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Creating a Set of Strategies for Teaching English as a Foreign
Language to Year 5 Learners on the Autism Spectrum

MA thesis

Sirelin Koval

SUPERVISOR: Lect. Natalja Zagura

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ABSTRACT

Estonia is among those countries that follow the principles of inclusion in education, which states that basic education must be available to every person. Teachers must be ready to accommodate all students in an EFL classroom, including those with an autism spectrum disorder. This thesis aims to evaluate which teaching strategies, or combinations of them, have been found to be effective and successful in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms for students with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) and to create a set of teaching strategies that can be used in Year 5. The strategies created have been used in a special education school but the target teacher for this thesis is a comprehensive basic school teacher who has students with ASD in their classroom. This support material helps the teacher quickly adjust their teaching to meet the basic needs of an ASD student. Since these strategies generally facilitate the learning process, students without ASD can also benefit from their use.

The thesis consists of an introduction, two main chapters, a conclusion, a list of references, and two appendices. The first chapter is dedicated to research done previously about autism in education and EFL classroom, divided into five sub-sections with a focus on ASD in educational settings, ASD in a social EFL classroom, ASD challenges in foreign language instruction, strategies for teaching ASD in EFL classrooms, main special needs, and general teaching strategies. The second main chapter compiles a set of teaching strategies and gives examples of how to use them, followed by a discussion by the author.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ADHD – attention deficit hyperactivity disorder

ASD – autism spectrum disorder

EFL – English as a foreign language, used in the case English is not an official language of the Country

GAD – generalized anxiety disorder

NCBS – national curriculum for basic school

INTRODUCTION

Being a teacher today, whether at the elementary, secondary, or even university level, one is very likely to come across students whose educational needs differ from the majority. The responsibility of providing the necessary support to include all students and offer them an equal opportunity to learn in a classroom falls into the hands of the teacher. Even though the Estonian Central Bureau for Statistics does not have any statistics about the proportion of people with autism, according to the Autism and Developmental Disabilities Monitoring (ADDM) Network (2022) in 2020, about 1 in 36 children aged eight years old in the United States were identified with an autism spectrum disorder. Decades ago, it was found that per 10 000 children, only up to ten had an autism disorder diagnosis, but then again, it is essential to note that according to Zablotzky et al. (2019), changes in demographic and socioeconomic subgroups can be related to improvements in awareness and access to health care. Taking this into account, these days, even the teachers of foreign languages in comprehensive basic schools need to have the knowledge on how to teach and support an autistic learner.

According to the Estonian ministry of Education and research (2019), the main aim of the Estonian education system is inclusive education. Simply put, inclusion in education means that every child is provided with an educational arrangement that is tailored to their needs and aspirations. Inclusive education was designed as a principle to include all students despite their special needs. Furthermore, when following the NCBS together with the Estonian Educational Development Plan by Estonian ministry of Education and research (2019) until the year 2035, it is seen that both have set their focus on high-quality and inclusive education. The Estonian Educational Development Plan states that education is attainable and accessible, learning is

supported, and learning opportunities meet the learners' abilities and needs. The reality is that students with special needs often study in regular classrooms with teachers who do not have the special training to work with them. Teachers are asked to provide inclusive education but might need to gain knowledge of how to carry it out. This creates the need for a set of strategies for teaching English as a foreign language for foreign language teachers at the comprehensive basic school level. With this set of strategies, English teachers can have an overview of how to modify their English teaching strategies, curriculum, and materials to better the learning of an autistic student.

Teaching strategies are often defined as generalized plans for a lesson that include specific instructions and outlined tactics for a better teaching outcome. Openshaw et al. (1967) defined teaching strategies as "a generalized plan for a lesson(s) that includes structure, desired learner behaviour in terms of the goals of instruction, and an outline of tactics necessary to implement the strategy." Since the autism spectrum is quite broad, it would be challenging to create teaching strategies for all ASD learners for teachers to implement in an EFL classroom. Current research focuses on creating a set of teaching strategies for teaching autistic learners in an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom who follow the Estonian National Curriculum for Basic School (NCBS).

At this point, it is relevant to note that according to Khachadourian et al. (2023), the majority (74%) of individuals with autism spectrum disorder had at least one comorbidity, including attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), generalized anxiety disorder (GAD) and behaviour problems, psychiatric and neurological disorders, and various growth conditions. Therefore, we can note that the chance of an ASD student having other underlying conditions is relatively high. As the focus is creating a teaching strategy for teachers of English for ASD

students, it is vital for the teacher to be aware of their students' other accompanying disorders and take them into account. This helps to set the focus for the thesis and create a good set of relevant strategies.

To date and the knowledge of the author, no teaching strategies published for Estonian teachers teaching ASD students in EFL classrooms have been devised yet, which provides a justification for creating a set of strategies to help teachers modify already existing materials. In 2011, Liia Salum defended a similar research paper on *Teaching English to Students with Autism*. In her MA thesis, she pointed out the necessity to modify and adapt activities and texts in course books; and created some supplementary materials for teaching autistic students in her lessons. This research is relevant since Salum works with similar students at the same school and is a colleague working in the same field.

I chose a practical approach to help comprehensive basic school teachers adapt existing materials to their students' needs. The purpose of this qualitative study is to evaluate which teaching strategies, or combinations of them, have been found to be effective and successful in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms for students with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) and to create a set of teaching strategies that can be used with the course book *Family & Friends 3* (used in Year 5). Since the author of the thesis teaches multiple groups in Year 5, several of whose pupils are on the autism spectrum, the author's teaching will clearly benefit from the project. Even though the strategies are implemented in a special education school, the intended audience of this thesis is a comprehensive school English teacher who has students with ASD in their class. These strategies aim to assist the teacher when adapting their teaching methods and materials quickly and efficiently. Proceeding with the aim of this thesis, the research questions are as follows:

1. What are the main environmental, socio-communicative, and academic special needs of children with autism in basic education EFL classroom?
2. Which teaching strategies are found to be effective when teaching young ASD students in an EFL classroom?
3. How to use these teaching strategies to address ASD learners' environmental, socio-communicative, and academic needs in EFL basic education classroom?

The thesis consists of two chapters. Chapter one talks about students with ASD in the education system and EFL classroom. The second chapter gives an overview of the *Family & Friends 3* course book and its supporting materials, compiles a list of strategies, and provides examples on how these strategies could be applied in the EFL classroom.

CHAPTER 1: AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER

Chapter 1 provides a literature review which is divided into five sections. Sections 1.1. and 1.2. give an overview of ASD learners in education system in general and in the EFL classroom more specifically. Sections 1.3. to 1.4. discuss challenges when creating teaching strategies working with ASD learners and discuss the best methods and strategies to carry out. Section 1.5 summarizes an autistic learner's environmental, socio-communicative, academic special needs, and general teaching strategies.

1.1. Students with ASD in educational settings

Autism spectrum disorder (ASD), as defined by American Psychiatric Association (2013), "...is a neurodevelopmental disorder characterized by deficits in social communication and the presence of restricted interests and repetitive behaviours." The Association published this definition in its 5th edition, creating the concept of a "spectrum" ASD diagnosis. The "spectrum" concept combined separate pervasive developmental diagnoses (autistic disorder, Asperger's disorder, pervasive developmental disorder, and childhood disintegrative disorder) into one. The American Psychiatric Association's (2013) Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (5th ed.) describes the combination of diagnoses as a helpful process of providing more precise criteria, which will result in simplifying the process of providing an accurate diagnosis.

According to Zager et al. (2016), the symptoms of autism can be divided into two main domains: impaired social communication skills and restrictive and repetitive behaviours and

interests. Impaired social reciprocity shows abnormal social-emotional responses, such as decreased frequency of eye contact, preference for being alone, absence of pointing, showing, and giving objects, and a lack of response to social stimuli. These symptoms are often diagnosed by 12 months of age; however, some children are asymptomatic and do not meet diagnostic criteria until later in life (Zager et al. 2016). Pupils on the spectrum can also have a limited ability to engage in back-and-forth conversation as well as having a reduced sharing of interest and emotions since they are often described as atypical in social relationships (Zager et al. 2016). Most children with ASD show repetitive and stereotyped motor behaviours at some point in their development. Repetitive behaviours and interests are often expressed with having restricted interests; repetitive motor mannerisms (e.g., hand or finger flapping or twisting); non-functional routines or rituals (e.g., always having the same bedtime schedule); and persistent preoccupation with parts of objects (e.g., Being fascinated with the wheels of a toy car but not playing with the vehicle itself).

As mentioned above, according to the Autism and Developmental Disabilities Monitoring Network (2022), in 2020, about 1 in 36 children aged eight years old in the United States were diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder. Even though ASD is a neurodevelopmental disorder that mainly affects a person's ability to communicate and interact socially with others, it can but does not always affect an individual's cognitive ability. Since autism is a spectrum disorder, it affects each person differently and is presented with various degrees of severity. While schools are considered social environments, that can be seen as a problematic issue for children who are socially impaired (Fleury et al. 2014). Students with ASD have trouble with social skills, and having a mixture of peers among various teachers and classrooms engaging in different rules can also prevent autistic students

from engaging in learning. Poor academic performance is also often noted for autistic children since their social abilities affect their learning capacity within a classroom (Ostmeyer & Scarpa 2012). Autism is a lifelong developmental disability that impacts the way a person interprets the world around them and interacts with others. Since it is often a hidden disability, as the person might not show any physical differences from their neurotypical peers, it makes it important for teachers to be educated about the nature of ASD.

Many children with autism are unable to pick up on social cues and have limited imitation skills; therefore, the basic principles of social interaction need to be included in the teaching process. Classroom social situations that are meant to limit students' repetitive behaviour can be stressful for autistic learners as they might lead to irritability, aggression, self-injury, or other repetitive and problem behaviours (Boyd, Woodard & Bodfish 2011). Boyd et al. (2011) divided ASD students' educational challenges into three areas: social, behavioural, and academic categories, showing that those three categories are interrelated and directly affect each other. For example, improved social skills lead to a decrease in repetitive behaviours and that decrease can lead to increased engagement in learning activities, which directly affects knowledge acquisition (Boyd, Woodard & Bodfish 2011). Accordingly, autism should not be considered as a deficit but rather a position for observing differences that result in the increase in equality and rights for a learner with ASD.

Autism disorder is mostly considered a developmental disability with significant social communication and behavioural challenges. Having taken that into account, a study by Leifler et al. (2021) suggested that adjustments in the pedagogical and psychosocial learning environment can improve students' performance and function in school. A systematically set up classroom to support students' needs, can increase their skill acquisition, independence and

lower their stress and anxiety levels. Myles et.al (2015) from Organization for Autism¹³ Research pointed out that classroom adaptations for different autism spectrum characteristics are beneficial to all learners in the classroom but especially support students with autism. The organization recommends defining classroom areas, such as free time areas, reading corners or alone zones. Keeping the classroom organized and having a designated space for objects in the room can benefit the ASD student. It is also recommended to keep a daily visual schedule for students to always see, as well as having other visual cues for emotional and socio-communicative support.

For some ASD students or students with comorbidities (such as ADHD), according to Myles et. al (2015), it is beneficial to face their desks away from windows and high-traffic areas in the classroom or where they have access to other distractive stimuli. Since some students can be susceptible to smells, it is important to avoid using strong perfumes or heavy lotions and ask other related personnel to do the same. Regarding to the sensitivity to sounds, it is important to prepare and gradually teach tolerance to the student for everyday sounds. Teachers are recommended to use a soft voice, when possible, have headphones ready or have students use earplugs when essential. For students sensitive to light, finding the best level of light and not having any lights flickering can be crucial. It is also recommended to try out different colours of light or changing the intensity of it.

1.2. Student with ASD in a social EFL classroom

A student with difficulties in social communication and a language barrier has more difficulties to overcome than a person without these barriers. One of the ways to successfully teach ASD students, is to provide teachers with proper teaching strategies. Teaching strategies, in this sense, refer to the methods, systems, techniques, procedures, and other processes a teacher uses during instruction. Based on the research of Lasintia et al. (2021), there are three main strategies used for dealing with the difficulties a teacher might face when teaching EFL to ASD students.

The first challenge was improving listening and getting the attention of the learner. To enhance students' understanding, teachers employ visual aids, objects, media, and other props. The second obstacle described was echolalia, which is expressed through overly repeating what is being said. The teacher's task is to guide this process and instead of repeating, have students answer and ask their own questions. Finally, students with autism require pictures and cards to help them understand what the teacher is saying. The learning content should be expressed in a simple language so the students can understand what is being said. The learner needs to understand the context and then gradually learn how to use words correctly to be able to communicate.

English language learning can be approached as a process of mastering several skills (listening, reading, writing, and speaking) or, alternatively, a set of communicative language activities and strategies - the latter being listed in the *Companion Volume* of CEFR by Council of Europe (2018: 56- 129). The present thesis will take into consideration the (more recent) distinction used in CEFR – receptive, productive, and interactive skills, with mediation skills being left aside at this point, as these are cognitively too challenging for the EFL learners of the target group that are considered in this project.

To be able to communicate in a foreign language, both receptive and productive language skills should be developed. Students with autism often struggle especially with social and communicative situations; therefore, having a set of strategies for teachers to help students master those communicative skills is essential.

1.3. Autism Spectrum Challenges in Foreign Language Instruction

Due to their varied behavioural differences, autistic learners require a simple and systematic learning environment, which helps them to partake in education. Structured teaching is an approach that helps individuals with ASD to understand their world and live in it more independently by fostering systematic and predictable instruction. The primary purposes of structured teaching are improving an individual's adaptive skills and adjusting their environment to accommodate the deficits caused by autism. The main components stated by Suprihatin et al. (2019) for structured learning are the organization of the physical environment and having visual schedules and work/activity systems together with visually structured activity. These elements bind directly with the characteristics of autism spectrum disorders, where many individuals with ASD are visual learners.

According to Suprihatin et al. (2019), physical organization or structure refers to displaying equipment, resources, and general surroundings. Strong classroom visuals and auditory stimulation can be distressing for individuals with ASD. Another challenge for ASD students is the changes that they are unaware of. Making changes that are not systematic or predictable is seen as an interruption towards pupils with ASD's state from being focused and enjoying previous work. Due to the nature of ASD in verbal processing, limiting verbal

explanation is needed to avoid confusion. This means that verbal explanations should be matched with a student's ability and communicated directly to them. It is also suggested that all instructions should be supported with symbols, icons, texts, pictures, or objects based on each child's developmental level. This shortens verbal communication and helps the student focus on the visual guidance.

In an article by Pratt et al. (2017), the authors stated that some ASD individuals do not use their long-term memory but rehearse things repeatedly. While this might be useful in remembering short sequences of information, it takes a lot of time and is an ineffective strategy for remembering things, especially in the long run. This is defined as a rote memory learning technique and is often demonstrated exceptionally by ASD students. However, it takes a lot of time to process the information gotten. It can make it hard to generalize learnt skills from one setting to another, meaning teaching the same skill or knowledge across different settings, activities or people is important.

1.4. Strategies and methods for teaching EFL to ASD students

As mentioned above, ASD learners require a structured learning environment to excel in the classroom. For that reason, this thesis will mainly focus on a program called Treatment and Education of Autistic and Related Communication Handicapped Children (TEACCH) when discussing modifying materials for ASD learners and creating a set of strategies. For TEACCH, structured learning is at the centre of learning, and it helps teachers utilize the strengths children have (Suprihatin et al. 2019). According to Mesibov et al. (2004), the

components of structured teaching approach are routines and flexibility, physical environment organization, predictable teaching sequence, visual activities, and work/activity systems.

In a paper published by Mesibov et al. (2010), the TEACCH structure is based on four kinds of structures. The first TEACCH structure focuses on the physical structure and visual cues to show the order of tasks, or what to do next. The second structure involves the organization and communicating the sequence of the lesson or the day to make it more understandable. It is also relevant that once something is confirmed on the timetable, impromptu changes are not ideal for ASD students as it may cause disturbance to them. The third TEACCH structure is the organization of visual tasks, showing how long something lasts, seeing the process of the activity, what comes after the activity. The final structure is linking individual tasks into sequence of activities, called the work systems or activity systems. This increases the effectiveness of the work done.

Mesibov et al. (2010) also stated that young ASD learners often do not have an automatic or clear understanding of where they are supposed to be; therefore, they may wander from room to room when not provided with clear physical boundaries. Using visual schedules helps learners to keep themselves organized and including time for free choice strengthens their communication skills. Having these types of schedules in a classroom can also make learners' preferences more meaningful to learners since they understand what options are available.

When modifying materials for teaching ASD students as an EFL teacher, knowing the general guidelines for teaching ASD students is necessary. Iovannone et al. (2003) pointed out six general strategies to be included when working with students with ASD, which can then be modified and specified according to the student's needs:

1. Having “individualized supports and services for students and families” by understanding their unique preferences, interests, and learning styles. Considering family preferences and already working systems at home can help determine goals and how instruction will be delivered. Incorporating the child's own preferences and special interests and focusing on their strengths and weaknesses can help determine the most appropriate level of instruction needed for the child's individual goals.
2. Following “systematic instruction” involves carefully planning instruction given and identifying valid education goals by carefully outlining instructional procedures for teaching, evaluating the effectiveness of the teaching process, and adjusting it accordingly. Systematic, well-planned instruction is essential in classrooms with students with ASD. Carefully targeted skills to be taught and planning instructions ahead should have an effective result.
3. “Comprehensible and structured environments” for students to be arranged in a way that elicits, enhances, and supports the acquisition, social interactions, appropriate behaviours, and targets academic goals. This kind of environment allows the student with ASD and others in the classroom to understand what is currently happening in the learning process and what is happening next.
4. “Specialized curriculum should include systematic instruction in social engagement skills”, including initiating and responding to social interactions, appropriate recreational skills, and language comprehension. Together with the ASD students' families, curricular content and instructional methods should be based on individual assessment. The assessment should focus on skills that are most likely to be useful in the student's life and increase their competent performance.

5. “Functional approach to problem behaviours” is used, rather than eliminating a child's behaviours but replaced the problem behaviours with an appropriate alternative or replacement behaviours that results in the same consequence. Behaviour support plans include multiple positive interventions to prevent problems from occurring and provide appropriate replacement behaviours, so the students know how to change even their own response to problems and adapt their reactions.
6. Strong “family involvement” and collaborative partnership with the family can contribute to the effectiveness of interventions and programming of student's behaviours, primarily since the same strategies are used in multiple environments.

1.5. Autistic learner’s environmental, socio-communicative, academic special needs, and general teaching strategies

Throughout the process of getting familiar with the materials for the literature review, the most important special needs and general strategies were collected and combined to have a better overview of what is being worked on next. Even though there are more specific needs and teaching strategies for an autistic learner, I decided to focus on these (see Appendix 1) language-specific strategies. These will be the base for creating a list of more specific strategies and additional examples that can be used in grade 5.

Continuing with the aim of this thesis, the research has found answers to the first and second research questions. The first one goes as follows: *What are the main environmental, socio-communicative, and academic special needs of children with autism in basic education EFL classrooms?* The answer to this question is based on Boyd et al. (2011), Fleury et al. 2014),

Myles et. al (2015), Ostmeier & Scarpa (2012), Zager et al. (2016), and is summarized with an illustration (Appendix 1). Some of the main special needs for children with autism in EFL classroom in **environmental** settings are as follows:

- *Repetitive behaviours and motor mannerisms*, which may include repetitive movements, fixations, sensory-seeking behaviours, adherence to rituals and routines, and stereotyped behaviours.

- *Restricted interests*, which may be expressed as an intense focus on specific topics, activities, or objects. Students may become fixated on a particular subject, collect items related to it, or become upset if they are unable to engage with it.

- *Sensory differences*, which might be expressed as either over-responsivity or under-responsivity to sensory stimuli. Over-responsivity may lead to sensitivity to certain sounds, textures, or lighting, resulting in avoidance or agitation. Under-responsivity can lead to seeking out various sensory experiences, such as touching objects, making noises, or rocking back and forth.

Looking at **socio-communicative needs**, it was found that the main special needs in this category are as follows:

- *Abnormal social responses*, which can be expressed as difficulty in social interaction and communication as they may struggle to initiate or respond to social cues (such as eye contact, facial expressions, or body language). The student might have difficult

understanding social norms and appropriate behaviour in different settings, leading to awkward or inappropriate social interactions.

- *Abnormal emotional responses*, which makes expressing their own emotions difficult or they might display emotions in a way that is not consistent with the situation. They can also struggle with understanding others' emotions and responding appropriately.

- *Lack of response to social stimuli*, which can be expressed as a lack of interest or response to social cues. The student may not respond to their name being called or may not show interest in others' activities or emotions.

- *Reduced sharing of interest and emotions*, which is expressed through having difficulty in expressing and sharing their own interests, emotions, and experiences with others. The student may have limited or repetitive conversation skills and may not show interest in others' activities or emotions.

- *Difficulty with social skills, understanding relationships*, which may be expressed as challenges in understanding and applying social norms and cues. The student might struggle to initiate or respond to social interactions, maintain conversations, and understand nonverbal communication.

In the final, **academic** category, the main special needs include:

- *Difficulties in learning academic topics*, that may be expressed as challenges in processing and retaining information presented in academic settings. The student may have

difficulty with organization, planning, and completing tasks, and might struggle with understanding more abstract concepts.

- *Difficulties in understanding daily living skills*, can be expressed as having difficulty in learning and applying skills necessary for daily living (such as hygiene, cooking, and self-care). They might have difficulty with organizing, planning, and executing daily tasks and routines.

- *Different memory strategies, rote-memory skills*, which is expressed with a preference for rote-memory and difficulty with higher-order memory strategies. The student may have strong memory for facts but may struggle with understanding and applying more abstract concepts.

The second research question aimed to find *which teaching strategies are found to be effective when teaching young ASD students in EFL classrooms?* The answer to this question is based on Lasintia et al. (2021), Leifler et al. (2021), Mesibov et al. (2010), Mesibov et al. (2004), Myles et.al (2015), Pratt et al. (2017),) Suprihatin et al. (2019), and is summarized with an illustration in the second part of the thesis (Figure 1). Some of the main teaching strategies for children with autism in EFL classroom in **environmental** settings are as follows:

- *Work/activity systems and structured activities*, as these can be expressed using schedules, visual aids, and clear instructions. As the TEACCH structure states, a visual schedule can be used to outline the steps of a task or activity, providing a visual representation of what needs to be done. A work system may even involve breaking a task into smaller steps and providing visual cues to indicate when each step is complete.

- *Simple, systematic visual language*, like the use of pictures and symbols, which can help to represent different parts of speech can help students understand the concept better. Visual organizers can help teaching a story structure, character development, and themes in a text.

- *Visual schedules* can be used well in EFL classroom in the beginning of each lesson (lesson plans). Student sees the outline of the lesson and when something is finished, it can be crossed off or marked done.

- *Predictable sequence of teaching* can be done by using visual or oral language. Using a relatively consistent structure for EFL lessons can help students with ASD anticipate what is coming up next.

- *Organized and safe environment* can help minimizing distractions. It is also beneficial to have designated areas for different activities (such as game corner, reading nook etc....)

- *Clear physical boundaries* are similar to organized and safe environment, as having designated areas can make ASD student better understand where something is. For some students it can be helpful if their seat and the area around it is marked (for instance with tape on the floor) and the rules and expectations about physical boundaries are set.

In the next, **socio-communicative needs** category, the main special needs include the following elements:

- *Modelling appropriate communication* can help student understand and learn proper communication techniques. Teachers can model appropriate communications skills (such as

making eye contact, taking turns in conversation, using appropriate body language).

Modelling appropriate behaviour by hearing and seeing helps students understand how to communicate in different situations.

- *Using social scripts* can provide a clear structure for social communication, outlining what to say or do in various social situations. They can also support language development by providing models of appropriate language and vocabulary use as well as prompt students to think through different problem-solving scenarios and social expectations and norms.

- *Incorporating special interests* into student's lesson activities can create a more engaging and effective learning environment. Giving students opportunities to talk about their special interests or have a discussion with the classroom, makes it easier for the student to socialise with others.

- *Communication in natural context* should be encouraged (such as during peer play or their daily routines), as it helps ASD students to generalize communication skills to real-life situations. It is important to socialize about and during meaningful situations that take place during the day or lesson.

In the final, **academic category**, it was found that the main teaching strategies in this category are:

- *Structured activities* can help practicing for various social situations. The key is to provide a clear set of rules and expectations for the specific activity and give opportunities for

social interaction. Repetition and practice help with building familiarity and confidence in social skills.

- *Clear, short, systematic instruction* together with repetition allows to build familiarity with communication skills. According to TEACCH structure, clear and concise language helps the student avoid confusion or misinterpretation. Instructions for communicative tasks should be short, clear and in a logical order.

- *Using positive reinforcement* and feedback can encourage social behaviour and communication. Immediate specific praise for reinforcing good behaviour is recommended. Other types of reward systems can be set (such as tokens, stickers or other visual or tangible rewards) to help student track their progress.

- *Breaking bigger tasks into smaller sections* allows students to better organize and plan their work and allow for more frequent opportunities for feedback and support. Having smaller sections together with their work schedule can help autistic students see their progress throughout the task or lesson.

This literature review gave an overview of the main special needs and the best general strategies for teaching ASD students. As this thesis focuses on the creation of a set of teaching strategies as a foreign language to year 5 learners on the autism spectrum, the next chapter is going to present those specific strategies with examples from *Family & Friends 3* and other illustrations by the author.

CHAPTER 2: EMPIRICAL STUDY: CREATING A SET OF SUPPORTING STRATEGIES FOR TEACHING AN ASD LEARNER IN AN EFL CLASSROOM

The aim of this empirical study is to compile a set of teaching strategies to use in Year 5, while considering the current national curriculum for basic schools (NCBS). As teaching can be different with ASD students, having guidelines for modifying materials is beneficial. The aim of this thesis is by no means to create a set of strategies that work for all the students with ASD in the same way but rather to offer general guidelines and strategies to help teachers find the best solutions for all students in a classroom. The main goal of this chapter is to compile a set of strategies to support teachers who are teaching EFL to students with ASD. Certain principles should be followed when teaching and modifying or designing materials for students with autism. The present paper will discuss several suggestions found useful for teaching and creating study materials of EFL to students with autism based on the first part of the thesis.

In the process of writing the literature review, answers for the first two questions were found, as seen above (see section 1.5). This empirical part of the thesis tries to find an answer to the following research question: How to use these teaching strategies to address ASD learners' environmental, socio-communicative, and academic needs in EFL basic education classroom? As the research has found out what the main needs of an ASD learner are and what general strategies are found to be beneficial according to each need, a list of specific strategies for teachers to use in EFL classroom will be developed.

Section 2.1 discusses the structure and content of the course book *Family & Friends 3*. Section 2.2 compiles specific recommendations and strategies on how to modify teaching materials for students and offers examples for some strategies that the author has used in practise. Section 2.3 discusses the use of strategies in a classroom. When forming the list of strategies, the system of CEFR receptive, productive, and interactive skills and TEACCH structure are used to present the findings.

2.1. The structure of *Family & Friends 3*

The present section focuses on the overview of *Family & Friends 3*, a course book, and its supporting materials, used in Year 5. This Oxford University Press 7-level course consists of *Family & Friends Starter* set and levels one to six in regular course book series up to *Family & Friends 6*.

2.1.1. Structure of the course book series

Each course book consists of 13-15 units per level, and one-third of each unit is dedicated to skills training. Units are divided into four sections, focusing on specific language areas, such as words, grammar, phonics, and skills. The word section focuses on learning specific vocabulary about the topic and offers listening files. The grammar section presents a grammar box with examples and practice activities for the students. The phonic section consists mainly of listening, repeating and, chanting words. Some units focus on rhyming words and finding similar phonetic sounds. The final skills section is the most extensive one. It generally consists of two skills: receptive (reading, listening) and productive (speaking and writing). Throughout

the units, students are presented with different types of texts, both authentic and written for educational purposes.

After every three units, the course book offers a section called “fluency time” and “skills time”. The fluency time section presents a language-related project mainly focusing on developing speaking skills. Skills time section offers the chance to practice the past three units’ vocabulary and grammar and can be used as practice for skills tests. At the end of the course book, extra reading materials and cultural topics can be found. For every unit, unit tests are available together with progress tests, which combine up to three units. The lessons are supported by flashcards at levels 1-3 in the *Family & Friends* series. Extra accompanying resources can be found in the *Family & Friends* course book, Grammar Friends series, *Family & Friends 3 Extra Practise*, Teacher's Resource Pack, and on CD-ROM.

2.1.2. Overview of *Family & Friends 3*

Family & Friends 3, taught in year 5 for level A2.1, consists of 15 units, two extensive reading chapters, and four sections on the topic of culture. Units one to three talk about different countries, seasons, hobbies, collectibles, and phrasal verbs. These units also focus on learning the simple present, talking about likes and dislikes, and asking for permission. Units four to six talk about water sports, adjectives for describing places and people, zoo animals, and daily routines. The grammar section focuses on the present continuous tense: affirmative, negative, and interrogative. Units seven to nine cover the topics of food, places in town, and describing and comparing things. The grammar section starts with prepositions of time and continues with

countable and uncountable nouns. The final grammar topic is about comparatives and superlatives.

Units 10 to 13 talk about the park, transportation, verbs, adjectives, and prepositions. The main grammar topics for these units are past simple and talking about rules and obligations. The final units, 14–17, focus on school and holiday topics combined with time-related words. The grammar section continues to focus on the past simple and introduces the structure “going to”. The course book focuses on all language skills, as it offers different materials for each unit. Units are built up similarly, as they start out with new vocabulary, reading and listening activities. The second part of the unit focuses on the grammar section and adds some extra vocabulary. Thirdly, students are presented with phonics and given some extra reading.

When thinking about autistic learners, having a clear structure for each unit is necessary as it helps the student know what is coming next and focus on the content. Another positive aspect is the number of listening activities and visuals available to support the learners. Having multiple sources for teaching a topic can be beneficial for the teachers in finding the right strategies and methods. Even though there seems to be a variety of materials in this course book set, they can turn out to be easy or not proposing adequate challenge to some more advanced students. Some activities might only require connecting words or numbering them. Autism spectrum is diverse; therefore, some students might need more structured challenges. Since ASD learners often do not have an automatic or clear understanding of what they are supposed to be focusing on, a predictable sequence of teaching, visual activities and work/activity systems can be helpful for the student.

2.2. Compiling a set of teaching strategies

For creating a list of teaching strategies for teaching English as a foreign language to year 5 learners on the autism spectrum, the focus of this section will be on the general teaching strategies and making them more specific, as well as offering examples on how to use them. While the previous figure (Appendix 1) presented special needs together with general teaching strategies, this section will be focusing solely on the teaching strategies. Teaching strategies are previously categorized, for the purpose of this thesis, into three categories: academic, socio-communicative, and environmental teaching strategies. This section will be looking at these general teaching strategies and form them into specific strategies that can be used in an EFL classroom for ASD students. The specific teaching strategies will be based on *Family & Friends 3*, together with CEFR language skills (receptive, productive, interactive) and TEACCH structure. Since autism is a broad spectrum and has several comorbidities that can go with it, these strategies focus on the students who are still able to follow the national curriculum in a regular classroom. The strategies are not meant to be overly complicated or take too much time for the teacher, but to give some support for the teacher and, as a result, also facilitate learning for an ASD student.

The list of strategies is discussed with examples and then organised into a list of strategies for a more visual and easily accessible overview. The list will be based on 13 general teaching strategies which are categorized into 3 sections: academic, socio-communicative, and environmental strategies. All these general strategies have specific methods and guidelines that can be used in a classroom. Some strategies will include visual examples from *Family & Friends*

3 course book or workbook, to show how to use the specific strategy in year 5. The list of specific strategies is based on the general teaching strategies for ASD learners (Figure 1).

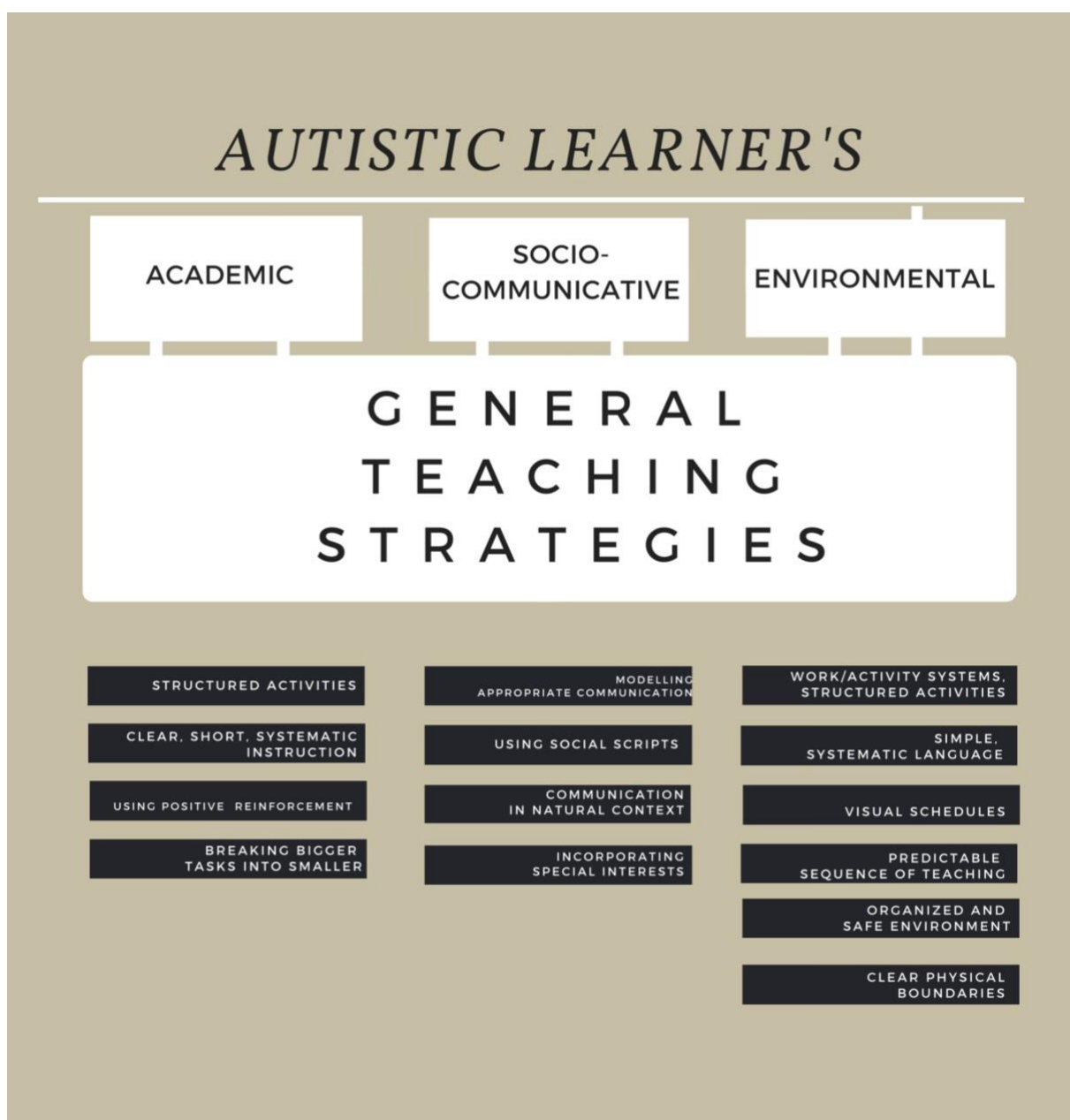


Figure 1. Autistic learner's academic, socio communicative, environmental general teaching strategies (based on chapter 1.5)

The first strategy in academic section is *structured activities*. This refers to student knowing what the nature of the task is, how many tasks are to be completed, how to know when the task is finished and what they are supposed to do after the task is finished. At this point it is important to first understand what skill or skills the activity involves receptive, productive, or interactive skills. When focusing on receptive skills (reading or listening), it is important to let the student clearly know that now they are going to be listening to an audio, specifying what the type of the listening file is (an interview, individual words, a dialogue, a story etc....).

The same goes for reading: let the student know what they are reading and if there is something they are supposed to find in the text. If the reading or listening is a part of a bigger task, then let the student know that. When the student has finished reading or listening, let them know what they are supposed to do next or even if they are supposed to wait until everyone else finished, reminding them of that is helpful. If we look at a sample activity (Figure 2), “Listen, read and say”, it consists of three separate tasks (listening, reading, and saying). In this case we can see how *breaking bigger tasks into smaller* could be done:

Task one: Listen to the audio file about Tom and Anna speaking.

Task two: Read the text silently about Tom and Anna speaking.

Task three: Read the text out loud about Tom and Anna speaking.

1 Listen, read and say. 145



| | | | |
|-------|---------------------------------------|-------|--|
| Tom: | Where did you go on holiday? | Tom: | What was the best part? |
| Anna: | I went to New York with my parents. | Anna: | We went sightseeing and shopping. We bought lots of souvenirs. Here! |
| Tom: | Wow! Lucky you! What was it like? | Tom: | Cool! Thanks, Anna! |
| Anna: | It was brilliant! I had a great time. | | |

Figure 2. Modifying a listening task (*Family & Friends 3, class book*).

In a classroom situation, it might be that not everyone is going to be reading the text out loud, which then can be told beforehand (letting the autistic learner know if they are going to be the one reading the text out loud or not). The same can be done about the next task (Figure 3). In this activity, there are two separate tasks involved: reading and circling together with looking the picture. To do the circling correctly, the student must look at the picture first. In this case, it would be beneficial to have three tasks for the student:

Task one: Look at the picture.

Task two: Read the sentences.

Task three: Choose the correct option and circle it.

3 Read and circle.

- 1 Mum **listened** / **didn't listen** to music yesterday.
- 2 The girls **played** / **didn't play** a game.
- 3 Dad **cooked** / **didn't cook** dinner.
- 4 The boys **played** / **didn't play** a game.
- 5 Mum **watched** / **didn't watch** TV.
- 6 The girls **listened** / **didn't listen** to music.



Figure 3. Read and circle (*Family & Friends 3, class book*).

This modification can be easily done orally and does not take much extra time for the teacher. This can be written down for the student if required or seen helpful by the teacher. The second strategy *clear, short, systematic instruction* helps to break down complex ideas into more manageable parts. This can be easily demonstrated in written productive skills, where students are required to produce something themselves. As an example, this reading exercise (Figure 4) might seem short and clear but extra guidelines to help the writing can be helpful. For instance:

Task one: Make notes about your weekend plans.

Task two: Organize your ideas.

Task three: Write a draft.

Task four: Revise your work.



Figure 4. Written task instruction (*Family & Friends 3, workbook*).

Here are some more examples on how to modify extra writing tasks for the ASD learners (Figure 5 & 6)

| | |
|--|--|
| <p>3 Rewrite the sentence using the word in brackets.</p> <p>1 An elephant is bigger than a car. (small) _____</p> <p>2 A giraffe is taller than Jim. (short) _____</p> <p>3 A car is faster than a goat. (slow) _____</p> <p>4 A monkey is smaller than a cow. (big) _____</p> | <p>1. Underline the adjective 2. Put the word in brackets into the correct form 3. Rewrite the sentence</p> |
|--|--|

Figure 5. Rewrite the sentence (*Based on Family & Friends 3, workbook*).

2 Underline.

1 I've got an (inflatable ring sea gull arm bands) for my holiday. 

2 Let's play with our new (arm bands beach ball inflatable ring)! 

3 My little sister has got (inflatable ring sea gull arm bands). 

4 Let's (float paddle inflatable ring) on the water. 

5 Look at the (beach ball arm bands sea gull)! 

6 I (paddle beach ball float) in the sea in the summer. 

1. Look at the pictures
2. Read the sentence
3. Underline the correct word

Figure 6. Underline the correct word (Based on Family & Friends 3, workbook).

Sometimes it might not be about the instruction itself, as it can already be relatively short. It is more about separating it into steps that the student can follow. When discussing *positive reinforcement*, timing can be critical to the effectiveness. It is important for the student to feel that the goal set is achievable, and the reinforcement is attainable. Some examples of positive reinforcement are free time, verbal praise, preferred activities, earning privileges, tokens, or desired objects.

These material items do not have to be anything expensive, sometimes a stamp or a sticker can be used. As an example, a sticker book can be used in lessons, where after every successful lesson (which should be defined for the student) or a successful week they get a sticker in the book (Figure 7). When designing the sticker book, students' *special interest can be incorporated into it*, making it more interactive and personal for the learner.



Figure 7. My sticker book

Continuing with the socio-communicative section, the first strategy, *modelling appropriate communication*, is a relatively general as teacher can be seen as a role model for all the students in the classroom and should be approached as such. Language classrooms are considered social and communicative environments; therefore, ASD students can learn proper behaviour through observations. More specifically when discussing social behaviour, this can be learnt through different activities. For instance, talking about going to the supermarket and purchasing food, the teacher can organise a simulation in the classroom as if it were a supermarket. In *Family & Friends 3*, unit 8 discusses the topic of food, countable and uncountable nouns together with asking for what would one like (Figure 9). Students can familiarize themselves with items the shop offers (Figure 8) and compile a list of items they would like to buy. The task itself should clearly be categorized into several smaller tasks. One option would be to state the following:

Task one: Look at the pictures in exercise 2 (Figure 8). Pick 5 items and write them down.

Task two: Think about how much or how many of these items you would like to buy.

Task three: Use your list and do your shopping.

2 Look at the pictures. Ask and answer.

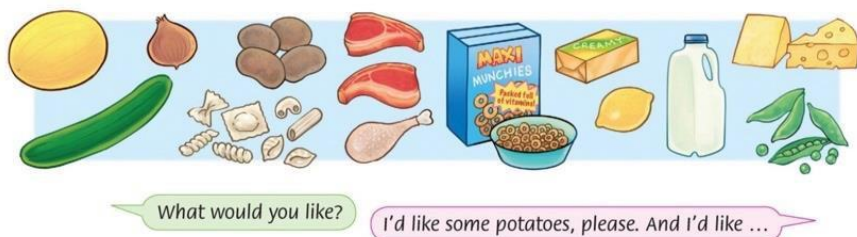


Figure 8. Food items (Family & Friends 3, textbook).

1 Listen to the story again and repeat. Act.

2 Look and say.

Let's learn!

| countable noun | uncountable noun |
|----------------|------------------|
| one melon | some bread |
| two melons | |
| three melons | some melons |

I / You / He / She / It / We / They

I'd like a melon.
We'd like some pasta.
Would you like some cereal?
Yes, please. No, thanks.

I'd like = I would like

Figure 9. "Would like" grammar box (Family & Friends 3 textbook)

Before task three, the teacher can explain who will be playing which part in a supermarket and what is the order for students to come and buy their items. For modelling appropriate behaviour, the teacher can explain and present how to behave in a supermarket and what language to use. Throughout this activity, students will develop their receptive (reading and

listening to information), productive (compiling a list of food items) and interactive skills (producing oral text in form of a dialogue).

Another way for modelling behaviour to be used is through videos and other visuals. *Social scripts* are not something that are necessarily used in the *Family & Friends 3* course book but can be incorporated by the teacher through different topics. *Social scripts* can be considered as packages of expectations about what people will do in certain situations. As an example, in *Family & Friends 3*, unit 10, students learn about the use of *must* and *must not* together with park vocabulary. This can be considered as a social script about what can be done in a park and what must not be done. As an example, exercises 3 and 4 (Figure 10) ask students to identify what behaviour is and is not prohibited in a park. This topic can be extended into forming their own social scripts, as “Things I can do in a park” and “Things I must not do in a park”. The teacher can choose the format for creating the script themselves (list, visual text, flashcards, presentation etc...)

3 Read and match.

1 You **mustn't** walk your dog here.
2 You **must** put litter in the bin.
3 You **mustn't** take photos here.
4 You **must** be quiet.

a  b  c  d 

4 Write.

1 You **mustn't** eat here.
2 You _____ wash your hands.
3 You _____ turn off your mobile phone here.
4 You _____ swim here.

1  2  3  4 

Figure 10. *Must and must not* (*Family & Friends 3*, textbook)

English language classrooms are social environments and to practise language skills students need to communicate with each other. One way to do it is to encourage *communication in natural context* in English. The teacher should encourage students to have discussions in English as they communicate throughout the lesson. This can be done during group or pair discussions, break times or in out-of-the-classroom situations (visiting a museum, a park, or the shops). Reminding students to use English to communicate with each other during the lesson helps them with their interactive language skills as they are the ones creating the text without having any specific guidelines or scripts to follow. Practising communication skills for specific purposes and context can also benefit ASD students who suffer from anxiety disorder.

Incorporating special interests does not have to be time-consuming, an easy way is to adapt the task by offering a choice for the student around their area of interest. This can easily be used when talking about students' likes and dislikes, but also when writing stories, thinking about different conversation topics. As an example, in *Family & Friends* unit 9 students are asked to describe the world around them and practise giving directions. In exercise 2 (Figure 11), students' task is to create a map of an island. At this point, the teacher can encourage students to think about places they like around the city and incorporate these items on their own island.

2 Draw a map of an island.

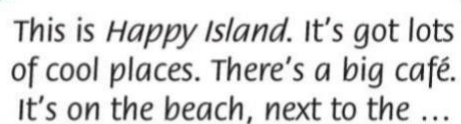


Figure 11. Drawing a map of an island (*Family & Friends 3, textbook*)

Giving the students an opportunity to create their island based on their interests makes it easier for the student to talk about it later. In exercise 4 (Figure 12) students are asked to speak about their island with questions already presented. At this point the teacher could incorporate why-questions about their map item creations. This task is another good example of practising interactive skills as they are asked to create their own island with different buildings and items together with having a discussion on it.

4 Speaking Tell the class about your island.

- 1 What's the name of your island?
- 2 What places are on your island?
- 3 Where are the places?
- 4 What are they like?



This is *Happy Island*. It's got lots of cool places. There's a big café. It's on the beach, next to the ...

Figure 12. Talking about an island (*Family & Friends 3, textbook*)

The final environmental section starts out with having *work/activity systems and structured activities*. There can be different kinds of work systems in place, it can be meant for everyone in the classroom to be seen (like a visual schedule) or a more personal one (a box system or a written one). The easiest one in structure is the one done on paper (which can be laminated for multi-purpose use) or a personal whiteboard. Using a visual representation of tasks (Figure 13), the student can mark their done tasks and move on to the next one. When all the tasks are finished, the student can see what they are to do next (Figure 14). This can also be helpful for students who comorbid diagnosis such as GAD as it takes the pressure of not knowing from their shoulders. Students can have a discussion what those potential activities are for when all

the tasks are finished. The teacher can either pick an activity themselves from those activities or have the student decide from those options. When considering ADHD, the teacher can include movement breaks or other stimulating activities. Having this kind of work system can help the ASD learner see what their tasks are either for the whole lesson or a specific activity and know what comes after it.

MY TASKS

TASK 1

TASK 2

TASK 3

TASK 4

TASK 5

WHEN I AM FINISHED I CAN

Figure 13. My tasks

MY TASKS

TASK 1

TASK 2

TASK 3

TASK 4

TASK 5

WHEN I AM FINISHED I CAN

READ DRAW

Figure 14. My tasks with examples

The second strategy *simple, systematic language* is a relatively easy and well-manageable strategy. Using a simple and systematic language should be done throughout teaching as complex and lengthy sentences can be overwhelming to ASD students. Concrete language is preferred instead of abstract concepts or figures of speech. Idioms or sarcasm can be hard to understand for some students therefore these should be taught carefully. One recommendation is to use pictures and visual language (a system that is communicated through visual elements, such as photos, maps, paintings, symbols) to explain idioms or other figurative language.

Using *visual schedules* in a EFL classroom can vary for students but should be kept simple in structure. A consistent format for the visual schedule with clear heading and categories will help students with ASD understand the organization and the structure of the lesson. The schedule of the lesson can be written on the board or be on a board by magnets or Velcro straps. One example is to use a pre-made lesson schedule (Figures 15 & 16), that can be set up at the beginning of the lesson. Setting up the system at the beginning of the schoolyear can be done together with the classroom, so they understand what these tasks mean and what they might include. Even if not having a personal classroom, this schedule can easily be held in a folder or a bag as it does not require much space or effort to set up.

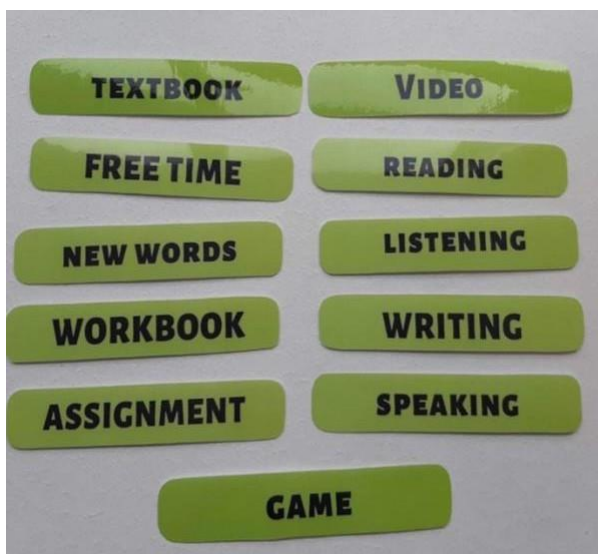


Figure 15. Tasks for the lesson plan



Figure 16. Lesson schedule

The use of lesson schedules and visual indicators of what is to happen next will also benefit with having a *predictable sequence of teaching*. The structure of *Family & Friends 3* is quite supportive and has a consistent structure. The students have a clear understanding and overview

of the units presented in the course book. When planning a lesson schedule and presenting it to the classroom it is better to try and not make any drastic changes whilst the lesson is taking place. This together with the structured activities and language transfers into creating an *organized and safe environment* for the student and help with defining *clear physical boundaries*. It might be good to visually define different areas in a classroom: having a clear space for the student, a section for movement or rest. To visually define these spaces, cushions, mats or even tape can be used. For example, some students might have trouble following directions with “keep your materials in your own space”, therefore having visual signals for the “space” can help with visualising the definition.

In an EFL classroom, implementing strategies such as structured activities, clear instructions, positive reinforcement, breaking down tasks, modelling communication, and using social scripts can significantly benefit learners with ASD. Providing structured activities and clear instructions can help learners feel more comfortable and confident, reducing their anxiety levels. Positive reinforcement can motivate the learner to exhibit desired behaviours, and breaking tasks into smaller steps can make them more manageable. Modelling appropriate communication and using social scripts can improve communication skills and social interactions for learners with ASD. These strategies can be tailored to meet the unique needs of each learner with ASD in an EFL basic school classroom, enhancing their learning experience and facilitating their academic success.

2.3. The use of created strategies in practise

During my experience as a teacher, I have learned that adapting teaching strategies to accommodate diverse learners is essential to ensure every student's success. While teaching Year 5 students, I discovered that students with ASD do tend to benefit from visual and organizational support. Implementing shorter and clearer instructions helped all students understand the task more quickly, which resulted in them starting their work earlier. What I appreciated about these modifications was that they did not take much time to implement, which is essential when considering a working teacher's busy schedule. As an educator, I understand that every minute counts. By using these strategies, teachers might be closer to achieving their goals without overburdening themselves or their students.

Since not all ASD learners are the same, and their needs may differ based on their level of functioning, some students may require additional visual aids or work systems. As a teacher who knows their students' strengths and weaknesses, I can tailor these teaching strategies accordingly. Additionally, comorbidities such as ADHD, GAD, or depression can affect how ASD learners respond to different teaching strategies. Some students may require more movement breaks during lessons to help them focus, while students with anxiety may require more quiet and less stimulating environment. It is important to understand that these comorbidities may impact students' ability to learn and their behaviour in a classroom. The key is to be flexible and willing to modify teaching materials as needed to ensure every student's success.

One of the aims of this thesis was to find out how to use evidence-based teaching strategies to address ASD learners' environmental, socio-communicative, and academic needs in EFL basic education classroom. It was found that the teaching strategies focus on providing clear

instructions, breaking down tasks into manageable steps, using visual aids, and incorporating structured activities. For students' academic needs, activities can be modified to specify the nature of the task and provide clear instructions for receptive, productive, and interactive skill development. Socio-communicative needs can be addressed through appropriate modelling, using social scripts, and encouraging communication in English among students. Environmental needs can be met by implementing work/activity systems, visual schedules, and creating an organized and defined physical spaces. These strategies aim to support ASD learners, reduce anxiety, improve social interactions, enhance their overall learning experience in the EFL classroom.

This thesis addresses the lack of published teaching materials for ASD students in EFL classrooms. The result of this thesis suggests several teaching strategies for teaching EFL for ASD students and the practical contribution provided me with relevant strategies and tools for teaching my ASD students in year 5. Comprehensive basic school teachers could derive similar implications from these findings, as they can use the set of strategies to modify their own lessons. For further research, it would be beneficial to test how these strategies work in the mainstream classroom, where the ASD student studies with their non-autistic peers or to test if these strategies are also relevant with older students.

For having these materials more accessible, a digital booklet was created. The booklet (Appendix 2) summarizes the essential teaching strategies from the thesis and illustrates them with examples. The visual booklet is available on an online platform *Canva* and is accessible for viewing through the link presented in the appendices. I created this booklet to be able to get an idea of strategies quickly and visually, which makes it easier to use for EFL teachers.

CONCLUSION

Inclusive education is one of the aims in Estonian education system. This means that every child should be provided with an educational arrangement which is tailored to their needs and aspirations. Students with ASD have the right of being educated in a mainstream school in their local community together with their peers. Therefore, comprehensive schoolteachers must also be able to educate the students whose educational, socio-communicative, and academic needs differ from their peers. This requires additional resources from the teachers. Teaching English as a foreign language to a student with ASD requires considering their unique needs and challenges. The teaching process should incorporate the basic principles of social interaction, as many children struggle with imitation skills and other social cues. Structured teaching approaches, such as the TEACCH programme, prove effective in supporting ASD learners in the EFL classroom. Structured learning environments, predictable teaching sequences, and visual activities contribute to improved understanding and engagement. The use of visual schedules and work systems promote organization and independence among students. It is important to consider individualized support for ASD learners.

The aim of the thesis was to create a set of teaching strategies that can be used in Year 5 by evaluating which teaching strategies, or combinations of them, have been found to be effective and successful in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms for students with autism spectrum disorder. The emphasis was to focus on comprehensive school English teachers who might have some students with ASD in their classroom. To my knowledge, no teaching strategies published for Estonian teachers teaching ASD students in EFL comprehensive school classrooms have been published. This provided a research gap for the current thesis.

The literature overview provides the insight into three aspects that are relevant for the present study. The first section focuses on ASD students in educational settings and defines the characteristics of ASD. According to the American Psychiatric Association (2013), ASD is a neurodevelopmental disorder characterised by deficits in social communication and restrictive repetitive behaviours. Students with ASD face challenges in social skills and academic performance. Teachers can support them by incorporating social interaction principles and creating a structured learning environment. The second section concentrates on looking at EFL classroom as social environments. Students with difficulties in social communication and language barriers face unique challenges in their learning process. Research suggests visual aids, guiding echolalia, and using pictures/cards to enhance understanding. Moreover, developing communication skills is essential for ASD students in language learning.

The third section looks at ASD challenges in foreign language instruction. It is important to maintain a structured and predictable environment, limit verbal explanations, and provide visual support for instructions. This helps the students stay focused and understand information more effectively. Practising skills across different settings, activities, and people is crucial to promote skill transfer and application. The fourth section summarizes general teaching strategies for ASD students. Sections five to six give an overview of main special needs for ASD students when learning and summarize the use of teaching strategies in EFL classroom for ASD students, and how they can be used. Embracing these differences and implementing appropriate strategies teachers can create an inclusive environment for students' growth and promote inclusivity.

Throughout the process of writing the literature review, answers for two research questions were found. Main environmental, socio-communicative, and academic special needs for children with autism in comprehensive basic school education in EFL classrooms and corresponding effective teaching strategies were found. The empirical part of the thesis focused on creating specific teaching strategies based on the finding from the first part of the thesis. Specific strategies were discussed together with examples from *Family & Friends 3* course book and workbook for Year 5.

The relevance of the created strategies was tested in my classrooms that had students with ASD. I found that that students with ASD tend to benefit from visual and organizational support. Implementing shorter and clearer instructions helped all students understand the task more quickly, which resulted in them starting their work earlier. Given the broadness and comorbidities in ASD using all of the teaching strategies and examples might not work for all of the students. It is important to note that every student is unique, and the teacher should base their strategies or choose the best ones based on their learners and classroom situation.

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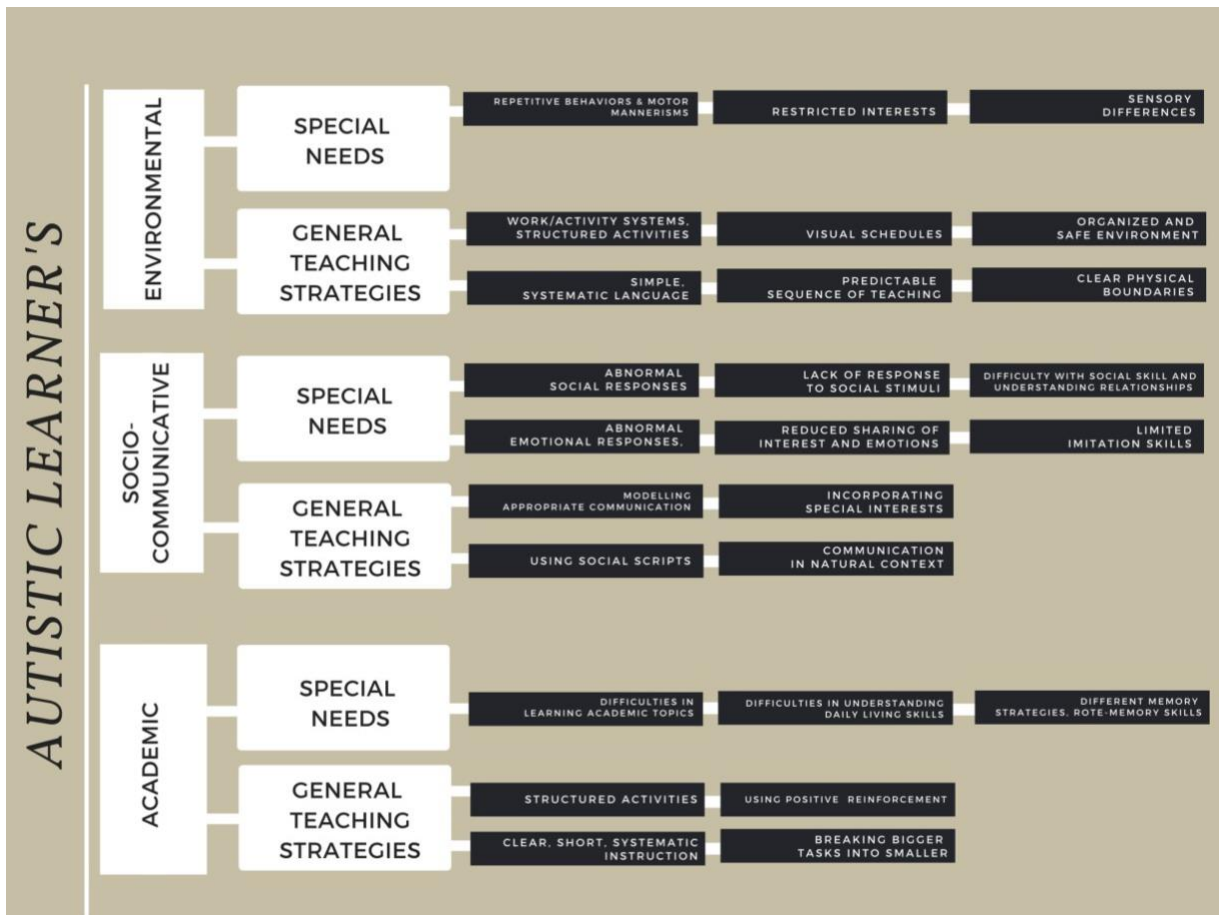
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APPENDICES

Appendix 1. Autistic learner's environmental, socio-communicative special needs and general teaching strategies.

The scheme has been developed by the author on the basis of the sources discussed in sections 1.1 to 1.5.



Appendix 2. Digital booklet

The booklet has been developed by the author on the basis of the strategies discussed in section 2.2. and is digitally accessible here: <https://shorturl.at/fkLUW>

AUTISTIC LEARNER'S

ACADEMIC

SOCIO-COMMUNICATIVE

ENVIRONMENTAL

GENERAL TEACHING STRATEGIES

STRUCTURED ACTIVITIES

CLEAR, SHORT, SYSTEMATIC INSTRUCTION

USING POSITIVE REINFORCEMENT

BREAKING BIGGER TASKS INTO SMALLER

MODELLING APPROPRIATE COMMUNICATION

USING SOCIAL SCRIPTS

COMMUNICATION IN NATURAL CONTEXT

INCORPORATING SPECIAL INTERESTS

WORK/ACTIVITY SYSTEMS, STRUCTURED ACTIVITIES

SIMPLE, SYSTEMATIC LANGUAGE

VISUAL SCHEDULES

PREDICTABLE SEQUENCE OF TEACHING

ORGANIZED AND SAFE ENVIRONMENT

CLEAR PHYSICAL BOUNDARIES

FOR TEACHING ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN

STRUCTURED ACTIVITIES

CLEAR, SHORT, SYSTEMATIC INSTRUCTION

USING POSITIVE REINFORCEMENT

BREAKING BIGGER TASKS INTO SMALLER

THESE STRATEGIES REFER TO STUDENT KNOWING:

- WHAT IS THE NATURE OF THE TASK;
- HOW MANY TASKS ARE TO BE COMPLETED;
- HOW TO KNOW WHEN THE TASK IS FINISHED;
- WHAT THEY ARE SUPPOSED TO DO AFTER THE TASK IS FINISHED.


→ WHAT THEY ARE GOING TO BE READING, LISTENING, WRITING, OR SPEAKING ABOUT.

- LET THE STUDENT KNOW
 - IF THEY ARE TO IMMEDIATELY FIND SOMETHING FROM THE TEXT, LISTENING OR VIEWING TASK.
 - IF THE TASK IS A PART OF A BIGGER TASK.

- WHEN THE STUDENT HAS FINISHED THE TASK, LET THEM KNOW WHAT THEY ARE SUPPOSED TO DO NEXT OR EVEN IF ARE SUPPOSED TO WAIT UNTIL EVERYONE ELSE HAS FINISHED.
- MAKE SURE THAT THE LESSON GOAL SET IS ACHIEVABLE, AND THE REINFORCEMENT IS ATTAINABLE.
- POSITIVE REINFORCEMENT CAN INCLUDE FREE TIME, VERBAL PRAISE, PREFERRED ACTIVITIES, EARNING PRIVILEGES, TOKENS, OR DESIRED OBJECTS.

SAMPLE TASK 1. LISTEN, READ AND SAY

1 Listen, read and say. 04



TASK ONE: LISTEN TO THE AUDIO FILE ABOUT TOM AND ANNA SPEAKING.

TASK TWO: READ THE TEXT SILENTLY ABOUT TOM AND ANNA SPEAKING.

TASK THREE: READ THE TEXT OUT LOUD ABOUT TOM AND ANNA SPEAKING.

EXTRACT FROM THOMPSON, T., SIMMONS, N. 2014. FAMILY & FRIENDS 2. CLASS BOOK. OXFORD: OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS

STRUCTURED ACTIVITIES
CLEAR, SHORT, SYSTEMATIC INSTRUCTION
USING POSITIVE REINFORCEMENT
BREAKING BIGGER TASKS INTO SMALLER

SAMPLE TASK 2. WHAT ARE YOU GOING TO DO THIS WEEKEND?



TASK ONE: MAKE NOTES ABOUT YOUR WEEKEND PLANS.

TASK TWO: ORGANIZE YOUR IDEAS.

TASK THREE: WRITE A DRAFT.

TASK FOUR: REVISE YOUR WORK.

SAMPLE TASK 3. REWRITE THE SENTENCES

3 Rewrite the sentence using the word in brackets.

- 1 An elephant is bigger than a car. (small)
- 2 A giraffe is taller than Jim. (short)
- 3 A car is faster than a goat. (slow)
- 4 A monkey is smaller than a cow. (big)

TASK ONE: UNDERLINE THE ADJECTIVE

TASK TWO: PUT THE WORD IN BRACKETS INTO THE CORRECT FORM

TASK THREE: REWRITE THE SENTENCE

SAMPLE TASK 4. UNDERLINE

2 Underline.

- 1 I've got an (inflatable ring sea gull arm bands) for my holiday. 
- 2 Let's play with our new (arm bands beach ball inflatable ring)! 
- 3 My little sister has got (inflatable ring sea gull arm bands). 
- 4 Let's (float paddle inflatable ring) on the water. 
- 5 Look at the (beach ball arm bands sea gull)! 
- 6 I (paddle beach ball float) in the sea in the summer. 

TASK ONE: LOOK AT THE PICTURES

TASK TWO: READ THE SENTENCES

TASK THREE: UNDERLINE THE CORRECT WORD

EXTRACTS FROM THOMPSON, T., SIMMONS, N. 2014. FAMILY & FRIENDS 3. WORK BOOK. OXFORD: OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS

USING SOCIAL SCRIPTS
MODELLING APPROPRIATE COMMUNICATION
INCORPORATING SPECIAL INTEREST
COMMUNICATION IN NATURAL CONTEXT

- TEACHER AS A ROLE MODEL FOR ALL THE STUDENTS
- STUDENTS CAN LEARN PROPER BEHAVIOUR THROUGH OBSERVATIONS, AND WHEN DISCUSSING SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR, THROUGH DIFFERENT ACTIVITIES.
- SOCIAL SCRIPTS CAN BE CONSIDERED AS PACKAGES OF EXPECTATIONS ABOUT WHAT PEOPLE SHOULD OR SHOULD NOT DO IN CERTAIN SITUATIONS
- ENCOURAGE STUDENTS TO USE ENGLISH TO COMMUNICATE WITH EACH OTHER DURING THE LESSON
- ENCOURAGE THE USE OF ENGLISH DURING
 - GROUP OR PAIR DISCUSSIONS
 - BREAK TIMES
 - OUT-OF-THE-CLASSROOM SITUATIONS
- SPECIAL INTERESTS CAN BE USED WHEN TALKING ABOUT STUDENTS' S LIKES AND DISLIKES. WHEN WRITING STORIES, THINKING ABOUT DIFFERENT CONVERSATION TOPICS

SAMPLE TASK 5. MUST AND MUST NOT

3 Read and match.

| | |
|--|--|
| 1 You <u>mustn't</u> walk your dog here. | 2 You <u>must</u> put litter in the bin. |
| 3 You <u>mustn't</u> take photos here. | 4 You <u>must</u> be quiet. |



4 Write. must mustn't

| | |
|---|------------------------------------|
| 1 You <u>mustn't</u> eat here. | 2 You <u>must</u> wash your hands. |
| 3 You <u>mustn't</u> turn off your mobile phone here. | 4 You <u>must</u> swim here. |



ASK STUDENTS TO IDENTIFY WHAT BEHAVIOUR IS AND IS NOT PROHIBITED IN A PARK.

THIS TOPIC CAN BE EXTENDED INTO FORMING THEIR OWN SOCIAL SCRIPTS. "THINGS I CAN DO IN A PARK" AND "THINGS I MUST NOT DO IN A PARK".

CHOOSE THE FORMAT FOR CREATING THE SCRIPT THEMSELVES (LIST, VISUAL TEXT, FLASHCARDS, PRESENTATION ETC..)

EXTRACT FROM THOMPSON, T., SIMMONS, N. 2014. FAMILY & FRIENDS 3. CLASS BOOK. OXFORD: OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS

| | | | |
|----------------------|-------------------------------------|--------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| USING SOCIAL SCRIPTS | MODELLING APPROPRIATE COMMUNICATION | INCORPORATING SPECIAL INTEREST | COMMUNICATION IN NATURAL CONTEXT |
|----------------------|-------------------------------------|--------------------------------|----------------------------------|

SAMPLE TASK 6. FOOD ITEMS

2 Look at the pictures. Ask and answer.



What would you like? I'd like some potatoes, please. And I'd like ...

WHEN TALKING ABOUT GOING TO THE SUPERMARKET AND PURCHASING FOOD, THE TEACHER CAN USE THE CLASSROOM AS A SUPERMARKET

STUDENTS CAN FAMILIARIZE THEMSELVES WITH THE ITEMS THE SHOP OFFERS AND COMPILE A LIST OF ITEMS THEY WOULD LIKE TO BUY.

THE TASK ITSELF SHOULD CLEARLY BE CATEGORIZED INTO SEVERAL SMALLER TASKS.

SAMPLE TASK 7. GRAMMAR PRACTISE

1 Listen to the story again and repeat. Act.

2 Look and say.

Let's learn!

| | |
|---|--|
| <p>countable noun</p> <p>one melon</p> <p>two melons</p> <p>three melons</p> | <p>uncountable noun</p> <p>some bread</p> |
|---|--|

I / You / He / She / It / We / They

I'd like a melon.

We'd like some pasta.

Would you like some cereal?

Yes, please. No, thanks.

I'd like = I would like



TASK ONE: LOOK AT THE PICTURES IN EXERCISE 2

TASK TWO: PICK 5 ITEMS AND WRITE THEM DOWN.

TASK THREE: THINK ABOUT HOW MUCH OR HOW MANY OF THESE ITEMS YOU WOULD LIKE TO BUY.

TASK FOUR: USE YOUR LIST AND DO YOUR SHOPPING.

SAMPLE TASK 8. DRAWING A MAP

2 Draw a map of an island.

1



Draw or stick pictures of some buildings and other places on your map.

2



Colour and cut out your map. Write the name of your island. You can write the names of the places on your map, too.

ENCOURAGE STUDENTS TO FIRST THINK ABOUT WHAT PLACES AROUND THE CITY OR COUNTRY THEY LIKE AND THEN ASK TO INCORPORATE THESE ITEMS ON THEIR OWN ISLAND

GIVING THE STUDENTS AN OPPORTUNITY TO CREATE THEIR ISLAND BASED ON THEIR INTERESTS MAKES IT EASIER FOR THE STUDENT TO TALK ABOUT IT LATER.

EXTRACTS FROM THOMPSON, T., SIMMONS, N. 2014. FAMILY & FRIENDS 3. CLASS BOOK. OXFORD: OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS

| | | | | | |
|--|-----------------------------|------------------|----------------------------------|--------------------------------|---------------------------|
| WORK/ACTIVITY SYSTEMS, STRUCTURED ACTIVITIES | SIMPLE, SYSTEMATIC LANGUAGE | VISUAL SCHEDULES | PREDICTABLE SEQUENCE OF TEACHING | ORGANIZED AND SAFE ENVIRONMENT | CLEAR PHYSICAL BOUNDARIES |
|--|-----------------------------|------------------|----------------------------------|--------------------------------|---------------------------|

- WORK SYSTEMS SHOULD BE SIMPLE, CONCRETE, AND CONSISTENT IN FORMAT WITH CLEAR HEADINGS AND CATEGORIES
- AS AN EXAMPLE, VISUAL SCHEDULES CAN BE ON
 - PAPER (WHICH CAN BE LAMINATED FOR MULTI-PURPOSE USE)
 - PERSONAL WHITEBOARDS
 - TABLETS
- SIMPLE AND SYSTEMATIC LANGUAGE SHOULD BE USED THROUGHOUT TEACHING AS COMPLEX AND LENGTHY SENTENCES CAN BE OVERWHELMING TO ASD STUDENTS
- CONCRETE LANGUAGE IS PREFERRED INSTEAD OF ABSTRACT CONCEPTS OR FIGURES OF SPEECH
- IDIOMS OR SARCASM CAN BE HARD TO UNDERSTAND FOR SOME STUDENTS THEREFORE THESE IT SHOULD BE TAUGHT CAREFULLY
- USE PICTURES AND VISUAL LANGUAGE (VISUAL ELEMENTS, SUCH AS PHOTOS, MAPS, PAINTINGS, AND SYMBOLS) TO EXPLAIN IDIOMS OR OTHER FIGURATIVE LANGUAGE

MY TASKS

TASK 1

TASK 2

TASK 3

TASK 4

TASK 5

WHEN I AM FINISHED I CAN

MY TASKS

TASK 1

TASK 2

TASK 3

TASK 4

TASK 5

WHEN I AM FINISHED I CAN

READ

DRAW

HAVING THIS KIND OF WORK SYSTEM CAN HELP THE ASD LEARNER SEE WHAT THEIR TASKS ARE EITHER FOR THE WHOLE LESSON OR A SPECIFIC ACTIVITY AND KNOW WHAT COMES AFTER IT.

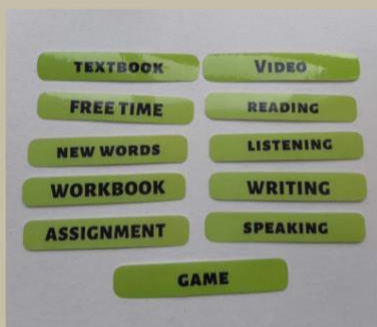
USING A VISUAL REPRESENTATION OF TASKS

THE STUDENT CAN MARK THEIR COMPLETED TASKS AND MOVE ON TO THE NEXT ONE

WHEN ALL THE TASKS ARE FINISHED, STUDENTS CAN SEE WHAT THEY ARE TO DO NEXT



ONE EXAMPLE IS TO USE A PRE-MADE LESSON SCHEDULE, THAT CAN BE SET UP AT THE BEGINNING OF THE LESSON



- WHEN PLANNING A LESSON SCHEDULE AND PRESENTING IT TO THE CLASSROOM IT IS BETTER TO TRY NOT TO MAKE ANY DRASTIC CHANGES WHILST THE LESSON IS TAKING PLACE
- SETTING UP THE SYSTEM AT THE BEGINNING OF THE SCHOOLYEAR CAN BE DONE TOGETHER WITH THE CLASSROOM, SO THEY UNDERSTAND WHAT THESE TASKS MEAN AND WHAT THEY MIGHT INCLUDE.

RESÜMEE

TARTU ÜLIKOOL

ANGLISTIKA OSAKOND

Sirelin Koval

Creating a Set of Strategies for Teaching English as a Foreign Language to Year 5 Learners on the Autism Spectrum

Strateegiate komplekti loomine inglise keele võõrkeelena õpetamiseks autismispektril olevatele õpilastele 5. klassis

Magistritöö

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Annotatsioon:

Magistritöö eesmärk on uurida, millised õpetamisstrateegiad või nende kombinatsioonid on osutunud tõhusaks ja edukaks autismispektri häirega õpilaste jaoks inglise keele võõrkeelena tundides. Samuti on eesmärgiks luua strateegiate komplekt, mida saab kasutada autismispektril olevate 5. klassi õpilaste õpetamiseks. Inglise keele õpetajad puutuvad oma tundides kokku erinevate õppijatega ning autismispektri häirega õpilaste õpetamise kohta ei ole veel loodud otsust materjali. Sellest tulenevalt tekkis idee uurida ning panna kirja erinevad õpetamisstrateegiad, mida kasutada võõrkeeletunnis autistlike õppijate toetamiseks. Töös pandi kirja konkreetsed strateegiad võõrkeeletunnis kasutamiseks ning toodi näiteid materjali kohandamiseks. Töö sihtrühmaks on üldhariduskooli inglise keele õpetajad, kelle klassiruumis õpib autismispektril olevaid õpilasi.

Magistritöö koosneb sissejuhatusest, kahest peatükist, kokkuvõttest, kirjanduse loetelust ja kahest lisast. Töö sissejuhatus annab ülevaate autismispektrihäirega seotud statistikast ning viitab kaasava hariduse printsiipidele. Lisaks viitab sissejuhatus töö praktilisusele, sest tihtipeale õpivad autismispektri häirega õpilased just üldhariduskooli tavaklassides. Õpetajatelt eeldatakse kõikide õpilaste kaasamist, kuid sageli võib puudu jääda praktilistest teadmistest autistliku õpilase suunamiseks.

Esimeses peatükis antakse lugejale ülevaade autismispektri olemusest ning õppija eripäradest hariduses ning võõrkeeletunnis. Esimene peatükk võtab kokku peamised erivajadused, mis tulenevad autismispektri häirest ning paneb kokku üldised strateegiad erivajadustega toimetulemiseks inglise keele tunnis. Magistritöö esimese peatüki lõpus saadi vastused kahele uurimisküsimusele: Millised on autismispektri häirega laste peamised keskkonna-, sotsiaal- kommunikatiivsed ja akadeemilised erivajadused üldhariduskooli inglise keel võõrkeelena klassiruumis? Millised õpetamisstrateegiad on osutunud tõhusaks autismispektri häirega õpilaste õpetamisel inglise keel võõrkeelena klassiruumis?

Teine peatükk keskendub kolmandale uurimisküsimusele vastuse leidmisele: Kuidas kasutada leitud strateegiad, et arvestada autismispektri häirega õppijate keskkonna- ja sotsiaal- kommunikatiivsete ning akadeemiliste vajadustega võõrkeeletunnis? Küsimusele vastamiseks loodi igale õpetamisstrateegiale näiteid ning näidisharjutusi, et kohandada viiendas klassis kasutatavat õppematerjali *Family & Friends 3*.

Töö tulemustest selgus, et õpetamisstrateegiate kasutamine klassiruumis, kus õpivad autismispektrihäirega õpilased, on tulemuslik. Strateegiaid praktiseeriti ja mugandati autori enda 5. klasside õpilaste tundides. Lisaks leiti, et erinevate kaasuvate häirete tõttu on õpetaja rolli juures oluline kohandada materjale vastavalt igale autistlikule õpilasele eraldi, sest nende vajadused võivad erineda. Autor nentis, et strateegiate kasutamine aitas õpilaste jaoks muuta tööülesanded selgemaks. Lühemate ja selgemate juhiste rakendamine aitas õpilastel kiiremini ülesannet mõista, mis omakorda tähendas seda, et õpilased said iseseisvalt tööga varem alustada.

Märksõnad: inglise keele õpetamine, autismispektri häire, üldhariduskool, õpetamisstrateegiad, harjutuste kohandamine

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