



Engaging with Culture in Teaching of English as a Foreign Language in Finland: A Teacher Perspective

Pinja Aitio

Master's Thesis

Degree Programme for Language Learning and Teaching, English

School of Languages and Translation Studies

Faculty of Humanities

University of Turku

March 2022

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Number of pages: 53 pages, 7 appendices

This study focuses on English teachers' engagement with culture in their teaching and in textbooks. Their views are compared to the Finnish national curricula, which contain numerous cultural aims for foreign language teaching and learning. Culture's role within foreign language teaching has been extensively studied since it factors in the learners' communicative and intercultural competences. However, Finnish foreign language teachers' voice is still unheard in reflecting their subjective views of culture teaching and its connection to the cultural content in textbooks.

The aim of this study is to explore English teachers' conceptions of culture in various contexts. The data were collected via semi-structured interviews that were conducted on six English teachers in Finland. The data analysis was done following principles for qualitative data analysis. The results suggest that the teachers' conception of culture is broad, and they highlight the importance of intercultural competence in their teaching. Textbooks are a significant resource for culture teaching, which is why teachers often rely on them despite often finding stereotyping representations of cultures in them. The teachers expressed being unfamiliar with the cultural aims for foreign language education in the national curricula, but their personal aims corresponded positively with what the national curricula state.

The results of this study underline the importance of cultural awareness being a part of lifelong learning, as teachers need to be constantly retrained to be able to offer culturally responsible education for the students to improve their intercultural competence. Teachers' views related to culture in foreign language teaching need to be further studied in a wider perspective to improve the foothold culture has in foreign language education.

Key words: culture teaching, English as a foreign language

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1 Introduction

Foreign language teachers are often assumed to be experts in intercultural communication and cultural instruction. However, this is not always the case since teachers can often feel overwhelmed and confused about what they are expected to teach in relation to culture (Hahl 2020). This leads to Finnish teachers often leaning on textbooks when it comes to culture teaching. For example, Luukka et al. (2008) argue that textbooks are favored by Finnish teachers as opposed to other material. According to them, textbooks can even be considered as the “hidden curricula” in Finland since they have such a substantial effect on teaching in practice. While textbooks are often where inspiration for culture teaching is drawn from (e.g. Maijala 2020, Hahl 2020), their cultural content can also be seen as problematic and oversimplified (e.g. Dervin et al. 2015, McConachy 2018). Culture is in a crucial role in the Finnish national curricula’s goals for foreign language education, and its role has been established as the “fifth dimension” in the field (Maijala 2020). Culture in foreign language learning, however, is different from the four other traditional language skills (speaking, listening, reading, and writing) because it is part of all of them (Damen 1987). Thus, culture can be regarded as a substantial part in foreign language learning, which is why teachers must possess cultural skills and awareness to be able to transfer knowledge and a progressive view of issues to their students.

The relationship between culture and foreign language teaching is a complex issue. On one hand, culture and language are viewed as inseparable, which is why, almost automatically, all foreign language teaching includes cultural instruction. This view promotes ideas of culture not being viewed as a set of facts but rather acknowledged as a diverse phenomenon that is present in all aspects of foreign language education. On the other hand, culture is often separated as its own entity, or in that case, reduced to the role of target or national culture. It is beneficial to examine the connection between culture and language through a broad conception: the concept of culture includes knowledge of, for example, art and food culture as well as values and patterns of behavior (Pyykkö 2015). However, especially when students are involved, it is important to underline that the actions of an individual cannot be seen entirely as a result of culture and every person should be encountered as individuals (Jahoda 2012). This way the teacher’s role is further emphasized as a facilitator for cultural reflection.

According to Byram (2008, 37), especially when talking about the cultural turn in foreign language teaching, plenty of research has been conducted in relation to the learner’s

perspective. This exposes a gap in research related to the teacher's perspective in cultural issues. Teachers facilitate what happens in their classroom, and Ryan (2012, 425-426) explains that teacher thinking is an important area of study for this exact reason. When thinking about interculturality and the cultural aspect in foreign language teaching, this is of extreme importance since culture is intertwined with all aspects of language. Internationally, teacher thinking has been a popular subject of study, especially on intercultural matters, but this perspective is still rather unexplored in Finland. On an international setting, for example, Sercu et al. (2005) presented the results of an extensive research project on foreign language teachers' perception of culture teaching and interculturality. In this study, teachers in seven countries answered a questionnaire that aimed to explore their perspectives on culture teaching and learning. However, Finnish teachers did not participate in this study, and research into the connection of culture and foreign language teaching has been conducted mainly from the pre-service teacher perspective in Finland. For example, Maijala's (2020) study into the culture teaching methods pre-service teachers prefer does not explain how teachers' conception of culture teaching develops while they gain teaching experience beyond the one-year teacher education programme. What is more, since textbooks are an important source for teachers, they have been thoroughly analyzed for their cultural content (e.g. Hahl 2020). However, teachers' perceptions of culture and their views of its portrayal in textbooks has not been studied. This hints that the important input from teachers related to the cultural content in textbooks is missing. The Finnish national curricula steer educational policies, which is why it is often the basis for comparison for research results. It is thus important to investigate whether Finnish foreign language teachers' views related to culture are in line with what is stated in the national curricula. Thus, this study aims to fill the gap in research and provide a needed insight into Finnish foreign language teachers' perceptions of the cultural dimension in foreign language learning.

The present study aims to explore English teachers' perceptions of culture. The focus of this study is to describe how Finnish teachers of English view culture and its relation to foreign language teaching, or to specify, how they constitute ideas of cultural knowledge and intercultural competence. Since textbooks are in a central role in education in Finland, the teachers also expressed their views on their ways of utilizing the cultural aspects in them, as well as state their views on the culture-related content in them. In Finland, the national curricula steer education and define the aims, which is why the views expressed by the interviewed teachers are compared to the cultural goals stated in both the National Curricula

for Basic Education and the National Curricula for General Upper Secondary Education. The research questions at hand are:

1. How do English teachers in Finland view culture and engage with it in their teaching?
2. How do the teachers utilize textbooks when teaching about culture, and how helpful do they experience the cultural content in them?
3. How do the teachers' views correspond with the cultural aims for foreign languages and English in the national curricula?

The data for this study were collected through six semi-structured interviews of English teachers in Finland. The interview guide was designed based on previous studies and research on culture's role in foreign language education. When conducting the interviews, instead of strictly following the pre-planned questions, a conversationalist approach was chosen to assure the interviewees' comfort and that they got to talk about issues they experience relevant. The data were then analyzed following the principles for qualitative data analysis by both Dörnyei (2007) and Galletta and Cross (2013). The results were discussed through themes that emerged from the data, analyzed in relation to the theoretical background, while simultaneously answering the research questions.

This study will proceed according to the following order. First, in chapter 2, I will discuss notions of the concept of culture and ways of interacting with it. Second, in chapter 3, culture will be discussed in relation to foreign language education. Subsection 3.1 discusses cultural components related to foreign language education in general, subsection 3.2 focuses on how culture is engaged with in textbooks, and subsection 3.3. examines the cultural goals for foreign language education in the Finnish national curricula. After introducing previous research, the methodology will then be presented in chapter 4. The chapter will discuss the interview process from planning the interviews to conducting them, present the participants of this study, and describe the process of data analysis in detail. In chapter 5, the results are presented, analyzed and discussed in relation to previous studies and the theoretical background. Chapter 5 is divided into four subsections that reflect the sections in the interview guide. They are further divided into smaller subsections according to themes that emerged from the data. Finally, in chapter 6, I will discuss the main conclusions, limitations, implications, and suggestions for further research. References will follow chapter 6, in addition to appendices, which include the translated interview guide and the Finnish summary.

2 Defining and interacting with culture

There can be as many views on what the term culture holds within and what it consists of as there are people on the planet. Kramsch (2014) suggests that even within the field of applied linguistics, it is common to compile a multidisciplinary theoretical background when talking about intercultural issues, since the subject touches several fields of research. The term culture itself is very complex in nature, which is why there is no specific or correct way of defining the concept. For this study, it is important to highlight the subjective nature of how one experiences and views culture since this study aims to give insight into the interviewed teachers' personal interpretations of culture. Jahoda (2012, 300) underlines that culture is not an isolated thing but rather a social construction that refers to a group of ambiguous and diverse phenomena. In addition, the concept of culture is under constant conversation (Jenks 2005, i). To be able to understand the notion of culture, it is necessary to recognize the underlying traditions of thought as well as the political and ideological fundamentals that affect it (*ibid.*). For example, Jahoda (2012) implies that it would even be favorable to avoid trying to define the construct altogether because of its multidimensional implications.

According to Jahoda (2012, 300) especially students should not necessarily be provided with a fixed, stiff definition of what culture stands for but rather highlight the usefulness of the concept. For the purposes of this study, however, it is important to discuss the different understandings of the term culture to limit unambiguous or unclear interpretation of the concept. The participants of this study were not restricted to express their views on culture from a specific point-of-view or presented with a definition of culture to follow, but they were given the opportunity to interpret it as they experience it. What is more, the aim of this study is not to discuss the historical development of cultures, or even culture as a concept, but rather to present some relevant interpretations for the context of this thesis. Dervin (2011, 39) notes that it is important for researchers to "implicate themselves", or, acknowledge the fact that when speaking about culture and interculturality, the discussion is always, to some extent, biased, and it can come off as further creating a gap between a cultural 'us' and 'them'. This study does not seek to promote the power structures in society, but rather explore the views that are under discussion.

At its base, the concept of culture carries meaning of everything we have learned about the human society (Jenks 2005, 8). Pyykkö (2015, 149) introduces the three basic meanings for culture: 1. Culture as arts and humanities, 2. Culture as popular culture, and 3. Culture as a

synonym for everyday life. In a broader sense, these include the systems of meaning, values and attitudes that are expressed in the actions and experiences of people (Pyykkö 2015, 149). For the purposes of early anthropology, culture was what separated the behavior of people from animals, which is why the concept of culture somehow creates a sense of unity between the whole population (Jenks 2005, 9). However, the concept of culture is at the same time highly intertwined with “diffusion, stratification, hierarchy and relativism” (*ibid.*). In other words, culture creates a system of hierarchies between and within different societies. This is because the origins for the concept of culture stem from ideas of synonymity with civilization (*ibid.*). A civilized culture usually refers to the remarkable achievements of humans, especially related to fine arts, literature, and music and the culture in question is often also described by these standards (*ibid.*). Culture can be seen as a tool of maintaining power structures in society, as it frequently exists on a spectrum of ‘high’ and ‘low’, or, in other words, civilized and non-civilized (Baker 2015, 48). Baker also argues that culture(s) exist under constant comparison; one culture can be seen as better while the other can be seen as worse. This is a very Western view of the phenomena related to culture.

According to Baker (2015, 52), culture creates mental knowledge about shared interests and identities within a social group. Thus, culture can be classified as knowledge of acting, and interpreting experiences in a certain manner, or in other words, conscious decisions on how to behave as a representative of a culture. Therefore, it is easy, while not always justified, to say that members of the same culture interpret and act in a similar way in communicational situations. When a member of a culture does not share the same interpretations, they are viewed as “different” from other representatives. Jenks (2005, 10) explains that especially British and American social theorists have applied the concept of culture for purposes of differentiation within social groups, not in a sense of unification. This relates to something called subcultures. According to Jenks (2005, 10), a subculture refers to a group of people within a larger entity of people. It defines and makes a differentiation between the special interests of a certain group of people and the larger collectivity. These groups are often labeled as abnormal or non-standard. People nowadays cross cultural borders more often than before, which is why the idea of cultural differences and conflicts is so prevalent in the discussion of culture. Also closely connected to the concept of culture, social groups, and cultural differences is race. Kubota and Lin (2009, 2) report that racial differences are often seen as equal to cultural differences. According to them, it is important to be able to critically evaluate one's own ideas about race, and its relation to the understanding of culture, as the

underlying attitudes and thoughts affect which opinions and conceptualizations of culture are repeated to the following generations.

According to Jenks (2005, 10), culture is nowadays usually understood as “the ways of life of a people, their beliefs, rituals and customs”. Within social sciences these notions are often classified into, for example, ‘value systems’, ‘patterns of belief’, ‘value-orientations’ or ‘ideologies’. Pyykkö (2015, 149) explains that culture can be seen as something that creates identities. Identity consists of, for example, nationality, language, ethnicity, age, gender, religion, educational level, and political tendency (*ibid.*). Baker (2015, 1) argues that this shift of rather than focusing on a fixed definition of culture to understanding the relationship between culture, identity and notions of intercultural communication is a fairly recent phenomenon. When examining the relationship between language and culture, it is best to have a very broad perception of what culture consists of (Pyykkö 2015, 149). Rather than fixating on what culture means in every setting, it would be favorable to look for ways in which to relate to different cultures. Intercultural communication is important to study because it improves mutual understanding between people (*ibid.*). Individual identities are not a product of culture but rather part-take in intercultural communication.

Dervin (2011) presents the liquid, solid and Janusian approaches to cultures and interculturality. The liquid approach opposes culturalism and over-simplifying cultures to a set of facts and allows the individual members of cultures to be viewed as complex (Dervin 2011, 38). The liquid approach is nowadays a widely accepted way to engage with cultures and interculturality. On the other hand, the solid approach, or culturalism, removes individuality from the equation. It gives the impression of the cultures encountering and interacting with each other while placing the representatives of cultures on a spectrum for the purposes of essentializing, or in other words, presenting students with permanent descriptions of homogenous cultures (Dervin 2011, 38-39). According to Dervin (2011, 47), the Janusian approach, however, refers to the “two-faced” discourse surrounding cultures and interculturality. It indicates researchers discussing liquid and solid elements related to culture at the same time. Simultaneously underlining the fact that representatives of cultures are individual and heterogenous and stereotyping them is harmful, while making generalizations about representatives based on the analysis of their individual thoughts and behaviors is how the Janusian approach is characterized. However, with the globalizing world, there is a need to avoid polarized and preserved views of cultures and their representatives (Dervin 2011, 40). Cultures, or rather interculturality, should be processed through understanding instead of

trying to explain the phenomena (*ibid.*). The importance should be on considering heterogeneity and variability within the cultures (*ibid.*). With the liquid approach, rather than viewing ethnic, cultural, and linguistic identities as product or evidence of a national culture, they are recognized as something an individual decides to present by their own choosing and influenced by the current time (Dervin 2011, 41). Instead of all the interest being in the question of which culture an individual represents and how it shows in their actions, the focus should shift onto how individuals construct their cultural identities (*ibid.*). This is an interesting thought from the perspective of foreign language education.

In this chapter, I have presented an insight into how the concept of culture is characterized and defined, as well as different ways of relating to culture and interacting with it. Because the concept of culture is very difficult to straightforwardly define, and it is not necessarily productive to do so, the concept itself is merely characterized from different perspectives, and the interviewees of this study were given opportunity to interpret it how they wanted to. This approach was chosen to further underline the subjectivity of experiencing culture in general. Thus, more relevant is to explore ways in which individuals relate to the concept and how they approach it. However, for the purposes of this study, a differentiation is made between a target (or national) culture and culture as a general concept. Foreign language teachers often refer to the culture of a country that is related to the language they teach as target culture. For example, English teachers often consider the culture of countries such as the UK, the USA or Australia as target cultures. In this study, instances where culture is talked about in the role of a target culture will be referred to as such.

3 Culture in foreign language teaching

In this section, culture is discussed in relation to foreign language teaching. In 3.1, under discussion are views of culture's position in the field and its connection to intercultural competence and cultural awareness skills. What is more, foreign language teachers' role in culture teaching is examined. Section 3.2 discusses culture's role and representation in textbooks. What the aims and goals set for foreign language teaching look like in the Finnish national curriculums is then discussed in section 3.3.

3.1 Culture teaching, intercultural competence, and cultural awareness skills

Culture is a central part of language, which is why it is practically impossible to teach a foreign language without discussing at least some aspects of the culture that relates to it (Hilliard 2014, 238). According to Pyykkö (2015, 149), language and culture are hard to separate from one another because the relation between them creates an issue: does culture create language or is it the other way around? When examining the relationship between language and culture, it is best to have a broad conception of culture: the term contains ideas of values, attitudes, ways of life, nonverbal communications, art, science, technology and much more. Pyykkö's definition for a broad conception of culture is used in this study to characterize the ways in which the teachers view culture. What makes the relationship between language and culture exceedingly interesting to researchers is that nowadays more and more people cross the boundaries of languages and cultures (Pyykkö 2015, 150). For example, people much more often move from one country to another and encounter cultural and linguistic diversity in their everyday lives. This is an important phenomenon to notice, since it implies that everyday situations, such as going to the grocery store or participating in a foreign language class, are frequently instances of intercultural encounters.

Before the 1990s, when the importance of intercultural competence as part of social competences was established, culture was viewed as something fixed and unchanging that described people's mindsets and behavioral patterns within the borders of a nation state (Pyykkö 2015, Dervin 2011, Hahl 2020). However, this view is now considered "outdated". It stems from the nationalist purposes in Europe in the 18th century (Pyykkö 2015, 152). Culture in an educational setting is nowadays considered an everchanging phenomenon (Dervin 2011). The liquid approach to interculturality presented in chapter 2 recognizes that the perception of culture is individual and under continuous change. Kramsch (2014, 50-51),

explains that the idea of intercultural learning influences how language teaching and learning are nowadays approached. According to her, foreign language teaching is often concerned with how to educate language learners to mediate between cultures, engage with diversity and exchange interpersonal meanings, rather than solely focusing on teaching linguistic competences. The change in perspective in foreign language teaching reflects the changes in society (Pyykkö 2015, 154). Pyykkö explains that the ways in which languages are used are also evolving constantly, for example young people use language in a very different manner in their spare time and in school. The spread of cultures, such as the North American popular culture, affects the ways in which language learners want to use language. For example, Luukka et al. (2008, 20-21) state that the multiculturalization in Finland has led to English being used more and more in informal settings, instead of its significance only being recognized in education and working life. By participating in these multilingualistic and multicultural activities, individuals get to build their intercultural identities, roles, and relationships.

The relationship between culture and foreign language teaching is even more important to study when the language used for communication is no one's native language (Pyykkö 2015, 150). The essence of culture in foreign language teaching is highly affected by the English language's status as lingua franca. Baker (2015, 6) presents a definition of English as a lingua franca as the language of intercultural communication, especially situations in which English is not the speakers' native language and the only option as the medium of communication. According to Jenkins (2009), despite of this, English is often taught with the idea that the primary goal for language learners is to be able to communicate with its native speakers. She explains that there has been a growing demand for acknowledging and considering English's role as lingua franca in foreign language education, since learners are aiming to become intercultural communicators. According to Holliday (2009, 21), viewing English as the language of global communication inevitably has an impact on which countries the English language is associated with and who owns the language. Holliday (2009, 22) states that the teaching of the culture of English-speaking countries cannot be limited to countries where English is the official language. This is comparable to how achieving the level of a native speaker is no longer the goal in foreign language learning. The phenomenon of English as a lingua franca is based on the fact that international English standards are determined by non-native speakers, which in turn leads to greater tolerance for linguistic diversity. English is spoken multiple times more by non-natives as a second or third language than by native

speakers (Pyykkö 2015, 150). Very often in foreign language classes, English is linked to either British or North American cultures, but the concept of lingua franca challenges the traditional view of a language having a specific culture or the other way around (*ibid.*).

According to Maijala (2006, 182), learning intercultural skills is not possible without simultaneously reflecting on ideas of familiarity and unfamiliarity. It is often hard to reflect on other cultures without comparing it to one's own culture. This way, interculturality only exists in concepts of "my culture" and "their culture". However, when teaching about culture and interculturality, it would be favorable to look for similarities between cultures instead of focusing on intercultural differences (Hahl 2020). If the differences between cultures are in a central role in cultural education, it further promotes the idea of otherness. Looking for the differences between "us" and "them" maintains the existing power structures in a society and creates even more inequality within the people (Hahl 2020, 178). According to Holliday (2009, 145), culture is now understood as a concept that goes beyond the borders of a nation state. Nowadays, people are careful and conscious to avoid making essentialist presumptions related to culture and the representatives of a culture. Essentialism is closely related to the solid approach to interculturality presented in chapter 2. From a cultural point of view, it refers to the assumptions that an individual has certain characteristics or acts in a certain way solely because of their culture, rather than due to individual social, ideological or intellectual influences (Dervin 2011). The term is important to keep in mind when teaching about culture. The aim in cultural education is to recognize that not all representatives of a culture share the same characteristics. Culture does not confine a homogenic group of people but rather consists of a group of diverse individuals, which should be reflected in foreign language teaching too.

With the globalizing world, interculturality in the field of foreign language teaching and learning is a central concept. However, it is important to note that national cultures still hold an important role in foreign language teaching. It is not necessarily advisable to focus solely on the learning of facts related to national cultures, but national cultures still interest learners. For example, Maijala's (2006) study explains that language learners are interested in learning about descriptions of day-to-day life, arts, history, traditions, society, politics, sights, and geography related to the target culture, or a specific national culture. Maijala (2006, 193) states that the interest in national cultures demands that teachers also possess knowledge of the target cultures that relate to the language they teach. Maijala (2010) explains that the importance of teaching about national cultures stems from the teachers and learners'

conceptions of culture. However, she also expresses the need for balance between intercultural learning and learning about national cultures. Both are important and language learners should be provided with possibilities to reflect on their own culture in an intercultural setting.

According to Hilliard (2014, 238), one of the goals in foreign language education should be to raise learners into culturally conscious and sensitive world citizens. To reach this goal it is necessary to include a copious amount of cultural content and activities in the teaching. Gaining intercultural competence is in a central role in language teaching, which is why teaching about culture is crucial. Byram (2008, 163) presents the building blocks of intercultural competence. According to him, intercultural competence consists of an open and curious attitude, knowledge about social groups and manners, as well as the skills of interpreting, relating, observing, and interacting. However, accumulating intercultural skills is not a simple, straight-forward process. Hahl (2020, 176-177) recognizes that intercultural competence should be acknowledged as a part of lifelong learning. Thus, the learner's role in the process of developing intercultural competence cannot be limited to an isolated actor who is gaining information about foreign cultures and enhancing their attitude to be interested in them, but rather lifelong curiosity to learn new ways of intercultural communication. Pyykkö (2015, 149) explains that in a more practical sense, the relevant question for the purposes of foreign language teaching is how information is communicated in different cultures. Intercultural communication is important to familiarize oneself with because it makes it easier to relate and understand one another. In a way, teaching intercultural communication skills could be regarded as providing students with abilities of identification and empathy, which in turn are skills needed in everyday life.

Hahl (2020, 176) explains that to be able to offer culturally responsible education in a constantly internationalizing world, language teachers are required to have skills to enable critical and reflective conversations in which the learner is guided to constructively think about the “right and wrong” information, thoughts and ideologies related to culture. However, Byram (2008, 162-163) argues that language teaching is often limited when it comes to culturally responsible education and critical cultural awareness skills. He defines critical cultural awareness skills as the ability to assess perspectives, practices and phenomena related to one's own or another's culture based on certain criteria. To improve these skills, it would be important for language learners to be able to identify cultural values from different materials, analyze them, and use their knowledge, skills, and attitudes related to interculturalism to act

as both an interactor and a mediator in the discussion of culture. Hahl (2020, 176) underlines that when evaluating intercultural competences and critical cultural awareness skills as part of foreign language learning, it is important for the teacher to provide tools for the students to be able to reflect and self-evaluate their own skills. The criteria and objectives must be transparent for the students to know what they should learn and what their performance is compared to.

The terms implicit and explicit instruction impact how culture is taught in foreign language classes, and how knowledge of culture is gained. Ellis (2009, 16) defines instruction as something that intervenes in the learning of a language. Implicit instruction refers to the learner being exposed to situations where they unconsciously construe rules about how the language works. This means that the learners come across a phenomenon they are not actively pursuing to learn, but they rather assimilate the rule without it being the primary focus. Culture instruction often happens implicitly. This means that cultural input, whether in a textbook or presented by the teacher, is usually acquired implicitly without the students actively realizing they are learning about culture. According to Ellis (2009, 17), explicit instruction, on the other hand, signifies the learners being aware of the learning process of a certain phenomenon. In other words, with explicit instruction, the learners know what is being taught and what they are meant to learn. Explicit cultural instruction happens through the learners noticing a phenomenon related to culture and internalizing it directly and consciously. The teacher might directly point out a culture-related feature, or textbooks often highlight and separate a specific cultural component that relates to the theme being discussed. For the teacher, explicit and implicit instruction function in a similar manner. When explicitly instructing on culture, the teacher consciously draws the students' attention to the matter, while implicit culture instruction might even be an unconscious process to the teacher.

In a previous study into pre-service teachers reported beliefs and practices related to culture teaching, Maijala (2020) expresses that the primary issues pre-service teachers expressed were the use of target language and teaching materials and combining their personal culture-related experiences into lessons. Matsumoto (2015, 225) also notes that while beginner language learners are motivated by a teacher's personality, the more experienced learners are motivated by the teacher's skills and techniques of teaching. In other words, the higher the skill level of the language learners, the more advanced and purposeful should the teacher's teaching methods and techniques be to keep the learners motivated. For cultural instruction this suggests that teachers should take the students' skill levels into consideration when

thinking about culture teaching methods. The pre-service teachers in Maijala's (2020) study explained that in culture teaching, they felt most comfortable using similar content and methods that they themselves had experienced in school. These methods were described as "teacher tells/shows/brings up". During the teacher education programme, they had found "communication in the target culture in daily life situations" one of the most meaningful and useful methods in culture teaching. According to Matsumoto (2015), practicing communicational situations in daily life situations in the target culture is a good example of tasks the students find motivating when their skill level has progressed to an intermediate or advanced level. In Maijala's (2020) study, the pre-service teachers' conception of culture was found to reflect a solid view, but there were signs of improvement towards a liquid view. It was also concluded that the participants for Maijala's study were not aware about the amount of cultural knowledge that is needed to discover appropriate timing and methods to bring up cultural content. These results are interesting to compare to the views of this study, where the participants are in service to see whether they have similar thoughts or views related to culture.

Hahl (2020, 178) explains that while often presumed that it is undeniably clear for foreign language teachers to provide their students with content about different countries, cultures and interculturality, it is not always the case. In some instances, foreign language teachers might even be worried about what they are expected to teach. Therefore, teachers often rely on textbooks and other teaching materials, which in turn often contain plenty of stereotypical cultural content (*ibid.*). When the aim in culture teaching is in advancing democracy, curious attitudes, openness, and wide understanding, teachers' most important role is to guide learners to reflect on culture-related problems and questions through their own and others' experiences and behaviors (*ibid.*). Dervin (2016, 2) also calls for teachers to become interculturalists. This means that teachers should be able to question culture-related phenomena while acting as critical, ethical, and responsible role models to prepare their students to do the same outside of school. However, if teachers are unclear on the cultural content that is appropriate to bring up and discuss with students, it might lead to cultural goals being disregarded if students are not being provided the information needed to develop their skills in intercultural communication. Teachers' role in cultural instruction is thus crucial to study to ensure the fulfilment of the cultural goals set for foreign language education.

3.2 Critically engaging with culture in textbooks

In Finland, textbooks are in a central role in education. Dervin et al. (2015, 1) argue that teaching in Finland is highly reliant of textbooks. This means that in foreign language teaching, a substantial amount of cultural content passed on to the students is based on the textbook that is used (Dervin et al. 2015, 1). The content in textbooks can sometimes be biased and controversial, which is why it could be seen as problematic or even dangerous to give such an enormous platform for textbooks in foreign language teaching (Dervin et al. 2015, 1). According to Canale (2016, 227), the cultural content of textbooks is often defined as normative and norm-creating. This means that textbooks very easily repeat existing norms but also have power in creating new ones. Discussing textbooks' role in culture teaching is important since by redesigning culture-related content to better reflect the liquid approach to interculturality could prevent the repetition of existing stereotypes and allow more complex interpretations of cultures.

According to McConachy (2018, 79), the cultural representations in textbooks are designed to create interest in a foreign language as well as provide tools for intercultural competence. The representations and descriptions of cultures in textbooks are often over-simplified, which leads to essentialist assumptions related to a specific culture. It is extremely important to use and engage with textbooks in a critical manner to avoid creating and repeating cultural stereotypes. McConachy also states that textbooks on their own do not instruct learners to critically engage with the content, which is a problem when representations of culture are simplified. Placing textbooks on an “authorial platform” leads to learners quickly accepting their content as universal truth. Therefore, foreign language teachers must have the means and abilities to provide language learners with the tools to critically examine the cultural representations in textbooks. Language learners should be able to recognize not only the different parts of culture that are represented in their textbook, but how the habits and values of a cultural group are potentially described in an overly simple manner.

Canale (2016, 232) explains that the process of generalization in textbooks is not necessarily linked to an agenda, and the purpose is not to create harmful stereotypes of cultures and their representatives. It is usually done because of pedagogical reasons. The process of simplifying and generalizing content in textbooks makes different phenomena easier for the learner to understand. This way the information is brought closer to the learner. In addition, textbooks contain such a substantial amount of information, some things need to be left out. The process

of generalization is usually done so that a culture is presented as homogenous, leaving out subsidiary groups, views and traditions that differ from the mainstream. Cultural diversity being unrecognized in textbooks guides the learners to ignore it in a larger sense too. This type of excluding of information happens when dealing with both controversial and mundane issues. According to Dervin et al. (2015, 2), however, the facts, people, events, rules, norms, practices, and traditions portrayed in textbooks often mirror ideologies popularized in a nation-state. Also, finances factor into the content of a textbook. Even if the authors did not think about financial gain while making the textbooks, the publisher probably views the textbook as an investment and has the final say on what is included in it. Textbooks must be neutral, or in other words, not include a surplus of information that goes against the mainstream views, for it to be profitable for the publisher.

In an analysis of the presentation of cultures in different English textbooks used in Finland, Hahl (2020) found that the textbooks contain thought-provoking and pleasant texts. However, many texts and exercises simultaneously contained content that reinforced cultural stereotypes instead of enabling the critical examining of cultural representations. In the analyzed textbooks, themes of interculturality were present, but they painted a static and monolithic picture of culture and cultural identity. She stated that the content of textbooks did not correspond to the national curricula's emphasis on the multi-layered cultural identity. The results of the study indicate that it is important to further study how the content in textbooks is experienced by teachers. Teachers are in an important role to enable discussions related to problematic portrayals of cultures in textbooks, since the textbooks do not instruct the students to do so.

3.3 Culture in the Finnish national curricula

In Finland, the national curricula regulate all teaching, including foreign languages. Culture as a concept is given plenty of significance in the national curricula which is why it is important to examine how the cultural aims actualize in practice. The national curricula for basic education and upper secondary school steer educational policies, and even though the national curricula today are much more standardizing than the ones before, the execution still depends on the education providers, which in Finland, are municipalities (Pyykkö 2015, 157). In addition to the national curricula, there are local curricula for education providers, as well as school specific curricula that further guide how the national curricula are utilized in practice. These specific curricula are not analyzed or referenced in this study to guarantee the

anonymity of the interviewees. The new National Curriculum for General Upper Secondary Education was only put in operation in August 2021, and the interviewed upper secondary school teachers did not have much experience of the new national curriculum when the interviews were conducted. Therefore, I chose to focus on the previous National Curriculum for General Upper Secondary Education that was implemented in 2016. The National Curriculum for Basic Education was implemented on different years on different grades, beginning from 2015. The documents referenced in this study are both the National Core Curriculum for General Upper Secondary Education and the National Core Curriculum for Basic Education, on which “the pedagogical foundation for the organization and implementation of education” is based on (Vitikka, Krokfors, and Rikabi, 2016, 83). The core curricula have twofold functions; they are regulative documents that guide education, while also acting as guidebooks for teachers to advance their pedagogical skills in practice (*ibid.*).

According to Finnish National Agency for Education (2014), in basic education, the value base for the national curriculum leans on human rights, equality, democracy, natural diversity, viability of the environment, and the acceptance of multiculturalism. The National Curriculum for Basic Education also states that interaction between Finnish culture and the cultures in the Nordic and European countries must be considered in teaching. This means including into teaching the role of minorities and the increasing multiculturality in Finland. The National Curriculum for General Upper Secondary Education (Finnish National Agency for Education 2015) is based on the values of Finnish civilization history, which in turn is part of the Nordic and European cultural heritage. The value base leans on respecting human rights and life, the promotion of open democracy, equality and well-being, the encouragement towards acknowledging the conflicts between the declared and real values, and the critical consideration faults and possibilities of the Finnish society and international development. The values the national curricula lean upon are important to investigate when focusing on the specific cultural aims for foreign languages and English. The value base highlights that appreciating cultural diversity and viewing culture as a multifaceted concept that includes values such as equality and democracy have been considered when compiling the subject-specific cultural goals.

The National Core Curriculum for Basic Education presents the national goals for education that govern the preparation of all areas of the subject-based aims in the document. These goals are founded on the value base for the national curriculum discussed in the above paragraph. The national goals include cultural aims, such as education advancing the knowledge and

understanding of cultural and ideological traditions. The value base the national curriculum leans on, guarantees for cultural aspects to be present in all phases of basic education. In 2019 Finnish National Agency for Education implemented foreign language education to begin on grades 1-2 (Finnish National Agency for Education 2019). Before these changes, foreign language teaching usually started from grade 3 onwards, and in some cases by language showers on grades 1-2. The National Core Curriculum for Basic Education states as one of the goals for foreign languages to awaken the students' interest towards linguistic and cultural diversity. The students should also be encouraged to appreciate different languages and cultures. Foreign language teaching enables the creation of the student's multilingual and -cultural identity. The importance of authentic material and communicational situations is also highlighted in cultural perspective.

The cultural goals for advanced syllabus in English on grades 3-6 include four specific aims that support the students' growth into cultural diversity and linguistic awareness:

1. Guidance of the student into perceiving the linguistic and cultural diversity both globally and in their immediate surroundings, while also noticing English's position as language of global communication.
2. Motivating the student to appreciate their own linguistic and cultural background, as well as global linguistic and cultural diversity and encounter people without making value judgements based on assumptions.
3. Steering the students to notice phenomena that unifies or separates languages and supporting the development of the students' linguistic understanding.
4. Guiding the students to understand that there are plenty of materials available in English, of which they should be able to choose contents that advances their learning, and that are appropriate in content and in level of difficulty.

In addition to these four goals that support the students' growth into cultural diversity and linguistic awareness, it is stated that the students' communicational skills should be supported to be culturally accurate by offering possibilities to practice in versatile social settings. On grades 7-9, the above-referenced cultural goals are further deepened. In addition to those goals, there are additional aims to support the students' growth into cultural diversity and linguistic awareness that are specific to grades 7-9:

1. Advancing the students' ability to consider phenomena related to the English language's role, variants, and values, together with providing the students with the skills to develop their ability to function interculturally.

2. Encouraging the students to find interesting English materials and environments that expand their conception of the globalizing world, as well as their possibilities of functioning in it.
3. Guiding the students to observe the regularities of the English language and how similar things are expressed in other languages, along with using philological concepts to support their learning.

Along with these specific culture- and language-related goals, one of the interaction-related goals states that the students should be helped in acknowledging cultural features in communication and supported in their constructive intercultural interactions. (Finnish National Agency for Education, 2014).

For upper secondary school, the National Core Curriculum mentions that one of the aims for foreign language teaching is to enforce the students' cultural, international, and linguistic aspirations and skills. The goal is to deepen and continue developing the skills of cultural and linguistic awareness that started in basic education. The students are encouraged to reflect on the significance of attitudes and values. Internationalization is in a central role in the duties of foreign language teaching in upper secondary school. The specific cultural goals for the advanced syllabus in English state that the students should improve as English language users and actors not only in the culturally diverse world but in local, national, European, and global communities, while understanding the English language's importance and role as language of international communication. While the aims in the National Core Curriculum for General Upper Secondary Education are course specific, it is stated that every course should include current and local topics that are not subject-specific. Cultural aims are explicitly stated and included in course descriptions for all the six mandatory English courses and in one of the optional advanced courses. The cultural goals in the course descriptions include themes and situations such as linguistic diversity, English as a global phenomenon, language as a tool to improve cultural competences, different linguistic and cultural interactional situations in international contexts, multiliteracy of cultural phenomena and English-speaking media, active agency in English, discussions about societal and culture-related phenomena, higher education studies and future employment in an international context and familiarization of different types of texts related to economically, ecologically, socially and culturally sustainable ways of lives. (Finnish National Agency for Education, 2015).

Hahl (2020, 184) argues that both the National Core Curriculum for Basic Education (2014) and the National Core Curriculum for General Upper Secondary Education (2015) underline that the conceptions of culture and cultural identity are everchanging and multi-layered. The

goals for foreign language teaching and English in particular also show that in the national curricula, culture is given plenty of significance, and its impact on foreign language teaching is not underestimated. The English language's role as a global language of communication, intercultural and communicative competences, appreciation for cultural diversity, and noticing the differences and similarities in languages are the major repeating themes and objectives listed in the national curricula. These numerous cultural aims and conceptualizations in the national curricula are the reason why it is important to study how English teachers view the issues in practice, and how their views correspond to the ones presented in the national curricula.

4 Methodology

The purpose of this qualitative study is to explore Finnish English teachers' experiences and views about culture teaching and interculturality, as well as how teachers view culture and interculturality are represented in textbooks. As this study does not aim to explain a certain phenomenon related to how teachers engage with culture and its representations in textbooks, but rather is interested in the subjective views and behaviors of teachers, semi-structured interviews were the best suited method to gather data. Six English teachers were interviewed about cultural and intercultural aspects in their own teaching, their own cultural experiences, and cultural content in the textbooks they utilize in their teaching. The research questions at hand are:

1. How do English teachers in Finland view culture and engage with it in their teaching?
2. How do the teachers utilize textbooks when teaching about culture, and how helpful do they experience the cultural content in them?
3. How do the teachers' views correspond with the cultural aims for foreign languages and English in the national curricula?

In this chapter, the methods of the present study are described. First in 5.1, the interview process and questions are discussed in detail. Then, in 5.2, the participants for this study are introduced, and at last in 5.3, the data analysis process is discussed.

4.1 The interviews

The interviews were conducted during October and November of 2021. All the interviews were organized and recorded on Zoom, an online platform designed for video- and teleconference services. Due to the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic, all of the interviewees preferred to answer the questions remotely rather than in person. The audio from each interview was recorded using Zoom's function to then obtain the audiotapes, which were later transcribed. All participants were aware of their voice being recorded and that their anonymity was secured by omitting all references to identifiable information, or by using a pseudonym when referring to the interviewees. Informed consent was ensured by sending a privacy policy document to each of the interviewees. In addition, before each interview, the interviewees were reminded of the subject of the study, given the researcher's information, while also underlining that the data will be used in a master's thesis and that their participation is voluntary. Notes were not taken during the interviews to preserve the

conversational nature and unaffected flow of the interviews. In length, the interviews varied from the shortest being 27 minutes to the longest being 41 minutes. The interviews were conducted in Finnish to make the participants more comfortable talking about the issues at hand in their native language. Thus, the quotes provided later in section 6 are translations from the original transcriptions made by the author.

The interviews were semi-structured in nature to allow the interviewees some pre-prepared guiding questions and prompts, while also providing them the chance to elaborate on their views (Dörnyei 2007, 136). According to Dörnyei (*ibid.*), the semi-structured approach is justified when the researcher is able to design broad enough questions about the issue at hand, but at the same time, does not want to limit the interviewee's responses by structuring the questions too much. Dörnyei (2007, 137) emphasizes that in planning the questions, there are multiple factors to bear in mind. The first few questions, or "the ice-breaking period", usually include questions about the interviewee's personal life to help them relax and open up. I started the interviews by asking each interviewee how their day had been and then moved onto the background section of the interview, in which the participants answered questions related to themselves and their job. After the interview was conducted, I considered that the final closing question needs to allow the interviewee to have the opportunity to fill in their previous answers, or, have the "final say" (Dörnyei 2007, 138). Before ending the interviews, I asked each participant if there was anything they would like to add or another topic they would want to bring up.

The interview questions in this study were designed around three themes: culture in the participants' own teaching, their own cultural experiences, and their views on the cultural content in textbooks. These themes all had related guiding questions to provide the interviewees with ideas on what to talk about, and for the interviewer to lean on to ensure the collection of the needed data. The questions left space for the interviewees to reflect on the themes freely, and they were also able to go into more or less detail with specific questions when they wanted to. The interviews progressed naturally with each participant, and the questions were not necessarily discussed in the order they appeared in the set. This also provided me the opportunity to ask specifying questions and discuss certain parts in more detail. It added a level of personal connection to the interviews and thus, allowed the participants to feel more comfortable. According to Dörnyei (2007, 140), the important features of a good, reliable interview are that "it flows naturally with the various parts connecting seamlessly" and "it is rich in detail." Following these guidelines, I approached the

interviews with conversationality in mind while also allowing the interviewees to lead the conversation and not rushing or interrupting them. I also ensured the richness of details by asking clarifying questions in appropriate situations. The translated interview guide used is available in Appendix 1.

Dörnyei (2007, 136-137) also emphasizes the importance of piloting the interview questions to be able to modify the order and quality of questions and ensure the relevancy of the answers. The present interview was piloted with Teacher 1. After this first interview, a few questions were slightly edited and reorganized. The pilot interview was included in the interview data because the edited items did not affect the answers. The edits concerned reorganization of the questions so that the interview flowed more naturally and rewording items that were unclear to Teacher 1. For example, the section that addresses culture in the teachers' own teaching, reorganization was necessary because in the initial interview guide, the questions did not progress in a logical order. In the edited interview guide (see Appendix 1), the questions progress from larger themes (e.g., the role of culture and related challenges) to more precise items (e.g., the teachers' perception of the students' cultural knowledge skills and interests). Similar small changes were made in other sections of the interview too. The rewording concerned questions that Teacher 1 was confused about. I specified certain unclear items, such as, what was meant by external factors in the second section of the interview guide. In addition to this, some questions were also omitted completely because the answers came up naturally in other questions and they caused unnecessary overlap in the data. The omission of these questions, however, did not affect the answers. The teachers that were interviewed after the pilot included similar information in their answers regardless of the omitted questions. In addition, after the pilot interview, a question specifying the exact textbook the teachers use was omitted completely. This was due to it not being relevant information for the purposes of this study since specific textbooks are not under scrutiny here. Teacher 1's answer to this question was also omitted from the transcription.

4.2 The participants

The participants of this study consist of six English teachers that all work in a Finnish-speaking school in Finland. I found four of the participants by emailing principals of different schools in Finland and encouraged English teachers to get in contact with me in case they were interested in taking part in this study. The remaining two participants are acquaintances of mine, whom I personally asked to be a part of this study. The prerequisite for the teachers

to be able to participate in the study was that they were English teachers in a Finnish school (either in basic education or in an upper secondary school), and for them not to be a native speaker of English. To protect the anonymity of the participants in this study, a pseudonym was created for each participant. They will be referred to as Teacher 1, Teacher 2, and so forth throughout this study. The pseudonyms were assigned in the order the teachers were interviewed.

The background information section of the interview included questions related to the teachers' age, their experience in the field, the subjects they teach, the level of education in which they teach, and if they had visited English-speaking countries. 25-year-old Teacher 1 has worked as a teacher for less than a year but had done an extensive amount of substitute teaching while studying in university. Alongside of English, she also teaches Swedish and French. She is currently working in an upper secondary school in Western Finland. Also, she has visited more than one English-speaking country for vacations lasting up to 14 days. 24-year-old Teacher 2 has also officially worked as a teacher for less than a year but had worked as a substitute teacher alongside of her studies. In addition to English, she also teaches Swedish. Currently, she is teaching in basic education, in both primary (grades 1-6) and lower secondary (grades 7-9) schools in Southern Finland. She had also visited an English-speaking country for a short vacation. 29-year-old Teacher 3 has worked as a teacher for 4 years, teaching both English and German. She is working in an upper secondary school in South-Western Finland and had previously lived in an English-speaking country for a year. 35-year-old Teacher 4 has worked as a teacher for 7 years in a lower secondary school located in South-Western Finland. Alongside of English, she also teaches French and Spanish. She had visited an English-speaking country for multiple short vacations. 29-year-old Teacher 5 has worked as a teacher for 2 years, and she teaches both English and Spanish at an upper secondary school in Southern Finland. She had previously lived in an English-speaking country for two years. 36-year-old Teacher 6 has worked as a teacher for 6 years and is currently teaching both English and Swedish. She works in a lower secondary school in Western Finland. She regularly visits an English-speaking country for short periods of time.

In conclusion, the six teachers' ages ranged from 24 to 36, while their years of experience ranged from less than one year to 7 years. In addition to English, every teacher teaches another foreign language or multiple foreign languages, which is why they can discuss culture in relation to the other subjects as well. The teachers all work in upper secondary, lower secondary or primary schools in Southern or Western Finland, which is why their answers

reflect on the situation in that geographical area and education level. It is necessary to address that the interviewed teachers are all quite young and inexperienced, as in none of them have multiple decades worth of experience in the field. This, of course, limits the reach of this study. The present study is missing the voice of a foreign language teacher that has decades worth of teaching experience, and thus, limits the perspective to that of younger, less experienced teachers. However, while the limitation is acknowledged and considered, the purpose of this study is not to explain any phenomena related to culture teaching but explore views and experiences of those teachers that volunteered to participate in this study.

4.3 Data analysis

The data for this study consisted of the transcribed interviews described above. The transcripts already omitted any identifiable information to ensure the interviewees' anonymity. As the focus of this study is on the content of the teachers' answers, or in other words, in exploring the teachers' views about the issues at hand, the interviews were not transcribed word-for-word. Dörnyei (2007, 247) explains that in cases where the emphasis is on the content rather than the linguistic elements, non-verbal (such as facial expressions and gestures), suprasegmental (such as stress and intonation), paralinguistic (such as acoustic sounds) and nonvocal (such as hisses) aspects can be left out of the transcriptions. The same applies to imperfect speech (e.g., false starts, repetition, language mistakes); since the focus is not on the linguistic features of the interviewees' speech, these elements were left out in situations where they were irrelevant. As the quotes from the original Finnish transcriptions have been translated into English, it was important to consider the register and style of speech of the interviewees for the translations to be as accurate as possible. Both Dörnyei (2007; 243, 246) and Galletta and Cross (2013, 119) also note that the transcription process helps the researcher to familiarize themselves with the material before even properly beginning the analysis. This is due to the iterative nature of qualitative research.

The data were analyzed following the principles for qualitative data analysis in *Research Methods in Applied Linguistics* by Dörnyei (2007) and *Mastering the Semi-Structured Interview and Beyond: From Research Design to Analysis and Publication* by Galletta and Cross (2013). Both sources take into account the fact that theory of the subject is present in the process of designing the interview questions and in the process of analysis after forming larger themes and categories of the data, which is why I chose to follow these principles of qualitative analysis. Although Galletta and Cross (2013, 122) suggest that in the early stages

of data analysis the researcher should avoid drawing any conclusions between theory and data and focus solely on the data and the experiences of the interviewees, for the purposes of this study it was not sustainable to completely separate these processes. I did not seek to explain the data by referring to existing theory but rather focused on finding the connection between the two already in the early stages of analysis.

As Galletta and Cross (2013, 120-121) suggest, the beginning stages of data analysis in data gathered from semi-structured interviews involve organizing the data so that it is ready to be analyzed. For this study, the initial organizing happened alongside of the transcribing process. After organization, the themes, and patterns relevant in answering the research questions become evident and the process of coding them can begin (Galletta and Cross 2013, 125). These codes are formed into bigger themes which will then be ready for deeper interpretation (*ibid.*). The emergence of thematic categories will then enable the conversation between the data and theory (*ibid.*). Following the process suggested by both Galletta and Cross (2013) and Dörnyei (2007, 250-254), I started the coding by reading the transcribed files through multiple times. I formed the initial codes by highlighting any passages that seemed interesting, relevant, or important and labeling them. After this initial process, I examined the list of codes and formed larger themes. I then formed a hierarchy of these thematic categories to see the relationship between all the categories. These larger themes were thus easier to discuss in relation to the theory.

The above paragraphs describe the process of data analysis in its simplicity. However, during this process, I of course experienced challenges that I will address in this paragraph. In finding the initial codes and trying to form larger themes from them, I encountered overlap in the data. Since the teachers were encouraged to speak freely on the issues at hand and not necessarily follow the interview guide in accurately, some themes emerged either multiple times in one interview or in different points of the interview compared to other interviews. As the focus of this research is on the content of the teachers' views, I chose to present the results in the analysis by order of the themes rather than precisely following the interview guide's order. In other words, the data presented in section 6 is divided under the themes the interview questions were formed around, but then presented through the themes that emerged in the process of data analysis. The overlap caused by repetition in separate interviews was solved by categorizing the repeated item under the same theme so that the analysis process would be as simple as possible. The repetition was mostly done when the interview moved onto another topic, but the interviewee then remembered something else to add to an earlier talking point.

In these instances, the added information was added under the same theme during the data analysis process to ensure confusion or accidentally leaving an important thought out of the analysis.

5 Analysis and discussion

In this section, the data from the interviews is analyzed regarding the research questions of this study. The goal is not to explain a certain phenomenon related to culture teaching but rather explore and describe the teachers' views related to engaging with culture in foreign language teaching and in textbooks, while simultaneously reflecting on their own cultural and intercultural experiences. In chapters 5.1 and 5.2, I discuss the first research question from different perspectives. In 5.1, I explore how the teachers engage with culture in their teaching, and in 5.2, I examine how teachers experience the concept of culture itself. In chapter 5.3, I discuss the second research question, which examines the teachers' views of textbooks from the cultural perspective. Finally, in chapter 5.4, I discuss the third research question and examine how the data, or the teachers' subjective views on culture, correspond to the cultural aims and content in the national curricula. Actual examples from the interviews are presented in each subsection.

5.1 Culture in the interviewees' own teaching

In this chapter, I aim to partially answer the first research question "How do English teachers in Finland view culture and engage with it in their teaching?". This chapter focuses primarily on the ways in which the interviewed teachers engage with culture in their teaching. This section is discussed through themes that arose from the interviews. These include the role of culture in the teachers' teaching in general, the challenges they experience, the ways in which culture is included in the teaching, and their perception of their students' experiences of culture teaching. The teachers' own conceptions and experiences with culture will be discussed in subsection 5.2. The personal aims of the teachers' cultural instruction are discussed in relation to the national curricula in subsection 5.4.

5.1.1 The role of culture

The teachers were asked to describe the role of culture in their own teaching. All of them expressed that it was important for them and that it had a big role in their teaching but then many of them mentioned a set of challenges that they face. The perceived challenges are discussed in more detail in subsection 5.1.2. However, it is important to note that while the teachers perceive culture to be an important factor in foreign language teaching, they feel inadequate in being able to give it the foothold it deserves. Their answers on how often culture is engaged with in their teaching varied from every single lesson to once a week.

However, at this point, some of the teachers did not specify what constitutes as culture instruction in their opinion. Many of them in this sense limited culture into the role of target culture only. Two of the teachers mentioned the inseparability of language and culture in relation to their answers. In their opinion, culture and language go hand in hand and thus, culture is present, and in a central role during every foreign language class they teach. This reveals that the thought processes behind what constitutes as culture are personal, and teachers think about what culture is in different ways.

Related closely to the issue above is how important the teachers deem culture in comparison to other areas of language learning. Again, most of the teachers think that culture is equally important to other areas but then contradict themselves by explaining that culture is secondary to the demands to be met that focus on other language skills, such as writing skills, grammar, and vocabulary. This can be interpreted as the teachers' will to meet the national goals and expectations being greater than their view of the importance of culture instruction. However, a few of the teachers mentioned communicative competence in this perspective. In their opinion, culture is closely related to being able to communicate with representatives of other cultures, and they view cultural knowledge and skills to be even more important than other areas of language learning. Interestingly, one of the teachers compared the goals in basic education to the ones in adult education (see Example 1).

- (1) If I think about teaching in [an adult education center] [...] I think the goals would be very different, like in basic education, [the students] are being prepared for further education, like upper secondary and universities etc. but with adults, I think that they'd want to learn about the language, sure, but also if they wanted to travel somewhere, they'd want to know about stuff like traditions [in different cultures]. (Teacher 2)

The role of the level of education is further discussed in subsection 5.1.3. in relation to how culture is taught on different levels. However, Example 1 suggests that the level of education influences how the teachers view the role of culture in teaching. With many other contributing factors, many of the teachers suggest that the students' ages and skill levels contribute to how major a role culture has in a teacher's regular routine of including culture in their teaching. As Hilliard (2014, 238) explains, regular cultural input is needed in order for the students to gain skills of cultural consciousness and sensitiveness, many of the teachers' answers reflect that the amount of input depends on how often they include explicit culture instruction in their teaching.

What is specific to the role of culture in foreign language education, is the English language's position as lingua franca. All of the teachers view that the language's position influences culture teaching. A few of the teachers mentioned that they view English as dominant compared to the other languages they teach. The fact that English is spoken everywhere in the world and used as a communicational device in intercultural interactions puts other languages and cultures in an unequal position.

- (2) [English's position as lingua franca] brings out the problem that the students are kind of expected to be aware and know a lot about English-speaking countries but compared to Spanish the students are expected to not know basically anything. So, in Spanish classes I have more time to focus on cultural things than in an English class. (Teacher 5)

Example 2 suggests that the teacher views English's position as lingua franca as harmful to teaching about culture in English classes. This is an interesting view, since the optional languages often have more explicit goals related to the target culture specifically (Finnish National Agency for Education 2014; 2015). There is actually more time set aside for explicit cultural instruction in the optional languages compared to English. The role of culture is thus highlighted in the optional languages, while in English, the focus is on intercultural communication. Teacher 6 also explored the idea of the perspective in teaching about culture related to the English language (see Example 3).

- (3) I really have no idea if I should teach about culture from like the global point of view or just stick to the basic English-speaking countries' [...] Or I mean if I should just focus on the specific target cultures. (Teacher 6)

Example 3 relates to the issue of who owns the language and which countries the English language is associated with (Holliday 2009, 21). Example 3 suggests that foreign language teachers struggle with how they are expected to approach the lingua franca phenomenon. While the goals for achieving a native-like skill level are no longer topical, culture is often still repressed to be examined through a target culture. This factors in the English language being automatically linked to specific countries and national cultures. This is also reflected in the results in Maijala's (2020) study into pre-service teachers' views related to culture teaching. The focus should be shifted to international Englishes, since the language itself is not automatically connected to specific national cultures anymore (Pyykkö 2015).

With the role of culture in the interviewees' teaching, they also reflected on interculturality and intercultural competence. Many teachers expressed that they view intercultural skills as the main goal in cultural instruction. When talking about intercultural competence, themes

such as globalization, understanding, communication, and positive attitude emerged. To clarify, the teachers were not asked to define intercultural competence but rather reflect on what it means to them and their teaching. These themes are also present in Byram's (2008) definition of what intercultural competence consists of. Thus, the data exemplifies that the teachers understand how intercultural competence is built, which in turn suggests that the teachers take these themes into consideration in their teaching in general. All teachers also went beyond target culture instruction in their exploration of intercultural competence and underlined the importance of constant acquiring of intercultural skills. This corresponds to Hahl's (2020) plea for intercultural competence to be recognized as part of lifelong learning. The data thus also suggests that the teachers recognize that gaining intercultural competence is not a quick process, but it rather consists of skills that accumulate through the years.

- (4) [Intercultural competences] are, of course, really important because we live in a world where Finland, for example, is quite a small country compared to the rest of the world and that's why I think [intercultural understanding] is really important. Because we travel and watch shows from all around the world, and for example, in a classroom, there are students from different cultural backgrounds, so it is important to understand that your friend does things differently because that's what they're used to in their culture. (Teacher 2)

In Example 4, the teacher underlined the importance of understanding and relating to people from different cultural backgrounds because even the classroom is a multicultural environment. This highlights the importance of intercultural competence in daily interactions. The intercultural is not a detached concept but rather surrounds us in everyday situations. Example 4 suggests that the teacher views culture as something to be approached through the process of understanding, relating, and recognizing the variability rather than trying to find an explanation for a culture-related phenomenon. However, Example 4 also conveys that an individuals' behavior is the product of their culture. This in turn suggests that the teacher views culture and interculturality in a similar manner compared to the Janusian approach presented by Dervin (2011). Liquid, solid and Janusian approaches to interculturality are not explicitly mentioned in any interview specifically, but rather hinted towards in the content of their answers. The teachers' answers give hints towards the liquid approach, and their answers reflect that they want to think of themselves as responsible actors in approaching culture. This suggests that they have a Janusian approach to cultures and interculturality. Especially the solid approach to interculturality is nowadays considered old-fashioned, and to some extent, harmful, which is why it is a positive sign that the teachers express their want to relate to cultures through the liquid approach.

(5) I think that the main thing is that the students have a positive and curious attitude towards different cultures. Because if they have a positive attitude, they might be more open to learn intercultural communication skills and be more willing to fit into the globalizing world too. (Teacher 3)

In Example 5, Teacher 3 underlines the importance of a positive and curious attitude towards cultures. This relates to Byram's (2008, 163) building blocks of intercultural competence. An open and curious attitude is one of the areas that intercultural competence consists of, which is why Example 5 accentuates the fact that the teacher in question understands that the students should get credit for being open to learning about cultures since it is building their intercultural competence. These results are also in line with what was found in Sercu et al. (2005) and presented in Castro and Sercu (2018). These sources also underline that teachers appreciate a positive attitude, openness and tolerance in culture teaching.

To sum up, these teachers view the role of culture as very important in building communicative and intercultural competence. However, culture instruction is collateral damage when other aspects of language learning come to the picture; the teachers deem culture to be equal in importance but still would choose to focus on other areas since knowledge of grammar, for example, is tested more often. English being the language of communication in intercultural interactions where it is no one's native language affects the role of culture teaching. English can no longer be affiliated with specific national cultures since it is viewed as a global language. The teachers have a tendency to approach interculturality through the Janusian approach. However, it is positive that there are hints towards a liquid understanding; the teachers highlight the importance of understanding and relating in intercultural situations and recognize the intercultural's presence in all aspects of life.

5.1.2 Challenges in culture teaching

When talking about their experiences with culture teaching, the teachers mentioned multiple challenges they have faced. There are four major concerns the conversation revolved around. These include time limitations and the feeling of constant hurry, evaluation, lack of experience and the insufficiency of cultural input in textbooks. The experienced insufficiency of textbooks in regard to cultural content will be discussed in more detail in section 5.3. It is important to note here, however, that four of the six teachers mentioned the lack of cultural content in textbooks to be a challenge for them. For the other two teachers, the challenge was more related to the actual content of the textbooks rather than lack thereof.

Based on the interviewed teachers' views, culture in foreign language education is often neglected compared to other aspects. Culture is something that is seen as a fun "bonus" to counterweight the other, "more boring", parts such as grammar and vocabulary acquisition. Many of the teachers explained that they are passionate about the connection between language and culture but due to limited time, explicit culture instruction is often collateral damage. The combination of limited time resources and the pressure to reach other goals in the national curricula result into culture instruction being a secondary priority. Especially the upper secondary school teachers underlined the time limitations in relation to the matriculation examination. The discussion revealed concerns of the matriculation examination being the sole focus in upper secondary school.

- (6) I feel like with English, the goals are so much higher [for the matriculation examination] than in the other languages I teach. There are so many things the students need to know so I always need to hurry and make sure I cover the more important things. (Teacher 1)

Similar results were indicated in Sercu et al. (2005) and presented in Castro and Sercu (2018). Teachers express the desire to devote more time to culture teaching, but it does not happen due to the lack of time caused by the need to focus on other things. This suggests that more time resources should be freed to include more cultural content into teaching.

Another challenge many of the teachers mentioned is the evaluation of culture-related competences. They explained that the process of evaluation is difficult when it comes to culture because there is not necessarily a clear right or wrong. One teacher compared evaluating cultural knowledge to evaluating grammar. It is obvious grammatical elements are easy to evaluate because it is usually a straightforward process of whether something is correct or incorrect. However, that is not the case when it comes to culture. Therefore, two of the teachers answered that they do not consistently evaluate cultural skills and knowledge. From their point of view, aspects that are ambiguous in nature are not possible to evaluate fairly. In Example 7, the teacher is referring to cultural aspects that have more than one meaning, such as traditions or behaviors of people, not ones that are unambiguous.

- (7) Like, it would basically be the same thing if there were two correct answers for a task and you'd only give credit for one of the answers. (Teacher 5)

This refers to the ambiguous nature of the concept of culture itself. Although the teacher in Example 7 is referring to the evaluation of cultural skills, this suggests that there is an ongoing confusion related to how cultures are understood. What is more, evaluating culture-

related skills should be done through self-evaluation and reflection (Hahl 2020). The process is easier for the teacher when the objectives are made clear from the beginning. A great option is to take cultural aspects into consideration in other content to be evaluated. One teacher explained that she often has students make presentations or write compositions related to cultural aspects. That way the evaluation criteria can partially focus on the content, and she can ensure that cultural knowledge is also being learned.

Another challenge that had a major role in the discussions was the lack of experience. Especially the teachers that had just recently graduated expressed that they have not been able to give culture as big of a role in their teaching as they would have wanted to. Both teachers expressed that they had so many other things to be concerned about and to adjust to, which is why incorporating more culture in their teaching seemed difficult and time-consuming.

Similar notions are expressed in Maijala's (2020) study. These two teachers who had graduated under a year ago had, in many ways, a similar outlook on culture as did the pre-service teachers in Maijala 2020. Lack of experience in the pre-service teachers resulted in difficulty finding the appropriate timing and materials for cultural instruction. Similar experiences in the study at hand further underline Maijala's (2020) conclusion that more attention should be paid into culture teaching during the teacher education programme to convey clear tips related to culture teaching for the future teachers.

5.1.3 The ways of including culture in teaching

When asked how the teachers teach about target cultures specifically, they all mentioned leaning on and drawing ideas from the textbook. The teachers' reflections on textbooks will be further discussed in subsection 5.3. All teachers either straightforwardly expressed or hinted towards teaching about culture through examples, authentic materials and media. They also gave examples of specific ways they explicitly teach about a target culture. Many of them mentioned broadening the cultural concepts presented in textbooks by showing pictures, playing music, and having fun quizzes. In addition, many teachers indicated talking about their cultural experiences in class. This includes showing pictures from vacations and presenting souvenirs. In Maijala's (2020) study of culture teaching methods, pre-service teachers reported as most popular ways of including culture in teaching through the use of media, cultural projects and presentations and teacher talking about their personal experiences. Similar methods were mentioned in this study.

One teacher exemplified that one of the themes in the textbook she uses was English in Africa, and the unit had a great deal of cultural content, of which one chapter was related to Kenya. However, she wanted to add versatility in what the textbook offered. She had explained to the students that Kenya has two official languages, Swahili, and English, and even though Kenyan culture was presented through the “English-speaking lens”, she played Kenyan music in Swahili to the class, and made a quiz for the students to give them extra input related to Kenyan culture. Other teachers gave similar specific examples. In addition to this, two teachers also mentioned that when explicitly teaching about target cultures, they keep conversationality in mind.

- (8) It kind of escalates very easily. If we’re talking about a cultural thing, I might bring more attention to it and [...] it might spark up a conversation. So, I would say it’s very conversational, the culture teaching. I always try to ask [the students] questions and ramble on myself and maybe visually show some videos or pictures and stuff. (Teacher 1)

In Example 8, the teacher includes the students in culture instruction and mentions acting as a leader in cultural conversations. This suggests that this teacher has the skills to offer students critical, culture related conversations (Hahl 2020, 176). Even if the teacher does not specify the nature of these culture-related conversations, and whether the students are guided towards enrichening their critical cultural awareness skills, I argue that the mindset of cultural instruction being a conversation between the teacher and students encourages the students to form their own perspective of cultural phenomena. Byram (2008, 162-163) mentions the assessment of perspectives related to culture one of the defining characteristics of critical cultural awareness skills. Example 8 suggests that a conversation-like approach to culture instruction supports the development of critical cultural awareness skills. What is more, the dialogic nature of culture instruction is also recognized in Maijala’s (2020) study.

The teachers reflected on the effect of the students’ education level on culture instruction and their abilities to process cultural input. The students’ attitudes will be further discussed in subsection 5.1.4 but the following paragraph concentrates on how the teachers perceive students’ levels of education and their age contribute to the aspects of culture that are taught. In Example 9, the teacher ponders upon the explicit and implicit nature of culture instruction on different education levels.

- (9) In primary school, all of the cultural things come more unnoticeably like on the side of other things [...], like for example we were learning school-related vocabulary with fourth graders, and they learned the words principle and head

teachers and through that about the variations of like British and American English [...] but compared to lower secondary school, culture is more often separated as its own thing. (Teacher 2)

Example 9 suggests that the higher level of education the more explicit culture teaching is. Explicit instruction might be favored in later stages of education since the students can process and discuss more complex issues. In other words, issues can be talked about as such rather than having to simplify them due to inexperience. This is exemplified in Example 10.

- (10) Well, for example, comparing lower and upper secondary school students, I think upper secondary school students already have more tools to process the cultural things that they are presented with. Because of this I think it makes more sense to talk to them about different and complex culture-related issues than lower secondary students. (Teacher 3)

With explicit cultural instruction, the student is assumed to possess skills to be aware of the phenomenon being taught and discussing it (Ellis 2009). Examples 9 and 10 suggest that teachers' culture teaching methods are implicit in early education, but gradually shift to explicit when the students move to lower secondary school and upper secondary school. Younger students learn culture through exposure to situations in which they unconsciously construe knowledge about culture and interculturality (Ellis 2009).

5.1.4 Reflections of students' attitudes and perspectives

The teachers were asked to reflect on culture from the students' perspective, as in what they perceive students gain from cultural instruction and how aware and interested the students are about culture in general.

When learning about target cultures, many of the teachers explained that useful skills the students gain include knowledge about behaviors, traditions, attitudes, linguistic variability, and cultural specificities, such as sights, food, and music. One teacher brought up the importance of understanding the diversity within a target culture. She mentioned as an example the Catalan language and culture in Spain and explained how important it is for students to not view Spain and its culture as homogenous. Gaining general intercultural knowledge and skills of processing diversity came up in multiple interviews. The teachers view that culture instruction goes beyond facts about the target culture and the students learn valuable skills to view the world as multifaceted.

- (11) Without knowledge about different cultures and skills to process those differences, I think there would be so many conflicts even in like day-to-day

life. So, I feel like it's really important to teach about culture in a way that highlights that there are differences between different cultures, obviously, but also that there are differences within a culture. (Teacher 4)

Interestingly, in Example 11, the teacher in question highlights the importance of noticing subcultures in relation to avoiding conflicts. As Jenks (2005, 10) suggests, subcultures can be characterized as non-standard within a culture. Teacher 4 here understands that it is important to gain knowledge about the multi-layered nature of cultures to understand that culture is not something that refers to a homogenous group of people. Example 11, as well as other answers, also suggest that one of the most important things teachers view students gain from cultural instruction is intercultural skills. Intercultural competence is a repeating theme in the teachers' answers throughout the interviews, which suggests that they prioritize it in their teaching. Their students are thus exposed to intercultural knowledge which furthers the building of their intercultural awareness.

When reflecting upon the students' interest and awareness about cultures, all of the teachers pointed out how much the students' skill levels or general attitude towards school affected their cultural interest and knowledge. Many of them mentioned that students who were especially talented in English or another foreign language also tend to show interest, awareness and hobbyism towards the target culture. On the other hand, many of the teachers mentioned that if the student is not motivated in the subject, they are usually not interested in the cultural aspects either. This suggests that motivation is an important factor in gaining skills of cultural awareness, at least from the perspective of foreign language learning.

Many of the teachers also noted that the interest in cultures varies within the subjects they teach. Especially teachers that teach optional languages had noticed a difference in the students' interest in culture. On one hand, cultures that relate to the English language are generally more familiar to students than, for example, cultures that relate to the French language. The students have prior knowledge about English-language related cultures, and they actively consume media where they learn about, for example, the United States. Some of the teachers viewed that this factored in the students not being interested to learn more about the culture in foreign language classes. The students can be more motivated to learn about cultural aspects related to English-speaking countries because English is very much "required" on a social level (Matsumoto 2015, 226). This means that the students are also expected to know cultural context related to the English-language to be able to succeed in, for example, gaining entry to a higher educational institution. On the other hand, the unfamiliarity

of cultures related to optional languages seems to make students more interested to learn about them in school. The students probably do not consume media related to France, Germany, or Spain in their day to day lives. In Example 13, a teacher reflects upon the voluntary nature of optional languages.

- (12) [French] is an optional language so [the students] have chosen to come there and they want to study it and are interested in it to start with. Also, they have just started (learning it) so they obviously can't know a lot about the culture [...] but I think they find [the French culture] super interesting and it is visible that they want to learn more and more. (Teacher 1)

It is argued that students' motivation might change during the process of learning a target language (Matsumoto 2015). This applies to the situation described in Example 12. The teacher describes her students being interested in the French culture because the students have just recently started learning the language. This means that their motivation towards French is still untouched by variables that affect the decline of motivation after studying the target language for a longer period of time. Many of the teachers described a similar phenomenon in the optional languages they teach and stated that the students' motivation towards learning about culture in English classes is significantly lower than in the optional language classes. This too demonstrates that the optionality, and novelty, of the optional languages often affects the students' motivation to learn about the culture related to the target language too.

5.2 Teachers' conceptions of culture

In this subsection, I will explore the first research question "How do English teachers in Finland view culture and engage with it in their teaching?" from the other perspective. The teachers were asked to reflect on their own conception of culture. In this section of the interview the teachers were encouraged to explore their conception of culture outside of their job and from a more personal point of view. The teachers' way of experiencing culture has an impact on how they engage with it in their teaching, and even more importantly, what kind of an image of the world they convey to their students.

The common factor between all the interviewed teachers is that they all report having a broad conception of culture and finding cultures interesting. For example, Pyykkö (2015, 149) defines a broad conception of culture as including science, art, technology, lifestyle, living conditions, values, and nonverbal ways of communication in the definition of culture. In other words, a broad conception of culture refers to the acknowledgement of culture being a multifaceted concept in contrast to limiting it to a set of facts. Especially for foreign language

teachers, it is important to not restrict the definition of culture to, for example, a simple description of the cuisine of a target culture but rather highlight the diversity of the concept itself. Example 13 conveys the tone of the majority of their responses. The interviewed teachers understand that culture itself is a broad concept and that they themselves do not know everything, which is why they were hesitant to give themselves the credit.

- (13) I'm the type of person that easily gets sucked into all kinds of different things, and without praising myself too much, I'd want to say that my view of culture is broad and I kind of, like, want to have a positive attitude towards all different kinds of cultures and interculturality. (Teacher 1)

Overall, teachers view that a positive attitude towards culture and interculturality is important. Many of the teachers convey understanding that culture is a complex subject, and that they know about the underlying notions and meanings that the concept of culture carries. When reflecting on what can be considered being a part of culture, their answers varied. This can be due to the fact that all the teachers also report to practicing and improving their cultural knowledge outside of their work. How a person upkeeps their cultural knowledge is of course a personal process that depends on the specific interests of an individual. All of the teachers reported to having a broad conception of culture which suggests that even though they consider what is a part of culture, they acknowledge that the answer also varies depending on the individual. Interestingly, many of the teachers actually underlined in their answers that they understand the fact that their comprehension of culture is not necessarily identical compared to another interviewee. This further supports the problematic nature of defining the concept of culture itself, and the concept's function as a social construction rather than a set of facts (Jahoda 2012, 300).

The teachers also reflected on the outside factors that contribute to their conception of culture. Outside of their job, the things that influence their general conception of culture are news, social media, music, books and traveling. These outside factors impact their conception of culture without them realizing it in their day-to-day life, and all of the teachers recognize this as positive contribution to their conception of culture. Their interests outside of their work are a way of improving their cultural knowledge. All of the teachers mention that they practice and better their cultural skills outside of work in many different ways. The most popular way of advancing their cultural knowledge among these teachers is following current events in multiple different media platforms. In addition to keeping up with the news, the teachers mentioned following multiple English-speaking people on social media platforms such as

Instagram, Twitter and TikTok. One of the teachers further explained her social media presence to be the most transformational factor into gaining cultural information since she now feels like being able to offer her students cultural knowledge that is closer to their interests as well. In her opinion, social media teaches a substantial amount of information about the day-to-day lives of representatives of different cultures. In addition to actively following media, watching TV-shows, listening to podcasts, reading books, and traveling were mentioned as ways in which teachers maintain their cultural awareness. One teacher explains that the process of expanding her cultural knowledge in the abovementioned ways is often unconscious and passive.

Two of the teachers, however, report a negative aspect in external factors influencing their conception of culture (see Examples 14 and 15).

- (14) I think [external factors] do contribute. For example, like, sometimes news can have a negative effect when they talk about culture in a bad way. It's not always a negative influence but sometimes it makes me feel, like, bad. (Teacher 2)
- (15) I sometimes feel, like, anxious when I realize culture is related to everything around me. It makes me nervous how much things like social media influence my view about certain cultures and I'm still expected to portray a positive image of the culture to my students. (Teacher 4)

Examples 15 and 16 underline the fact that culture can sometimes be used as a tool to maintain certain power structures in society (Baker 2015, 48). Repeatedly portraying a culture in a negative light further reinforces the idea of a cultural spectrum on which cultures are ranked from “good” to “bad” (Jenks 2005; Baker 2015). This of course is a very one-sided view of cultures and often limits the interpretation to circumstances of a nation-state. These types of portrayals of cultures, where negative connotations are present in media can often cause difficulty in keeping a positive and curious attitude towards cultures. The effects of negative tone and connotations when reporting on cultural content repeated in the media can be compared on to the effect students experience in cases where negative stereotypes are repeated in textbooks and teaching does on the students. Too much focus on intercultural differences and not enough on similarities furthers the existing idea of a cultural other (Hahl 2020). I also argue that negatively charged cultural discussions in media or in teaching affect the motivation of the person on the “receiving end” of such conversations. Whether it be teachers following discussion in media that repeats the stereotypical power structures related

to cultures around the world, or students being presented with yet another stereotypical representation of a specific culture, the effect is unmotivating.

5.3 Cultural content in textbooks

In this section I aim to answer the second research question “How do the teachers use textbooks when teaching about culture, and how helpful they view cultural content in the textbooks that they use?”. First, I discuss the experiences related to the support offered by the textbooks in relation to culture teaching. Then, I move onto discussing the teachers’ perspectives and opinions on the cultural content portrayed in textbooks. Lastly, I explore the other materials the teachers mentioned utilizing in culture teaching. However, it is important to note that the aim of section 5.3 is not to criticize any textbooks and their publishers but rather offer perspectives into how the teachers experience the available content in them.

5.3.1 The support offered by textbooks in culture teaching

All of the teachers report either fully or partially leaning on their textbooks in culture teaching. This supports what, for example, Dervin et al. (2015) suggest about Finnish teachers relying heavily on textbooks. In Finland, textbooks are usually regarded as high in quality, which is why teachers very often solely lean on textbooks in what they teach. Especially Teacher 1 and Teacher 2, who have had the least experience on working as a teacher, both explain that as new teachers, they rely on their textbook fully on how the cultural aspects should be taught and discussed. However, both of them report on expanding the cultural content in textbooks with additional materials, such as Google, Youtube-videos, music and their own travel experiences. The other four teachers report that they rely on the textbook for additional support and ideas on what to discuss, but do not necessarily base all of their cultural instruction on them.

(16) I feel like without the textbook, I wouldn’t know what culture-related things to bring up. [...] I know that culture is important to consider but I feel like the textbooks don’t have enough support to offer to the teachers. That’s why I try to like broaden the cultural aspects suggested by the textbook on my own. (Teacher 3)

Example 16 suggests that often teachers do not know what they are expected to teach related to culture (Hahl 2020). Agreeing with Hahl (2020), I argue that the teachers rely so heavily on textbooks when teaching about culture because of the unclear expectations of what they are supposed to be conveying. This is interesting because all of these teachers reported viewing

themselves as knowledgeable when it comes to cultures. This could be related to the culture-related aims and goals presented in the national curriculum. There are many, and often they are very ambiguous in how they can be accomplished. These contrasts are discussed in section 5.4. Three of the teachers also mentioned that they find the chapters in textbooks especially useful in teaching about culture, and not just the target culture but from a more general perspective.

- (17) Especially the English textbooks I've used include characters, information, scenery etc. from all around the world! Not just the basic English-speaking countries, like it's not all about the British culture. I've been impressed by this since it also broadens the students' view about culture. I feel like that's great for the overall cultural aims like the students becoming more culturally aware and global citizens. (Teacher 6)

The teachers answers to the experienced supportiveness of textbooks varied very much. Example 17 suggests that Teacher 6 experiences textbooks as very supportive and useful in culture teaching, and as stated previously in this subsection, Teachers 1 and 2 express fully leaning on their textbooks when it comes to cultural instruction. The other three teachers, however, suggest that while they sometimes find the textbooks supportive in cultural teaching, the content in them is lacking and they feel the need to add more content on their own. One teacher explicitly stated that she would personally benefit from more support, since she already has a heavy workload. She suggested more cultural material to be available in the teachers' extra material bank that is often provided in the e-book version of textbook publishers. These answers suggest that if the textbooks offered more support for the teachers, cultural instruction would be made easier for the teacher, thus expanding the amount of cultural instruction included in the teaching.

5.3.2 Experiences of cultural content in textbooks

Half of the teachers reported that it is easy for them to recognize possible problems and also positive aspects in the cultural content that is present in textbooks. This suggests that, as discussed in the theoretical section of this study, it is important for teachers to be able to identify cultural aspects and analyze them in relation to their cultural knowledge of right and wrong (Byram 2008; Hahl 2020). One of the teachers, who had completed their teacher training less than a year ago, explained that the pedagogical studies offered a lot of support and tools to locate such features in textbooks (see Example 18).

(18) Before I didn't have a critical attitude towards the content, I was like "how fun, culture" but I didn't even consider if it was right and if it was the only point of view towards an issue. After (the teacher training) I feel like I look at [the cultural content] more critically. (Teacher 1)

Also, another teacher explained that she usually relies on her own conception of culture and her moral compass to determine whether a culture-related aspect in the textbook is problematic. This further suggests that these 3 teachers who find it easy to recognize positive or negative cultural content, possess intercultural knowledge and critical cultural awareness skills (Byram 2008). On the other hand, three teachers reported that they did not know how to identify problems or positive aspects from the cultural content of the textbooks when the cultural aspects were not separated from the other content. This relates to the problem of not being consciously aware of the cultural content that is present in teaching. These teachers do not recognize the cultural components of foreign language teaching if it is not separately discussed (see Examples 19 and 20).

(19) I think that I don't [recognize negative or positive aspects of the cultural content]. Like it just doesn't come naturally when it doesn't clearly state that this is related to culture. Actually, I can recognize it if it's really clear, but I believe there are so many more things that I just don't notice. (Teacher 2)

(20) I can admit that I don't recognize certain cultural things in textbooks. I just don't see those kinds of things in the material if they're not super clear. It's kind of sad to admit this but I think I trust the textbooks too much, like, that the textbooks are perfect and I can just use them without having to think about things too much. (Teacher 5)

All of the teachers that report not knowing how to identify these aspects in the textbooks mentioned that they do identify the negative or positive aspects in the content if they are clear, or, as one of the teachers put it, really offensive. This further underlines the importance of providing student teachers with the possibilities to familiarize themselves with different materials and examine them critically (Hahl 2020, 197). Teachers should be constantly retrained in order for them to be capable of noticing underlying negative presentations of cultures in textbooks, so that the students can be made aware of such portrayals as well. The fact that teachers are unable to identify cultural content, whether with positive or negative connotations, is in contradiction to the goals for the students to be culturally aware.

The teachers give positive feedback related to cultural content such as culture "pages", that present particular information on a target culture. Teacher 2 gave an example of a tourist information page that presented the sights of San Francisco that was part of a unit related to

the United States. Four of the teachers prefer cultural content that is explicit and where the cultural content is separated from other content. Many of the teachers reported that it is a more effortless process to then broaden the content offered by the textbooks if the cultural content is directly visible. Tasks in which the students had to search for information from different resources were also mentioned as positive experiences by multiple teachers. They found these tasks either motivating for the students or useful in both gaining cultural knowledge, and skills in searching for relevant information. One teacher gave an example of a task in which the students had to explore the websites of Canadian universities as if they were applying to them and found the task to be very relevant for the students' interests.

Negative feedback, on the other hand, is given to visible cultural stereotypes, particularly in the characters in texts. Four of the teachers make a note of having faced clear stereotypes, and two of them report having students point out offensive stereotypes in textbooks.

- (21) Although this has gotten a lot better in newer books, I feel like there are still some weird and unnecessary stereotypes in them. I actually have an example in mind, it was from a unit that was located in Africa, and I think one of the texts gave a really stereotypical and outdated view of Africa. Like they just went with the easiest, most repeated stereotype imaginable where the people were living in huts and playing drums in a circle. (Teacher 6)

Example 21 supports what Hahl (2020) found in her study of Finnish English-language textbooks. Hahl (2020, 195) explains that while the textbooks contained interesting and thought-provoking texts, aspects that reinforced cultural stereotypes were still present. Alternatively, the textbooks could have offered an opportunity to provide tools for the students to critically explore the cultural representations rather than repeat existing stereotypes (*ibid.*). In Example 23, one teacher calls for updated images of cultural diversity rather than giving space to outdated patterns of description.

- (22) I actually had a student ask me about how [a certain stereotype] could be in a textbook used in school. This was kind of a wakeup call for me personally to be on top of what was being said in the texts and exercises. (Teacher 3)

As Teacher 3 describes in Example 22, teachers need to be aware of what textbooks portray and possess the tools to critically examine the content. This is in line with what McConachy (2018, 79) highlights. If the teacher is not capable to recognize possible problems in textbooks and discuss them with the students, it might lead to students accepting stereotypes as universal truths. When asked how the teachers handle situations, such as the one described in Example 22, where a critical discussion of a problematic portrayal is needed, two teachers

report that they have not experienced this at all but feel confident that they could lead such a discussion. Four teachers have had discussions with their students related to problematic cultural representations in textbooks. One of the teachers reports to having taken the role as the leader of such conversation and allowed the students to present their views on identifying the problem. The other teachers did not specify how they handled the situations in practice but rather underlined the importance of having those conversations with the students rather than leaving it up to them to reach a conclusion of whether an aspect is right or wrong. Having had critical conversations with the learners or having confidence in being able to lead critical discussions paints a positive picture of the teachers' skills in offering culturally responsible education. This supports Hahl's (2020, 176) plea for teachers to be skilled in guiding the learners to the right direction in culture-related issues.

5.4 National curricula

Finally, in this subsection, I discuss how the presented views of the teachers correspond to the cultural goals in the national curricula. This subsection will thus answer the third research question "How do the teachers' views correspond with the cultural aims in the national curricula?" In the interviews, the teachers were also asked to describe their personal aims related to culture teaching. The answers will be analyzed in this chapter since it is interesting to examine if their personal goals correspond with the goals that are expressed in the national curricula.

The teachers were asked how much they had familiarized themselves with the cultural aims in the national curricula. The answers had variation. Some teachers mentioned that they had not accustomed themselves with the cultural aims in the national curricula that much. These teachers all explained that they knew there were goals related to cultural aspects of foreign language teaching but could not name any of them. The two teachers that had recently graduated (Teachers 1 and 2) both explained that during their teacher training, they remember explicitly being instructed on the national curricula and the cultural aims in them, which is why they had not felt the need to revisit the national curricula since they had a recollection of what the cultural goals included. The common factor in the teachers' answers was that all the teachers knew that they should be more familiarized with the national curricula, but either because of limitations in time resources or prioritizing other things in the national curricula, they had not necessarily spent enough time on revisiting the cultural aims and taken them into consideration in practice. However, the teachers that work in an upper secondary school

setting mentioned regularly going back to the national curriculum when planning for a specific course, since the specific cultural aims are listed in the course descriptions. Compared to lower secondary school teachers, the upper secondary school teachers all showed more tendency to pay attention to the cultural aims and taking them into consideration during the planning of a course and then in practice in their teaching.

Interestingly, even though the majority of the teachers expressed that they should spend more time familiarizing themselves with the cultural aims in the national curricula, their personal goals related to cultural teaching matched, at least partially, to the aims in the national curricula. This suggests that there is an underlying idea of what culture instruction should look like and what its effects should be. The recurring major themes in the cultural aims in the national curricula (English as the global language for communication, intercultural and communicative competences, appreciation for cultural diversity, and noticing differences and similarities between languages) were all reflected in the interviewed teachers' answers. Many of the teachers highlighted similar things in what their personal goals for cultural instruction are. It is clear that the teachers want the students to obtain the intercultural and communicative skills to function in a globalizing world while simultaneously appreciating the diversity both within a specific culture and globally. One teacher referred to such competence as life skills that are nowadays needed to function as both a citizen of a nation and the world, which is what the national curricula also highlight.

With both upper and lower secondary school teachers, intercultural communication skills were mentioned as the number one aim of their culture instruction. In the national curricula for both basic education and upper secondary school, it is stated that the students' intercultural communication skills should be supported in multiple different settings.

(23) I want my students to be able to communicate in any situation and understand that communication is, like, different in different cultures. So, I guess my aim in culture teaching is to give the students communicational tools so they can communicate in English in different situations, and of course, some understanding of different cultures.

(Teacher 6)

In Example 23, Teacher 6 conveys that she aims at offering versatile situations for students to practice their intercultural communication skills, while also making sure that the students recognize that culture affects communicational situations. This corresponds to culture-related interactional goals in the National Curriculum for basic education, and while not necessarily

relevant for this specific teacher since she works in a lower secondary school, similar things are also emphasized in the National Curriculum for upper secondary school. This exemplifies that while the teacher admits to not regularly revisiting the national curriculum and not being on firm ground about what the national cultural goals express, her personal goals for culture instruction at least in part mimic what is stated in the national curriculum. This also suggests that the teachers understand the importance of intercultural competence in connection to language skills.

The national curricula also underline the importance of a curious, positive attitude towards cultures and interculturality while simultaneously being able to appreciate and reflect on one's own culture. Many of the teachers also explained that they perceive a curious and positive attitude towards cultural issues as one of the most important skills that the students gain from cultural instruction. One teacher even specified that she thinks the students might even find comparing their own culture to a target culture. This too is reflected in the national curricula as encouraging the students to pay attention to phenomena that unifies and separates cultures and languages.

The teachers' perceptions about what culture means to them and how they view the concept itself also reflect the values the national curricula lean upon. When talking about culture, the teachers often highlight values such as equality, diversity, and compassion, which are also ideas that the national curricula mention as base for its content. This suggests that the interviewed teachers have similar base values to the national curricula, which in turn is reflected in their view of culture as a concept and displayed in their teaching of culture. The interviews show that the teachers' views related to culture, and their engagement with it in their teaching positively reflect the cultural aims stated in the national curricula. Whether unconsciously or knowingly taking the cultural aims into consideration in their teaching, the interviews imply that the numerous cultural goals for foreign languages and English in the national curricula are not being disregarded or presumed to be reached without input and thought from teachers.

6 Conclusion

The data for this qualitative study consisted of the interviewed English teachers' conceptions of culture, and their ways of engaging with it in teaching. What is more, the teachers' views related to cultural content in textbooks, and how they utilize textbooks in their culture teaching were also discussed. The interviewees' conceptions and views were then explored in correspondence to the cultural aims for foreign languages in the national curricula. The data were analyzed based on the principles qualitative data analysis suggested by both Dörnyei (2007) and Galletta and Cross (2013). The results were then presented and discussed through themes that emerged from the interviews.

The interviewed teachers view culture through a broad conception: culture is a multidimensional concept that is not limited to a set of facts. At the same time, the teachers implicate themselves, as in, they acknowledge that they do not know everything and that their view is subjective. It is also recognized that cultural awareness is something that individuals need to practice and maintain as it is under constant change. These teachers reported to following various media outlets in attempt to improve their knowledge of culture. A shared consensus between the participants of this study was that a positive attitude towards culture and interculturality is the foundation for how they experience culture. Similar notions were found in Sercu et al.'s (2005) research into how teachers in multiple different countries view culture teaching and interculturality. This study thus reflects what is noticed globally: teachers appreciate the students' positivity and openness when it comes to learning about cultures.

In their teaching, the interviewed teachers recognize that culture is substantial, and expressed its importance within foreign language teaching. The role of culture is acknowledged to be important, however, many teachers agreed that it is seen as a special bonus in contrast to other areas of language learning. The teachers contradict themselves in expressing that they view cultural instruction as equal to other areas of language learning, but still admitting that it often is not given the foothold it deserves due to limitations in time resources, problems with evaluation and lack of experience. The teachers recognize the influence of the phenomenon of English as a lingua franca on culture teaching. They express confusion on the perspective from which culture should be taught since English can no longer be straightforwardly connected to specific national cultures. The primary challenges teachers express are limited time resources and lack of experience. In Sercu et al.'s (2005) study, teachers also expressed that they wanted to devote more time for cultural instruction but that they felt it was

impossible. Also, in Maijala's (2020) study, pre-service teachers experienced difficulty of finding appropriate timing and materials for culture teaching due to lack of experience, which is also the experience of the two recently graduated teachers who took part in this study.

When discussing concrete ways in which the teachers include cultural content in their teaching, the focus shifts to target cultures. The contradiction between teachers reporting to having a broad conception of cultures but still shifting the focus towards national cultures when asked about concrete ways in which culture is taught is noteworthy. This suggests the teachers having a Janusian approach towards cultures (Dervin 2011). However, in relation to interculturality and the individual aspects of culture, the teachers hint towards features of the liquid view. This is a positive sign, since the national curricula highlight aspects that are in line with how the liquid approach to cultures and interculturality is presented.

Textbooks are in a crucial role of these teachers' culture teaching since they all express either fully or partially leaning on their textbooks in culture teaching. In that regard, the teachers use the textbooks as a platform to draw ideas from and guide them when they themselves are unclear on what they are expected to teach culture-wise. The content in textbooks is seen as helpful since they find it easier to then broaden the perspective when a subject is given to them in the textbook. Positive feedback is given especially to culture pages that present information about a target culture and different information search exercises. On the other hand, textbooks were given negative feedback related to visible cultural stereotypes.

Stereotypes being present in textbooks supports earlier textbook research (e.g. Hahl 2020, Canale 2016). This highlights the importance of teachers being culturally aware and able to recognize these problematic portrayals. These teachers, however, expressed confidence in being able to have critical discussions with their students about problematic portrayals, which suggests that the teachers are skilled enough to guide the learner in their journey of becoming a culturally aware citizen.

In their answers, the teachers reflected similar values to the ones that the national curricula lean upon. The cultural aims for foreign language education are ambitious but the interviews suggest that these teachers' aims are at least partially in line with the national curricula. Even if many teachers implied not being too familiar with the cultural goals in the national curricula, their answers reflect that the goals are not being disregarded but are being at least partially met. The teachers' answers highlight the importance of intercultural communication, which is also central in the national curricula's goals. What is more, the teachers seem to

possess similar values as the ones the national curricula lean upon: equality, diversity, and compassion.

The limitations of the study at hand include the small sample size, and the rather homogenous group of participants. Due to limited number of participants, conclusions cannot be drawn to represent the situation in general based on this study. In other words, the results of this study represent the subjective views of the interviewees. What is more, the participants of this study are all female teachers on a rather small geographical area, who are relatively young and inexperienced. The limitations offer possibilities for further research. With a larger sample size that includes foreign language teachers of different genders, ages, experience levels, and geographical areas, a comprehensive view of the state of culture teaching in Finland could be established. Based on the results of this study, foreign language teachers' voices are extremely important to be heard when, for example, textbooks are being drawn up, or when national curricula are updated. Furthermore, a similar study could be conducted on how students in different levels of education experience culture teaching to get an overview of how the multiple cultural aims in the national curricula actualize from the learner perspective.

Overall, the results found in this study suggest that Finnish teachers of English have a comprehensive understanding of what culture consists of. The inclusion of cultural content in teaching is found difficult due to various reasons, but the teachers still find it an important factor in developing the students' intercultural competence and thus, reaching the goals set in the national curricula. The teachers recognize the importance of cultural competence, but culture teaching is often viewed as secondary in contrast to other areas of language learning. This creates a problem: if cultural goals in the national curricula are ambitious and teachers view cultural instruction to be a valuable part of language teaching, why is culture instruction still seen as a "bonus" and is the first to be left out? There is need for reflection on the role of culture in foreign language education in Finland. More time resources should be available for teachers to plan how culture is included in teaching, and the emphasis should be balanced between culture-related skills and skills in other language learning areas. In addition, teachers could benefit from unanimous instructions on how culture should be considered in foreign language teaching.

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Appendices

Appendix 1 Interview Guide

Background information

- Age:
- How long have you worked as a teacher?
- Which subjects do you teach?
- On which level of education do you teach at, and have taught previously?
- Have you visited countries where English is spoken as a native language? Where and for how long?

Culture in your own teaching

- What part does culture play in your teaching?
- What are your aims in culture teaching?
- How do you teach about culture?
- How does the level of education contribute to culture teaching?
- What are the main challenges in culture teaching?
- How often is cultural content included in your teaching?
- How familiar are you with the cultural content related to your subject?
- Do you perceive cultural content to be less important/equally important/more important compared to other areas of foreign language teaching? (e.g. grammar, reading comprehension etc.)
- How much have you familiarized yourself with the cultural goals in the national curriculum?
- In your opinion, how does the English language's position as lingua franca contribute into culture teaching?

- What does intercultural competence mean to you?
- Do you provide your students with opportunities to reflect on issues related to cultures or interculturality in your lessons?
- What do you think culture teaching offers to your students?
- How culturally aware and knowledgeable do you perceive your students? Is cultural content experienced as interesting?
- Can cultural knowledge be evaluated? How do you evaluate it?

Your own cultural experiences

- What is your conception of culture?
- Do you perceive culture(s) to be interesting?
- Do you feel like your conception of culture is influenced by external factors (e.g., news, media)?
- Do you practice/improve cultural knowledge outside of your job? How?

Cultural content in textbooks

- Does the textbook(s) you use offer support in culture teaching?
- Do you have any positive examples in mind related to experiences with certain culture-related exercises and/or cultural content in general?
- Have you perceived there to be issues related to the cultural content in textbooks?
- Do you feel like you easily recognize issues or positive notes related to cultural content in textbooks?
- Do you discuss issues related to the cultural content in textbooks with your students?
- In addition to the textbook(s), do you use other material in culture teaching? What?
- Do you use your own cultural experiences (e.g., traveling) in culture teaching?

Appendix 2 Finnish Summary

Tämä pro gradu -tutkielma käsittelee suomalaisten englanninopettajien näkemyksiä kulttuurin opetuksesta ja sen esiintymisestä oppikirjoissa. Haastateltujen opettajien näkemyksiä verrataan opetussuunnitelmista löytyviin vieraiden kielten oppiaineiden kulttuurisiin tavoitteisiin. Kulttuurin ja vieraiden kielten opetuksen välistä suhdetta on tärkeä tutkia, sillä kulttuuritietoisuudella on suuri vaikutus oppijoiden kommunikatiiviseen ja kulttuurienväliseen kompetensiin. Kielen ja kulttuurin suhde on monimutkainen kysymys, sillä kulttuuri ja kieli voidaan nähdä täysin toisistaan erottamattomina ilmiöinä, jolloin kaikki kielen opetus sisältää automaattisesti kulttuurisia aspekteja. Toisaalta myös vieraan kielen opetuksessa kulttuuri usein eritellään omaksi sisällökseen, jolloin sen rooli rajoitetaan kohdekulttuuriin liittyvien faktojen opetteluksi. Kulttuurin ja kielen välistä suhdetta on hyvä tarkastella laajassa merkityksessä: kulttuurin käsite pitää sisällään tietoa niin taiteesta ja ruokakultturista kuin arvoista ja käyttäytymismalleista. Oppilaille ja opiskelijoille on kuitenkin hyvä alleviivata, ettei yksilön toimintaa kuitenkaan voi nähdä täysin kulttuurin tuloksena, vaan jokainen yksilö on kohdattava omana itsenään. Opettajan rooli korostuu kulttuurisen pohdinnan ohjaajana.

Vieraan kielen ja kulttuurin opetuksen yhteyttä on tutkittu laajalti oppijan näkökulmasta, mutta opettajien perspektiivi tarjoaa vielä paljon tutkimusmahdollisuuksia (Byram 2008). Suomessa on tutkittu esimerkiksi kieltenopettajaopiskelijoiden näkemyksiä kulttuurista (Maijala 2020), sekä oppikirjatutkimusta kulttuurin esiintymiseen liittyen on toteutettu laajalti (mm. Hahl 2020). Suomalaisten opettajien näkemys kulttuurista, kulttuurienvälisyystä, sekä kulttuurin esiintymisestä oppikirjoissa on jänyt vajaaksi. Muualla toteutetut aiemmat tutkimukset liittyen opettajien näkemykseen kulttuurin opettamisesta ovat paljastaneet, että kieltenopettajat usein tarkastelevat kulttuurin ja kulttuurienvälisyden roolia kohdekulttuurin opettamisen näkökulmasta (esim. Badura ja Sercu 2005 ja Ryan 2012). Kulttuuri ja kulttuurienvälisyys ovat tärkeitä teemoja suomalaisissa opetussuunnitelmissa, mikä käy ilmi esimerkiksi vieraille kielille sekä englannin oppiaineelle asetetuista tavoitteista. Tämän vuoksi on tärkeää tutkia ovatko opettajien näkemykset samassa linjassa opetussuunnitelmiin asetettujen tavoitteiden kanssa.

Tämän tutkimuksen tavoitteena oli tarkastella kulttuurin roolia vieraiden kielten opetuksessa ja oppikirjoissa suomalaisten englanninopettajien näkökulmasta, sekä verrata heidän

näkemyksiään opetussuunnitelmien vieraiden kielten kulttuuritavoitteisiin. Tutkielmaa ohjasi kolme tutkimuskysymystä:

1. Miten suomalaiset englanninopettajat kokevat kulttuurin käsitteen, ja miten se kytkeytyy heidän opetukseensa?
2. Miten opettajat käyttävät oppikirjoja kulttuurinopetuksessa, ja millaisena he kirjojen kokevat kulttuurisen sisällön?
3. Miten opettajien näkemykset vastaavat vieraille kielille ja englannin oppiaineelle opetussuunnitelmissa asetettuja tavoitteita?

Tutkielman teoriaosion ensimmäisessä kappaleessa esitellään tapoja, joilla kulttuuria on kirjallisuudessa määritelty. Sen lisäksi kappaleessa käsitellään tapoja, joilla kulttuuriin voidaan suhtautua. Kulttuurin käsite itsessään on monimutkainen määritellä, sillä se koetaan erittäin subjektiivisesti. Tämän vuoksi ei olekaan olemassa yhtä ainoaa oikeaa määritelmää sen käsitteelle. Jahodan (2012, 300) mukaan kulttuuri on sosiaalinen konstruktio, joka viittaa monimuotoisten- ja tulkin taisten ilmiöiden ryhmään. Tästä syystä olisi jopa suotavampaa jättää määritelmärytykset kokonaan tekemättä, ja keskittyä kulttuurin konseptin hyödyllisyyn. Tämän tutkielman tavoitteena ei ole löytää yksitulkintaista selitystä sille, mitä kulttuuri käytännössä tarkoittaa, mutta erilaisia ymmärryksiä esitellään, jotkei käsite jäisi irralliseksi.

Pyykkö (2015, 149) esittelee kolme perinteistä tapaa ymmärtää kulttuurin käsitettä: 1. Korkeakulttuuri eli kulttuuri taiteina ja humanistisina tieteinaloina, 2. Kulttuuri populaarikulttuurina ja 3. Kulttuuri synonyymina arkipäivän elämälle. Laajemmassa merkityksessä yllä mainitut tulkitatavat sisältävät merkitys-, arvo-, ja asennejärjestelmiä, jotka ovat nähtävillä ihmisten kokemuksissa ja toiminnossa. Toisin sanoen laaja kulttuurikäsitys tarkoittaa ymmärrystä siitä, että kulttuurin käsite pitää sisällään paljon muutakin, kuin faktuja tietyn maan ruokakulttuurista. Kulttuurin käsitteeseen liittyy lisäksi myös yhteiskunnallisen hierarkian muodostamista, arvottamista ja erittelyä. Erityisesti länsimaisissa kulttuurin käsitettä voidaan usein tarkastella vertaillen sivistyneitä ja sivistymättömiä kulttuureita. Tämä puolestaan ylläpitää vallitsevia yhteiskunnallisia valta-asetelmia.

Dervin (2011) esittelee kolme tapaa lähestyä kulttuureja ja kulttuurien välisyyttä: notkea, kiinteä ja kaksikasvoinen. Notkea lähestymistapa on nykyisin laajalti hyväksytty tapa suhtautua kulttuureihin ja kulttuurien välisyyn. Se antaa tilaa nähdä kulttuurien edustajat,

yksilöt, monimuotoisina, sekä prosessoida kulttuuria ymmärryksen ja samaistumisen kautta. Kiinteä lähestymistapa on notkean vastakohta. Kulttuuri ja sen edustajat nähdään muuttumattomina, eikä diversiteetin tunnistamiselle anneta sijaa. Kaksikasvoinen lähestymistapa taas viittaa ristiriitaan siitä, että kulttuuria lähestytään notkeasta ja kiinteästä näkökulmasta samaan aikaan. Usein tutkimuksissa alleviivataan kulttuuriin liittyvien stereotyppien haitallisuutta ja tunnistetaan yksilöiden monimuotoisuus, kun samanaikaisesti väitetään, että yksilöt ovat kulttuurin tuotteita. Kulttuurienvälisyys on vieraiden kielten opetuksessa tärkeä teema, jolloin on tärkeää lähestyä kulttuureita mahdollisimman avoimesti.

Tutkielman teoriaosion toisessa kappaleessa kulttuuria käsitellään vieraan kielen opetuksen ja oppimisen näkökulmasta. Opetuksen näkökulmasta kulttuuri nähdään nykyisin jatkuvan muutoksen alaisena olevana ilmiönä ja sitä lähestytään notkeasti (Dervin 2011). Aiemmin kulttuurinopetusta lähestytiin kiinteästä näkökulmasta, oppijoille esitettiin kuvausia muuttumattomista kansalliskulttuureista (Dervin 2011). Kulttuurienvälisen kompetenssin tunnistaminen osaksi sosiaalisia kompetensseja edisti kulttuurin asemaa opetuksessa. Kulttuurista ja kulttuurienvälisyystä puhuttaessa on tärkeää keskittyä yhtäläisyyskseen etsimiseen, sen sijaan, että korostettaisiin kulttuurienvälisiä eroja (Hahl 2020). Oppijoille on välitettävä kuva yhdenvertaisesta maailmasta, sen sijaan, että opetuksella vahvistettaisiin olemassa olevia valta-asetelmia (Hahl 2020). Kulttuurienvälinen kompetenssi koostuu avoimesta ja uteliaasta asenteesta, sosiaalisiin ryhmiin ja tapoihin liittyvästä tietoisuudesta, sekä tulkitsemisen, samaistumisen, tarkkailemisen ja vuorovaikuttamisen taidosta (Byram 2008). Opettajien rooli on kasvattaa oppijoita kulttuurisesti tietoisiksi ja sensitiivisiksi kansalaisiksi (Hilliard 2014), minkä vuoksi on tärkeää, että kieltenopettajilla on taitoja käydä kriittisiä ja reflektioivia keskusteluja kulttuureista (Hahl 2020). Byramin (2008) mukaan kulttuurisesti vastuullinen opetus ja kriittisen kulttuuritietoisuuden edistäminen jää usein kieltenopetuksen saralla vajaaksi.

Suomessa opetus on hyvin oppikirjavetoista (Hahl 2020). Kuitenkin kulttuurinen sisältö oppikirjoissa sisältää usein haitallisja ja kontroversialeja stereotypioita, minkä vuoksi voi olla vaarallista antaa oppikirjoille niin suurta painoarvoa opetuksessa (Dervin ym. 2015).

Kulttuurin esiintyminen oppikirjoissa on suunniteltu herättämään kiinnostusta vierasta kieltä kohtaan, sekä avustamaan kulttuurienvälisen kompetenssin kartuttamisessa (McConachy 2018). Tämän vuoksi on tärkeää, että kirjoihin suhtaudutaan kriittisesti ja oppijoita avustetaan tunnistamaan yksinkertaistettuja kuvausia kulttuureista (McConachy 2018, Hahl 2020).

Opettajien näkemystä oppikirjojen kulttuurisesta sisällöstä on tärkeää tutkia, jotta voidaan taata, että opiskelijoille välittyy oikeudenmukainen kuva maailmasta.

Kulttuurin rooli suomalaisissa opetussuunnitelmissa on suuri. Sekä perusopetuksen että lukion opetussuunnitelmiin arvopohja korostaa ihmisoikeuksia, tasa-arvoa, demokraattisuutta, luonnon monimuotoisuutta ja monikulttuurisuuden hyväksymistä. Oppiainekohtaisia tavoitteita kulttuuriin liittyen on asetettu useita, ja vieraiden kielten sekä englannin oppiaineen kohdalla ne liittyvät vahvasti kielellisen ja kulttuurisen monimuotoisuuden tunnistamiseen ja arvostamiseen. Oppilaiden ja opiskelijoiden motivaatiota ja kiinnostusta tutkimaan kulttuuriin ja kieleen liittyviä ilmiöitä kasvatetaan perusopetuksen ja lukion läpi, sekä heille tarjotaan laajasti mahdollisuuksia harjoitella kulttuurienvälistä kommunikointia aidoissa ja monimuotoisissa tilanteissa. Myös englannin kielen globaalın aseman tunnistaminen on englannin oppiaineen tavoitteena koulutuksen eri vaiheissa. Kulttuurin vaikutusta vieraan kielen opettamiseen ei missään nimessä aliarvioida, vaan huomio keskitetään nimenomaan kulttuurienvälisen ja kommunikatiivisen kompetenssin kehittämiseen ja monikulttuurisuuden hyväksytään. On tärkeää tutkia, millä tavoin kieltenopettajat vastaavat monilukuisiin tavoitteisiin, jotta niiden toteutuminen varmistetaan.

Tämä tutkimus toteutettiin kuuden puolistrukturoidun haastattelun avuin. Haastattelut toteutettiin vuoden 2021 loka-marraskuussa virtuaalisesti. Haastattelukysymykset suunniteltiin kolmen teeman ympärille: kulttuuri haastateltavan omassa opetuksessa, haastateltavan omat kulttuurikokemukset ja kulttuurisisältö oppikirjoissa. Näiden teemojen alle listattiin ohjaavia kysymyksiä, jotka kuitenkin antoivat haastateltaville tilaa ilmaista itseään vapaasti. Haastateltavat englanninopettajat työskentelivät Etelä- tai Länsi-Suomessa perusopetuksessa tai lukiolla. Heidän ikänsä vaihtelivat 24–36 ikävuoden välillä, ja opettajakokemusta heillä oli yhdestä vuodesta seitsemään vuoteen. Jokainen englanninopettaja opetti lisäksi myös vähintään yhtä muuta vierasta kieltä. Tutkimuksen kattavuutta rajoittaa opettajien suhteellisen nuori ikäjakama ja kokemuksen vähäisyys. Tutkimuksen tarkoituksesta ei kuitenkaan ole selittää kulttuuriin liittyviä ilmiöitä, vaan tarkastella haastateltujen opettajien näkemystä kulttuurinopetuksen.

Aineisto analysoitiin noudattaen Dörnyein (2017) sekä Gallettan ja Crossin (2013) perusteita laadullisen aineiston analyysia varten. Molemmissa lähteissä otetaan huomioon teoriapohjan läsnäolo jo kysymysten suunnittelussa ja analyysiprosessissa, ja sen vuoksi vuoksi kyseiset ohjenuorat otettiin käyttöön tässä tutkimuksessa. Aineisto järjestettiin analyysia varten jo

litterointivaiheessa, minkä jälkeen etsittiin tutkimuskysymysten suhteen relevantteja teemoja. Aineiston koodaus tapahtui lukemalla litteroidut haastattelut läpi useaan kertaan ja alleviivaamalla tärkeältä vaikuttavia ajatuksia. Suuremmat teemat aineistossa alkoivat näin hahmottua. Keskeiset haastatteluista nousseet teemat olivat: kulttuurin rooli opetuksessa, haasteet kulttuurinopetuksessa, miten kulttuuri otetaan mukaan opetuukseen, opettajien näkemys oppijoiden asenteista kulttuuria kohtaan, opettajien oma käsitys kulttuurista, tekstikirjojen tarjoama tuki kulttuurinopetuukseen, kokemukset oppikirjojen kulttuurisisällöstä, sekä muu kulttuurinopetuksessa hyödynnettävä materiaali. Näiden teemojen alle jakautuvat näkemykset kulttuurista, sekä opettajien omat henkilökohtaiset kulttuurinopetuksen liittyvät tavoitteet suhteutettiin opetussuunnitelmiin asettamiin kulttuuritavoitteisiin.

Haastateltujen opettajien kulttuurikäsitys oli laaja. Monet heistä osoittivat tiedostavansa kulttuurin käsitteen monimuotoisuuden, ja alleviivasivat, etteivät itsekään ole kaikkitietäviä niin opetuksen kohdekulttuurin kuin kulttuurin käsitteenkään suhteen. Kulttuuritietoisuutta on kehitettävä ja ylläpidettävä elämän läpi, minkä vuoksi onkin erityisen tärkeää, että kieltenopettajat pysyvät aallonharjalla. Haastatellut opettajat parantavat kulttuurituntemustaan esimerkiksi sosiaalista mediaa ja uutisia seuraamalla, sekä katsomalla paljon elokuvia ja lukemalla kirjoja. Opettajien näkemys kulttuurista pohjautuu erityisesti positiiviseen ja uteliaaseen asenteeseen kulttuureja sekä kulttuurienvälisyyttä kohtaan.

Haastatellut opettajat tunnistavat kulttuurin suuren merkityksen ja tärkeän roolin vieraiden kielten opetuksessa. Tästä huolimatta opettajat ilmaisevat kulttuurin jäävän usein toissijaiseksi muihin kieltenoppimisen osa-alueisiin verrattuna. Ristiriita syntyy siitä, että opettajat toisaalta näkevät kulttuurinopettamisen tasavertaisena, mutta myöntävät silti tietoisesti jättävänsä sitä muiden osa-alueiden jalkoihin aikaresurssien vähäisyyden, arviontihaasteiden ja kokemuksen puutteen vuoksi. Opettajat korostavat kuitenkin vastauksissaan kulttuurienvälisen ja kommunikatiivisen kompetenssin tärkeyttä, jotka ovat usealle heistä tärkeitä asioita, joita haluavat oppilailleen tai opiskelijoilleen välittää.

Oppikirjat ovat valtavan keskeisessä asemassa haastateltujen opettajien kulttuurinopetuksessa. Kaikki heistä mainitsevat nojaavansa joko osittain tai kokonaan oppikirjoihin opettaessaan kulttuurista. Opettajat käyttävät oppikirjoja alustana, josta he hakevat inspiraatiota ja ohjeistusta, kun heille ei ole selvää mitä kulttuurinopetuksen tulisi sisältää. Hahl (2020) mainitsee myös opettajien olevan usein tiedottomia ja huolissaan siitä, mitä kulttuurienvälistä sisältöä heidän tulisi opettaa. Tähän tutkimukseen osallistuneet opettajat ilmaisivat vastaavia

mielipiteitä. Tässä suhteessa oppikirjojen sisältö nähdään hyödyllisenä, koska oppikirjassa ehdotetun kulttuurisisällön pohjalta on opetusta helpompi laajentaa muihin näkökulmiin. Myönteistä palautetta opettajat antavat erityisesti ”kulttuurisivulle”, joissa esitellään tietoa kohdekulttuurista, sekä annetaan erilaisia tiedonhakutehtäviä. Negatiivista palautetta taas annettiin selvistä kulttuuriin liittyvistä stereotypioista. Aiemmassa oppikirjatutkimuksessa on myös tunnistettu stereotypioiden toistaminen oppikirjoissa (esim. Hahl 2020, Canale 2016). Tämä alleviivaa, kuinka tärkeää on, että opettajat ovat kriittisesti kulttuuritietoisia ja tunnistavat kulttuurin ongelmalliset representaatiot oppimateriaalista. Opettajat ilmaisivat olevansa luottavaisia omiin taitoihinsa käydä kriittistä keskustelua opetusryhmiensä kanssa kulttuuriin liittyvistä ongelmista. Tämä puolestaan viittaa siihen, että opettajat ovat tarpeeksi taitavia ohjaamaan oppijaa kehittymään kulttuuritietoiseksi ja -vastuulliseksi kansalaiseksi.

Opettajien vastaukset heijastavat samankaltaisia arvoja, joita myös opetussuunnitelmat korostavat. Vieraiden kielten kulttuuritavoitteet ovat kunnianhimoisia, mutta haastattelujen perusteella opettajien tavoitteet ovat ainakin osittain linjassa kansallisten opetussuunnitelmien kanssa. Monet opettajista myönsivät, etteivät he olleet perehtyneet riittävästi opetussuunnitelmissa mainittuihin tavoitteisiin ja tunnistivat tarpeen käydä tarkistamassa, mitä heiltä odotetaan kulttuurinopetuksen suhteen. Tästä huolimatta on positiivista huomata, etteivät tavoitteet kuitenkaan jää huomiotta tai toteutumatta, vaikkei aktiivista tietämystä tarkoista tavoitteista heillä olekaan.

Tämä tutkielma antaa englanninopettajien perspektiiviä kulttuurinopetuksen, sekä kulttuurin esiintymiseen oppikirjassa. Tutkielma myös vihjaa, miten opetussuunnitelmien kulttuuriin liittyvät tavoitteet toteutuvat käytännössä koulumaailmassa. Tutkimuksen perusteella ei kuitenkaan voida tehdä yleistyksiä kulttuurinopetuksen tilasta koko Suomessa. Tutkimuksen toistaminen laajemmalla tutkimusotoksella ja heterogeenisemmällä osallistujaryhmällä avaisi mahdollisuksia saavuttaa kattava kuva kieltenopettajien näkemyksistä. Tutkimuksen tulosten perusteella voidaan kuitenkin alleviivata, kuinka tärkeää on saada kieltenopettajien ääni yhä enemmän kuuluville esimerkiksi oppikirjoja laadittaessa tai kansallisia opetussuunnitelmia päivitetäessä.