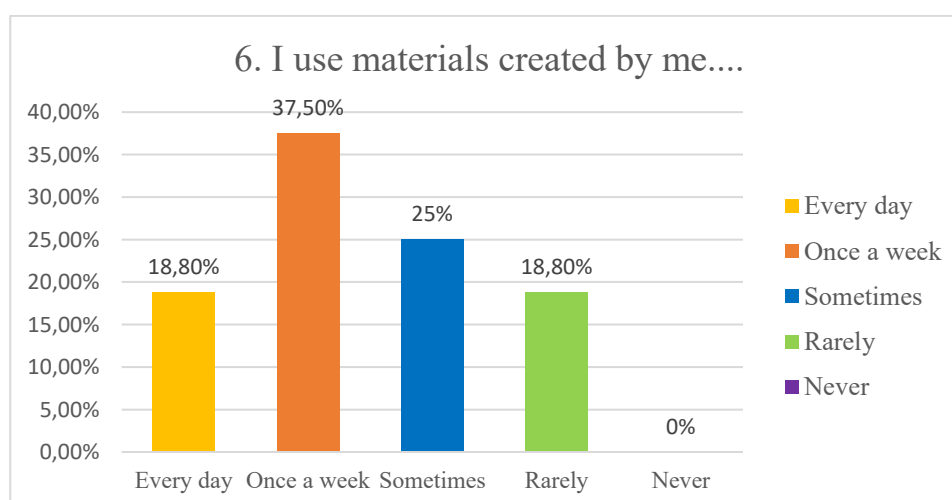


Figure 15. the use of self-created materials in other A1-level English learning

All of the respondents that provided an answer to question six reported to use materials they have created themselves. 81.3 percent of the respondents reported to use self-created materials either 'every day', 'once a week' or 'sometimes'. In early language learning 94.4 percent of the respondents reported to use self-created materials 'every day', 'once a week' or 'sometimes'. The results show that for some reason in the other A1-level English learning context, the need for self-created materials decreases. The possible reasons for the decrease will be discussed further in chapter 6.

5.3 Differences and similarities in A1-level English materials (part four)

The fourth and last part of the questionnaire introduced some open-ended questions that concentrated specifically on the differences and similarities in A1-level English learning materials. The respondents were given the chance to express their opinions freely with the insertion of open-ended questions. First, the respondents were asked how early language teaching differs from teaching in other grades. The respondents reported that early language teaching differs from teaching other grades in that early language teaching is very practical, emphasizes the use of songs and games, and concentrates on speaking and listening the target language. The notion of the pupils still developing reading and writing skills was seen as a crucial reason for the favouring of speaking and listening. The lack of writing was one of the differences between early language learning and other A1-level language learning. Other differences highlighted by the respondents were the use of dancing, playing, singing, colouring, mimicking, and learning by heart. In section 2.3, the lack of peer pressure and generally higher motivation among younger pupils were mentioned as some of the advantages of early language learning. These advantages were also mentioned in the questionnaire responses, when the respondents reported that early language pupils are usually very eager to learn and easy to motivate. In section 2.3, the limitation of time was also discussed as one of the claims used to downplay early language learning. The limited amount of time was also mentioned in the responses when one respondent (R14) reported the issue of only having early English once a week, when there are two or three weekly lessons of English in the third grade. Other differences mentioned by the respondents were the lack of texts and the addition of homework and exams, which leads to a more goal-oriented approach to language learning in the third grade. Finally, the need for more self-created materials in early language learning discussed in the previous section was also mentioned in question one of part four.

In the second question of part four the respondents were asked how early English teaching materials differ from the materials designed for older pupils. The respondents appraised similar ideas than in the first question, but additional differences were also reported. The awareness of the differences in the pupils ages was seen in the answer of one respondent (R3) claiming that pupils become more academic at around the age of 10 to 11 and start to think more analytically, which should lead to more complex topics in the learning materials. One respondent (R8) thought that the materials do not differ in any other way than that early language materials are more visual and have more picture. The large number of visually pleasing pictures was also noticed by other respondents. Other differences mentioned by the respondents were the use of more exciting and engaging fairy tales and imagination in early language learning materials than those used in other A1-level English materials. A shortage in the available materials provided for early language learning could be seen, when one respondent (R10) reported that there is less material for the early language learning than there is for other A1-level English learning. Moreover, one respondent (R13) reported a shortage in vocabulary and grammar, while another (R4) claimed that there are not enough activities that suit pupils who cannot read.

The third question of part four asked if the respondents had noticed any flaws in the materials of the books they use to teach early English and also explain their findings. One issue raised in the responses was the newness of early English in Finland, and thus the materials used to teach and learn early English are at an experimental stage. The novelty of the early language learning materials is an important observation and also one of the reasons for the execution of this study. By studying the similarities and differences in learning materials, many crucial ideas on how learning materials can be improved can be made. Otherwise, similar issues already previously mentioned, like the requirement of writing and reading in exercises, the excess number of words in vocabularies, and the need for more materials were highlighted in question three. Finally, other additional problems included the longevity of some activities and the use of words in the vocabulary that are not essential for the early language pupils to learn.

The last actual question in part four asked what the respondents thought was the most important thing in early English teaching and learning. The respondents highlighted the importance of teachers' own English skills, meaning that by copying the teachers' good pronunciation models, the pupils will also learn to speak English well. Also, the use of English in actual everyday situations by, for example, saying *Good morning* in the morning, was regarded important. Moreover, the respondents thought that it is important to encourage the pupils to speak English freely and without hesitation. Many respondents also highlighted the

enthusiastic, encouraging, and inspiring atmosphere which is achieved by playing and doing things together. First grade pupils might not have the knowledge on how languages should be studied thus the fact that the pupils are concretely taught how to study languages was regarded important. In the last question of the questionnaire, the respondents were able to give feedback or report any additional opinions on the topics of the questionnaire. A few interesting ideas were mentioned in the last question. Respondents reported that the importance of digital material is higher in the early language learning than it is in the other grades. This idea of the importance of digital materials in early language learning might generate from the advantages digital materials have, for example, in providing recordings and examples of the pronunciation pivotal in early language learning.

The analysis of the questionnaire responses provided more insight on the similarities and differences between early language learning materials and other A1-level learning materials of English. More on the comparison of the results of the analyses, the issues raised by the two analyses as well as some additional gathering thoughts will be discussed in the next chapter.

6 DISCUSSION

The first two research questions of this thesis pondered how the materials used in early language learning resemble and differ from the materials used in other A1-level English learning situations and what features of phonology, grammar, and vocabulary are included in the A1-level English learning materials. The results of the two analyses, the learning material analysis involving three A1-level English coursebooks and the questionnaire analysis containing the ideas and views of 19 respondents, revealed important differences and similarities in the learning of A1-level English. The largest general difference between early language learning and learning English in other A1-level contexts is that in early language learning the emphasis is more on spoken language. In the questionnaire responses, the methods of teaching and learning in early language learning were acknowledged to rely on singing, active learning, playing, and using the language verbally. Although some respondents reported that sometimes early English learning materials contain too many writing exercises, the overall view was that the focus is on spoken language. The emphasis on spoken language was also acknowledged in the learning material analysis. In the learning material analysis, both early language learning materials consisted of a large variety of exercises where the answers were given in either speaking, colouring, connecting dots or lines, or drawing.

Most of the similarities found between the three coursebooks concentrated on the general composition and the visual exterior of the learning materials. The English A1-level learning materials studied in this thesis were visually pleasing, colourful, and suitable for primary school children. Moreover, the learning materials used imaginative and exciting pictures and fantasy which worked to motivate the pupils to learn English. The three learning materials also had a clear and simple overall structure which was mostly easy to follow. Other similarities found from the learning materials were the similar choice of vocabulary themes. The similarities of the vocabulary themes support the compliance of the national core curriculum, where it is stated that the pupils have to be introduced to words and phrases that come from their everyday lives (POPS 2014; POPS 2019). The common vocabulary themes found from the learning materials consisted of words for school, clothing, numbers, colours, toys, animals as well as basic level verbs and adjectives. Most of the questionnaire responses also supported the claim that English A1-level learning materials use age-appropriate vocabulary.

Although some similarities were found between early language learning materials and other A1-level English learning materials, a large number of differences could be found. The results of the study showed that very often the learning materials used to teach English at A1-level differ from each other in their contents. Some of the differences found can be explained with personal preferences made by the publishers, while others can be explained by the constraints imposed by the national core curriculum. As was discussed earlier, the learning materials studied in this thesis consisted of similar vocabulary themes that circled around the pupils' lives. The differences originating from the personal preferences of the publishers include the varying choice of words in these vocabulary themes. Different approaches on, for example, the presentation for animal words could be found. Moreover, unlike *High five! 1-2* and *High five! 3, Go!* introduced many words relating to the British culture. The differences explained by the constraints imposed by the national core curriculum included mostly the differences found between early language learning materials and other A1-level learning materials. The national core curriculum highlights the use of spoken language in early language learning and supports the learning of the vocabulary and phonology over grammar (POPS 2019, 25). For example, the reason that *High five! 3* included texts which were completely omitted from early language learning materials can be explained by the constraints imposed by the national curriculum in which one of the goals of learning is the skill to interpret and produce texts (POPS 2014, 244).

The third research question asked why some features of phonology, grammar and vocabulary are highlighted in one learning materials, while in the other they are not. The results of the learning materials analysis show a clear distinction in the presentation and introduction of two features of language in the three learning materials. In the two early language learning materials *High five! 1-2* and *Go!* the focus of teaching and learning was on vocabulary. A lot of the emphasis of *High five! 3* was also placed on vocabulary. The fact that the emphasis of learning is placed on vocabulary in the beginner level English A1-level learning materials supports the idea that vocabulary forms the core of language learning. Without the knowledge of the vocabulary, communication will be challenging.

The second distinction in the presentation of language features could be seen with the presentation of grammar features. Grammar was the most heavily neglected feature of language in the two early language learning materials. In the two early language learning materials studied in this thesis, no grammatical features were explicitly taught to the early language pupils. Although some features of grammar were taught unconsciously by presenting simple phrases, questions, and sentences to the pupils, the actual composition of these elements of

language was not addressed. The immense difference in the number of grammatical topics and features introduced in the *High five! 3* can be seen as puzzling and possibly problematic. As was mentioned previously, the goals of learning are increased in the third grade, for example, by the addition of exams, and thus the pressure placed on the pupils also increases. Although the learning of pronunciation and the introduction of words is extremely important, one has to wonder if some minor features of grammar should be added to early language learning. Very often the most challenging features of language for pupils are features of grammar. By splitting the grammar topics, pupils would have more time to absorb the grammatical features of language and form a solid base for the future. However, as was mentioned in the questionnaire responses, a large portion of the contents of the learning materials used in the third grade repeat what has already been learnt in early language learning. If the situation truly is so, the fact that grammar teaching and learning is left to later grades seems reasonable.

One of the features of language that gained some but not a lot of emphasis in the learning materials was phonology. Although the two early language learning materials were different in their approaches on presenting phonological features, both provided some features of phonology either by presenting phonemes or providing phonological exercises. However, because the focus of early language learning should be on pronunciation and spoken language, the fact that the number of phonological features presented in the learning materials is so limited, is rather surprising and something that raises questions. In *Go!* a very limited set of phonemes were represented. If one of the reasons for the earlier start to foreign language learning is that pupils would have a better change in gaining the confidence and skills in the pronunciation of English, based on the early language learning materials examined in the study, the efforts in reaching these goals are not enough. In the learning materials some of the most crucial phonemes were presented but all other aspects of phonology and phonetics were dismissed. As Lengeris (2012) discussed a neglect of suprasegmental features can often be seen in the classroom. The neglect of suprasegmental features is not only seen in the classroom but could also be seen in the learning materials. The learning materials studied in this thesis did not provide materials for the teaching and learning of suprasegmental features like, for example, intonation. The learning of suprasegmental features of language is thus left to the teacher. If the claim proposed by Lengeris (*ibid.*) is true, the pupils have no way of gaining knowledge of these features. The learning of suprasegmental features is extremely important for the intelligibility of the communication. If, for example, the intonation patterns of the pupils' native language differ greatly from the intonation patterns of the target language, a change for misunderstanding is imminent. If one of the reasons for the earlier start of foreign

language learning is the superb language absorption abilities of younger pupils, shouldn't the phonological and suprasegmental features of language be explicitly taught in early language learning? Early language learning is the time and place to investigate and play with the sounds and intonation of English. The supporting environment emphasizing spoken language and the pupils' high motivation work as a perfect ground for learning pronunciation. The coverage of phonological features should thus be supported by providing more versatile phonological exercises in the learning materials.

An interesting observation made from the questionnaire responses was the increase in the use of self-created materials in early language learning. The reasons for the increase in the use of self-created learning materials could be the lack of simple songs, nursery rhymes, and game bases also reported in the questionnaire. Moreover, many teachers like to make their own learning materials or complement their teaching by adding different types of exercises. Another factor impacting on the use of self-created materials in early language learning could be time. There were a lot more pages and topics to cover in *High five!* 3 than there were in the early language learning materials. The reason for the increase in the use of self-created materials in early language learning might be the fact that there is more room for extra exercises and activities.

The results of the study are limited in the ways that they only cover three learning materials and the views of 19 individuals. In order to gain a further viewpoint on the differences of A1-level English learning materials, a study analysing multiple learning materials should be conducted. Further studies could also concentrate on differences in specific features of language like, for example, only focus on vocabulary or grammar and examine the presentation and introduction of these features in various learning materials. Moreover, a survey collecting responses from more people could be conducted in the future. With more responses the results of the study would become more reliable. In addition, the results of this study cannot reveal what the teachers and pupils actually do in the classroom. Although the responses to the questionnaire reveal some parts of the reality of language learning in the classroom, a study concentrating on observing real-life language learning situations in classrooms would be beneficial to see how teachers actually utilize different learning materials.

The results of this study work as a basis for the improvement of early language learning materials. As was said before, the phenomenon of early language learning is still to this day very new in Finland, and the materials provided for early language learning and teaching are at an experimental stage. This is why all research conducted in the field of early language learning is important.

7 CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this thesis was to uncover differences and similarities in A1-level learning materials used to teach English as a foreign language. The study aimed to identify possible differences and similarities between two early language learning materials and other A1-level English learning materials, and examine which features of phonology, grammar, and vocabulary are highlighted in the learning materials. As could be seen from the analysis of the learning materials, the difference between early language learning materials and other A1-level learning materials is that although both learning materials are designed for beginners, the contents of the learning materials differ immensely. The learning materials designed for early language learning purposes emphasize alternative ways of learning and concentrate on building the pupils' basic vocabulary. The learning materials designed for older pupils are generally longer, cover more features of grammar and vocabulary, and also include texts.

Although the study has its limits, important observations on the state of English A1-level learning materials could be provided. One of issues regarding the future of English learning materials concentrated on the learning materials used after early language learning. Although, in some cases, the materials used in third grade complement the learning materials used in early language teaching and learning, very often the learning materials used in third grade repeat the same matters already introduced and discussed in early language learning. Of course, the addition of grammar topics and features as well as the focus on written language provide adequate challenge for third grade pupils. However, one has to wonder, if the learning materials used after early language learning provide enough challenge to motivate the pupils. If the learning materials are not challenging enough, how could the learning materials used after early language learning be improved to motivate and challenge the pupils further the learning of English? Because the start of foreign language studies has been preponed to the first two years of primary school, a closer inspection of all A1-level learning materials of English is current. The earlier start to language learning is not the only reason for the need to ponder and improve the situation of English A1-level learning materials. As was discussed in section 2.2, English is increasingly heard and used in the Finnish society. This inevitably leads to an increase in children's knowledge of the language. The presence of social media has brought the knowledge of English not only accessible but also desirable to children. In order for the learning materials to continue the language learning process by providing challenging, interesting, and motivating exercises and texts, this notion has to be taken into consideration.

In this thesis, the learning materials were examined by using the electronic versions of each learning material. The increase in the use of digital learning materials and applications has started to diminish the use of physical copies of coursebooks. Although most primary school pupils still use physical copies of coursebooks, in upper secondary school, more and more students prefer digital learning materials. The use of digital learning materials is easy to justify. The perks of digital learning materials include, for example, easy access, possibilities to use recordings, and the fact that they are easy to carry and always available. Languages develop constantly to which physical copies of coursebooks always answer late. Digital learning materials are more easily updated and can respond to the students' current needs better. Hence, it is interesting to ponder whether physical copies of coursebooks are still necessary.

The choice of contents in the learning materials is crucial for the language learning process and can have an immense impact on the pupils' motivation. Learning materials that provide interesting topics, challenging yet motivating exercises, authentic and engaging texts, and current vocabulary stimulate the learning process and lead to higher chances of the learning process being successful. However, as mentioned in the introduction, English has become the language of education, business, and trade, and thus operates a specific and unique role in today's society. Seidlhofer (2011, 20-22) discusses that although the use of English around the world and the discussion of the teaching of English have changed, the contents of English course materials have not been able to respond to the change. Seidlhofer (*ibid.*) continues that the contents of English courses still centre around native speakers of English and variations of English spoken in countries where English is the official language. In order to respond to the status of English as the international language with a growing number of non-native speakers, learning materials of English must also change.

The future of the English language looks rather positive and bright in Finland. The fact that the learning of A1 language, which most often is English, now starts earlier than before denotes an important message to pupils and their parents. Early English is an indication that language learning is seen as important in Finland, and all efforts in supporting the learning of languages should be appreciated. However, the future of language learning in Finland is still open, and who knows what the future will bring. The change in the status of English and the open future of language learning are reasons why research in the field of language learning is always important, welcomed, and hopefully continues to interest researchers also in the future.

REFERENCES

- Alsagoff, Lubna. 2012. *Principles and Practices for Teaching English as an International Language*. New York: Routledge, Print.
- Arnold, Wendy & Shelagh, Rixon. 2008. Materials for Teaching English to Young Learners. In Brian Tomlinson (ed.). *English Language Learning Materials: A Critical Review*, 38-58. London: Continuum International publishing Group.
- Bavali, Mohammad & Firooz, Sadighi. 2008. Chomsky's Universal Grammar and Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics: An Appraisal and a Compromise. *Journal of Pan-Pacific Association of Applied Linguistics*, vol.12 (1), 11-28. Available from: <https://web-s-ebsohost-com.libproxy.tuni.fi/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?vid=0&sid=9ef9156c-31f7-4bbb-8434-f2e7c9dfcb1f%40redis>
- Bley-Vroman, Robert. 2009. The evolving context of the fundamental difference hypothesis. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*, 31(2), 175-198. Available from: <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0272263109090275>
- Brown, Roger. 1973. *A First Language the Early Stages*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Butler, Yuko. 2019. How teachers of Young Learners of English are Educated in East and Southeast Asia: research-based Lessons. In Subhan Zein & Sue Garton (eds.), *Early Language Learning and Teacher Education : International Research and Practice*, 17-38. Bristol: Multilingual Matters.
- Carter, Ronald. 2012. *Vocabulary : Applied Linguistic Perspectives*. London: Taylor and Francis.

- Crystal, David. 2006. English worldwide. In Richard M. Hogg, Richard & David Denison (eds.), *A History of the English Language*, 420-439. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Cook, Vivian. 2016. *Second Language Learning and Language Teaching*, 5th edn. London: Taylor and Francis.
- Curtiss, Susan. 1977. *Genie: A Psycholinguistic Study of a Modern-Day Wild Child*” In Harry Whitaker (ed.). Elsevier Science & Technology
- Davis, Barbara L. & Lisa M. Bedore. 2013. *An Emergence Approach to Speech Acquisition : Doing and Knowing*. London: Psychology Press
- Fletcher, Paul & Ciara, O’Toole. 2015. *Language Development and Language Impairment : A Problem-Based Introduction*. Chicester: John Wiley & Sons, Incorporated.
- Kanervo, Pauliina & Anna Laukkarinen. 2022. *Go!* Helsinki:Sanoma Pro oy.
- Fisher, Douglas. 2001. Early Language Learning with and Without Music. *Reading Horizons*; Sep/Oct 2001; 42, 1; Available from: <https://www-proquest-com.libproxy.tuni.fi/docview/236463132?pq-origsite=primo>
- Hakuta, Kenji, Ellen Bialystok & Edward Wiley. 2003. Critical Evidence: A Test of the Critical-Period Hypothesis for Second-Language Acquisition. *Psychological science*, vol.14 (1), 31-38. Available from: <https://doi-org.libproxy.tuni.fi/10.1111/1467-9280.01415>
- Impilä, Pauliina & Fiia Heilä. 2020. *Luokanopettajien asenteet ja valmiudet varhennettuun kieltenopetukseen*. University of Turku. Available from: https://www.utupub.fi/bitstream/handle/10024/149217/Heila_Pauliina_Impila_Fiia-Rebecca_opinnayte.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y

- Iwaniec, Janina. 2020. Questionnaires-Implications for effective implementation. In Jim McKinley & Rose Heath (eds.), *The Routledge Handbook of Research Methods in Applied Linguistics*. New York: Taylor & Francis Group.
- Kachru, Braj. B. 1992. *The other tongue: English across Cultures*, 2nd edn. Urbana and Chicago, IL: University of Illinois Press.
- Kajala, Maria, Niina Korpela, Raija Kuja-Kyyny-Pajula, Jamie Mäkinen, & Päivi Pelli-Kouvo. 2022. *High five!*1-2. Helsinki: Otava
- Keck, Casey & YouJin Kim. 2014. *Pedagogical Grammar*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company.
- Kisilevsky, Barbara S., Lihui Pang & Sylvia M. J. Hains. 2000. Maturation of human fetal responses to airborne sound in low- and highrisk fetuses. *Early Human Development*, vol. 58, 179–195. Available from: [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0378-3782\(00\)00075-X](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0378-3782(00)00075-X)
- Kisilevsky, Barbara S. & Sylvia M. J. Hains. 2011. Onset and maturation of fetal heart rate response to the mother's voice over late gestation. *Developmental Science*, vol. 14(2), 214-223. Available from: <https://doi-org.libproxy.tuni.fi/10.1111/j.1467-7687.2010.01028.x>
- Kljajevic, Vanja. 2012. *Comprehension of Wh-dependencies in Broca's Aphasia*. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing
- Knapp, Karlfried & Barbara Seidlhofer. 2009. *Handbook of Foreign Language Communication and Learning*. New York, N.Y.: De Gruyter Mouton
- Korpela, Niina, Raija Kuja-Kyyny-Pajula, Jamie Mäkinen & Päivi Pelli-Kouvo. 2022a. *High five!* 3 Textbook. Helsinki: Otava
- Korpela, Niina, Raija Kuja-Kyyny-Pajula, Jamie Mäkinen & Päivi Pelli-Kouvo. 2022b. *High five!* 3 Activities book. Helsinki: Otava
- Lahdenoja, Anne. 2019. *Kieltenopetusta esiopetuksessa*. Tampere university. Available from: <https://urn.fi/URN:NBN:fi:tuni-201911226197>

- Lengeris, Angelos. 2012. Prosody and Second Language Teaching: Lessons from L2 Speech Perception and Production Research. In Jesús Romero-Trillo (ed.), *Pragmatics and Prosody in English Language Teaching*, 1st edn. Dordrecht: Springer Netherlands.
- Leslie, Julian. 2002. *Essential Behaviour Analysis*. London: Routledge.
- Levey, Sandra. 2019. *Introduction to Language Development*, 2nd edn. San Diego, CA: Plural Publishing, Inc. Print.
- Loritz, Donald. 1999. *How the Brain Evolved Language*. New York: Oxford University Press, Incorporated.
- Mishan, Frieda. 2003. *Designing Authenticity Into Language Learning Materials*. Bristol: Intellect Books.
- Mystkowska-Wiertelak, Anna & Mirosław Pawlak. 2012. *Production-Oriented and Comprehension-Based Grammar Teaching in the Foreign Language Classroom*, 1st edn. Berlin, Heidelberg: Springer Berlin Heidelberg.
- Müller, Nicole. 2012. Qualitative research in clinical Linguistics and Phonetics. In Nicole Müller & Martin J. Ball (eds.), *Research Methods in Clinical Linguistics and Phonetics : A Practical Guide*, 87-106. Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons, Incorporated.
- Nieminen, Emmi. 2021. *Teachers' perceptions of teaching materials in teaching English to young learners*. Tampere university. Available from: <https://trepo.tuni.fi/bitstream/handle/10024/134909/NieminenEmmi.pdf?sequence=2&isAllowed=y>
- Nikolov, Marianne. 2009. *The Age Factor and Early Language Learning*, Studies on Language Acquisition. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.
- O'Dwyer, Laura M. & James A. Bernauer, James. 2014. *Quantitative Research for the Qualitative Researcher*. Los Angeles: SAGE Publications, Inc.

- Official Statistics of Finland (OSF). 2017. Participation in adult education [Internet]. ISSN=2489-6918. Language Skills 2017, 2. *Englantia osataan parhaiten*. Helsinki: Statistics Finland [Accessed: 13.3.2021]. Available from: http://www.stat.fi/til/aku/2017/04/aku_2017_04_2018-12-12_kat_002_fi.html
- Oller, John W., Stephen D. Oller, and Linda C. Badon. 2014. *Milestones : Normal Speech and Language Development Across the Life Span*, 2nd edn. San Diego: Plural Publishing, Inc.
- POPS. 2014. *Perusopetuksen opetussuunnitelman perusteet 2014*. Opetushallitus. Helsinki: Next Print Oy
- POPS. 2019. *Perusopetuksen opetussuunnitelman perusteiden 2014 muutokset ja täydennykset koskien A1- kielen opetusta vuosiluokilla 1–2*. Helsinki: PunaMusta Oy.
- Randall, Mick. 2007. *Memory, Psychology and Second Language Learning*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Co.
- Rogers, Henry. 2000. *The Sounds of Language: An Introduction to Phonetics*. London: Routledge.
- Seidlhofer, Barbara. 2011. *Understanding English as a Lingua Franca*. Oxford: Oxford University Press
- Singleton, David M. & Zolt Lengyel. 1995. *The Age Factor in Second Language Acquisition : A Critical Look at the Critical Period Hypothesis*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters,
- Shastri, Pratima Dave. 2009. *Communicative Approach to the Teaching of English as a Second Language*. Mumbai: Global Media.
- Snow, Catherine E. & Marian Hoefnagel-Höhle. 1978. The Critical Period for Language Acquisition: Evidence from Second Language Learning. *Child Development*, vol. 49, no. 4, 1114–1128. Available from: <https://doi-org.libproxy.tuni.fi/10.2307/1128751>
- Vipunen Education statistics Finland. 2015. *Choices for syllabus A in grades 1-6 of comprehensive school*. The Ministry of Education and Culture and the Finnish National

- Agency for Education. Available from: https://vipunen.fi/fi-fi_layouts/15/xlviewer.aspx?id=/fi-fi/Raportit/Perusopetus%20-%20ainevalinnat%20-%20A-kieli%20-%201-6%20luokittain%20-%20maakunta.xlsb [Accessed 23.03.2021]
- Vipunen Education statistics Finland. 2016. *Choices for syllabus A in grades 1-6 of comprehensive school*. The Ministry of Education and Culture and the Finnish National Agency for Education. Available from: https://vipunen.fi/fi-fi_layouts/15/xlviewer.aspx?id=/fi-fi/Raportit/Perusopetus%20-%20ainevalinnat%20-%20A-kieli%20-%201-6%20luokittain%20-%20maakunta.xlsb [Accessed 23.03.2021]
- Vipunen Education statistics Finland. 2017. *Choices for syllabus A in grades 1-6 of comprehensive school*. The Ministry of Education and Culture and the Finnish National Agency for Education. Available from: https://vipunen.fi/fi-fi_layouts/15/xlviewer.aspx?id=/fi-fi/Raportit/Perusopetus%20-%20ainevalinnat%20-%20A-kieli%20-%201-6%20luokittain%20-%20maakunta.xlsb [Accessed 23.03.2021]
- Vipunen Education statistics Finland. 2018. *Choices for syllabus A in grades 1-6 of comprehensive school*. The Ministry of Education and Culture and the Finnish National Agency for Education. Available from: https://vipunen.fi/fi-fi_layouts/15/xlviewer.aspx?id=/fi-fi/Raportit/Perusopetus%20-%20ainevalinnat%20-%20A-kieli%20-%201-6%20luokittain%20-%20maakunta.xlsb [Accessed 23.03.2021]
- Vipunen Education statistics Finland. 2019. *Choices for syllabus A in grades 1-6 of comprehensive school*. The Ministry of Education and Culture and the Finnish National Agency for Education. Available from: https://vipunen.fi/fi-fi_layouts/15/xlviewer.aspx?id=/fi-fi/Raportit/Perusopetus%20-%20ainevalinnat%20-%20A-kieli%20-%201-6%20luokittain%20-%20maakunta.xlsb [Accessed 23.03.2021]
- Yule, George. 2010. *The Study of Language*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

APPENDIX A.

The layout of the questionnaire

Differences in the English A1-level learning materials

This questionnaire collects data for a Master's thesis at Tampere university. The purpose of the thesis is to compare English A1-level materials designed for early English learning and English A1-level materials used in the third grade. The main attention in the thesis is drawn to the ways grammar and vocabulary teaching and learning differs from early English materials to other A1-level materials. Although the main focus of this thesis is on grammar and vocabulary topics, all comments and thoughts are welcome.

It takes roughly 10-15 minutes to respond to the survey. All information gathered will be treated anonymously and confidentially. Any questions or additional comments concerning the study can be sent to johanna.tolonen@tuni.fi

Part 1. Demographic information:

1. Age:
2. Gender:
 - Female Male Prefer not to say Other
3. Nationality/mother tongue:
4. Experience in teaching
 - 0-1 years 2-4 years 5-10 years 10-15 years 15-20 years 20-25 years
 - 25+ years
5. I teach A1-level English to
 - 1st graders
 - 2nd graders
 - 3rd graders
 - all of the above
6. Other teaching subjects:
7. What is your profession?
 - Classroom teacher
 - Subject teacher
 - Both
8. Textbooks you use:
 - Jump in!
 - High five! 1-2
 - High five! 3
 - Go!
 - Go for it! 3
 - Come with me! 1
 - Come with me! 2

9. Which region is your school located in?

- Uusimaa
- Varsinais-Suomi / Southwest Finland
- Satakunta
- Kanta-Häme
- Pirkanmaa
- Päijät-Häme
- Kymenlaakso
- Etelä-Karjala / South Karelia
- Etelä-Savo / South Savo
- Pohjois-Savo / North Savo
- Pohjois-Karjala / North Karelia
- Keski-Suomi / Central Finland
- Etelä-Pohjanmaa / South Ostrobothnia
- Pohjanmaa / Ostrobothnia
- Keski-Pohjanmaa / Central Ostrobothnia
- Pohjois-Pohjanmaa / North Ostrobothnia
- Kainuu
- Lappi / Lapland
- Ahvenanmaa / Åland

10. In your school, A1- level English starts in the

- 1st grade autumn
- 1st grade spring
- 2nd grade autumn
- 2nd grade spring
- 3rd grade

Part 2. Textbooks and materials in early English learning

1. Have you noticed any problems with the books you use?
2. Do you think something that should have been included is missing from the books?
 - No
 - Yes.If you answered yes to the previous question, what do you think is missing?
3. Which of the following is emphasized **the most** in the books you use?
 - Vocabulary
 - Grammar
 - Texts
 - Phonetics

4. Which of the following is emphasized **the least** in the books you use?
 - Vocabulary
 - Grammar
 - Texts
 - Phonetics
5. Have the books you use taken the pupil's age into account? How?
6. Do you teach grammar to your early English pupils? How?
7. Do you feel that grammar is important in the early English context? Why? Why not?
8. How often do you use the extra material provided by the book?
 - Every day
 - Once a week
 - Sometimes
 - Rarely
 - Never
9. I use materials created by me...
 - Every day
 - Once a week
 - Sometimes
 - Rarely
 - Never

Part 3. Other A1-level English textbooks and materials

1. Have you noticed any problems with the books you use?
2. Do you think something is missing from the books that should have been included?
 - No
 - Yes.If you answered yes to the previous question, what do you think is missing?
3. Which of the following is emphasized **the most** in the books you use?
 - Vocabulary
 - Grammar
 - Texts
 - Phonetics
4. Which of the following is emphasized **the least** in the books you use?

- Vocabulary
 - Grammar
 - Texts
 - Phonetics
5. How often do you use the extra material provided by the book?
- Vocabulary
 - Grammar
 - Texts
 - Phonetics
6. I use materials created by me....
- Vocabulary
 - Grammar
 - Texts
 - Phonetics
-

Part 4. Differences in the early English materials

1. How does teaching early English teaching differ from teaching other grades?
2. How do early English teaching materials differ from the materials designed for older pupils?
3. Have you noticed any flaws in the materials you use to teach early English?
4. What do you think is the most important thing in early English teaching and learning?
5. Anything else you would like to mention?

Thank you for your participation in this questionnaire!

APPENDIX B

Table 1. The distribution of the vocabulary in the learning materials

Coursebook	High five! 1-2	Go!	High five! 3
Pre-chapters	Greetings	-	Greetings and colours
Chapter 1	Numbers 1-12	Greetings and introducing	Numbers 1-12 and family members
Chapter 2	colours	toys	toys
Chapter 3	School supplies	Breakfast items	animals
Chapter 4	Basic verbs	Numbers 1-10	revision
Chapter 5	Family members	Basic verbs	Snacks, treats and adjectives
Chapter 6	animals	colours	Verbs and foods
Chapter 7	Foods and drinks	clothing	Prepositions, rooms in a house, furniture, numbers 13-20
Chapter 8	Body parts	School supplies	revision
Chapter 9	clothing	Hobby words	Time, days of the week, large numbers
Chapter 10	toys and furniture	Lunch items	Verbs
Chapter 11	more verbs	adjectives	Verb phrases
Chapter 12	adjectives	More verbs	revision
Chapter 13	-	Pets	Body parts and adjectives
Chapter 14	-	Games in the school yard	Clothing
Chapter 15	-	Days of the week	More verb phrases
Chapter 16	-	-	Revision

APPENDIX C

Table 2. Nouns introduced in the learning materials

Noun	High five! 1-2	Go!	High five! 3	Noun	High five! 1-2	Go!	High five! 3
a sharpener	X	X	-	An apple	X	X	-
A rubber	X	-	-	A banana	X	X	-
An eraser	-	X	-	An orange	X	-	-
A crayon	X	-	-	A cookie	X	-	-
A pencil	X	X	-	A carrot	X	X	-
A ruler	X	-	-	A sandwich	X	X	-
A pencil case	X	X	-	A pear	X	-	-
A glue stick	X	-	-	Milk	X	X	X
A notebook	X	X	-	Juice	X	X	X
A book	X	X	-	Water	X	X	X
A schoolbag	X	-	-	An egg	-	X	-
A desk	-	X	-	Bacon	-	X	-
A board	-	X	-	Cereal	-	X	-
A teacher	-	X	-	Tea	-	X	-
A school	-	X	-	Toast	-	X	-
A mum	X	-	X	Cheese	-	X	-
A dad	X	-	X	A sausage	-	X	-
A sister	X	-	X	Crisps	-	X	-
A brother	X	-	X	Lemonade	-	X	-
A granny	X	-	X	Chocolate	-	X	-
A grandad	X	-	X	A biscuit	-	X	-
A cat	X	-	X	Popcorn	-	-	X
A dog	X	-	X	Hamburgers	-	-	X
A lion	X	-	X	Chips	-	-	X
An elephant	X	-	X	Pizza	-	-	X
A tiger	X	-	X	Ice cream	-	-	X
A cow	X	-	-	Cake	-	-	X
A horse	X	-	-	Milk shake	-	-	X
A pony	X	-	-	Spaghetti	-	-	X
A pig	X	-	-	Chicken	-	-	X
A rat	X	-	X	Potatoes	-	-	X
A hamster	X	-	X	Salad	-	-	X
A sheep	X	-	-	Fish and chips	-	-	X
A puppy	-	X	-	Orange juice	-	-	X
A kitten	-	X	-	Apple juice	-	-	X
A bunny	-	X	-	Football	-	X	-
A donkey	-	X	-	Basketball	-	X	-
A lamb	-	X	-	Tennis	-	X	-
A duck	-	X	-	Badminton	-	X	-
A mini pig	-	X	-	The piano	-	X	-

A rabbit	-	-	X	The drums	-	X	-
A goldfish	-	-	X	The guitar	-	X	-
A snake	-	-	X	Computer games	-	X	-
A zebra	-	-	X	A mouth	X	-	X
A giraffe	-	-	X	A head	X	-	X
A t-shirt	X		X	A nose	X	-	X
A cap	X	X	X	Hair	X	-	X
A hoodie	X	-	X	Eyes	X	-	X
A dress	X	-	-	hands	X	-	X
A skirt	X	X	X	ears	X	-	X
A jacket	X	X	-	Arms	-	-	X
Pants	X	-	-	A tummy	-	-	X
Shoes	X	X	X	Legs	-	-	X
socks	X	X	X	A foot, feet	-	-	X
Shirt	-	X	-	A doll		X	X
A tie	-	X	-	A teddy bear	X	X	X
trousers	-	X	-	A game	X	X	X
A hat	-	X	X	A ball	X	-	X
A coat	-	X	X	A car	X	-	X
trainers	-	X	X	A sofa	X	-	X
jeans	-	-	X	A lamp	X	-	X
A present	-	-	X	A chair	X	-	X
A bedroom	-	-	X	A table	X	-	X
A living room	-	-	X	A bed	X	-	-
A bathroom	-	-	X	A football	-	X	/
A kitchen	-	-	X	A train set	-	X	-
A bed	-	-	X	A toy car	-	X	-
A house	-	-	X	A slide	-	X	-
A skateboard	-	-	X	A phone	-	-	X
A bag	-	-	X	A robot	-	-	X

APPENDIX D

Table 3. The distribution of verbs introduced in the learning materials

Verbs	High five! 1-2	Go!	High five! 3	Verb	High five! 1-2	Go!	High five! 3
jump	X	X	X	swim	-	X	X
climb	X	-	-	dance	-	X	X
run	X	X	X	skate	-	X	/
swing	X	X	-	ride	-	X	-
skip rope	X	X	-	fly	-	-	X
play football	X	-	X	play hide and seek	-	X	-
play tag	X	X	/	play hopscotch	-	X	/
go	X	X	/	play dodgeball	-	X	-
stop	X	-	-	go home	-	-	X
start	X	-	-	climb a tree	-	X	-
play	X	-	-	slide	-	X	-
read	X	X	X	go to bed	-	-	X
speak English	X	-	-	listen to	-	X	-
draw	X	X	X	walk	-	X	X
drink	X	X	X	wake up	-	-	X
wash my hands	X	-	-	go to school	-	-	X
colour	X	-	-	do your homework	-	-	X
sing	X	X	X	watch tv	-	-	X
eat	X	X	X	play with your friends	-	-	X
write	X	X	X	play computer games	-	-	X
sit	-	X	-	play the piano	-	-	X
watch a film	-	-	X	go shopping	-	-	X
play floorball	-	-	X	ride a bike	-	-	X
play disc golf	-	-	X	ride a horse	-	-	X
go swimming	-	-	X	go to the cinema	-	-	X
go skateboarding	-	-	X	go to the park	-	-	X

APPENDIX E

Table 4. The distribution of adjectives introduced in the learning materials

Adjectives	High five! 1-2	Go!	High five! 3	Adjectives	High five! 1-2	Go!	High five! 3
White	X	X	X	Happy	X	X	/
Black	X	X	X	Sad	X	X	-
Pink	X	X	X	Old	X	-	/
Brown	X	X	X	Young	X	-	-
Grey	X	X	X	Pretty	X	-	/
Yellow	X	X	X	Ugly	X	-	-
Blue	X	X	X	Good	X	-	/
Green	X	X	X	Bad	X	-	-
Orange	X	X	X	Fast	X	X	-
Purple	X	-	X	slow	X	X	-
red	X	X	X	Hungry	-	X	X
Big	X	X	X	thirsty	-	X	X
small	X	X	X	long	X	-	X
tall	-	-	X	Short	X	-	X
hot	-	-	X	cold	-	-	X