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TEACHING ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE AT THE INITIAL PHASE
OF THE FIRST SCHOOL STAGE

Master's Thesis

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Teaching English as a Foreign Language at the Initial Phase of the First School Stage

Abstract

As English has long ago become the most well-known foreign language in the world, it presupposes a high level of teaching English at schools. In Estonia, English is mostly taught as the first foreign language and the studies usually begin from the second or third grade. Often the English learning process starts with the oral preliminary course (OPC) in the first school stage. The research examined how teachers explained the nature of the OPC and which general principles and techniques they considered important and used during the OPC or at the initial phase of English studies. For the purpose of the study, a survey and two interviews were conducted, which altogether involved 74 English teachers of the first school stage. The results of the study showed that the teachers understood the nature of the OPC and supported using it. It appeared that developing listening and speaking skills along with correct pronunciation were the principles considered most important as well as applied most frequently. The results showed that the most frequently used techniques were the ones related to teaching listening and speaking.

Keywords: English as a foreign language, teaching English to young learners

Inglise keele kui võõrkeele õpetamine algetapil I kooliastme õpilastele

Resümee

Kuna inglise keel on juba kaua aega olnud peamine võõrkeel maailmas, siis see eeldab inglise keele õpetamise kõrget taset ka koolides. Inglise keelt kui peamist A-võõrkeelt õpetatakse Eestis tavaliselt alates 2. või 3. klassist. Sageli algavad inglise keele õpingud I kooliastmes suulise eelkursusega. Töö empiirilises osas uuriti, kuidas õpetajad selgitasid suulise eelkursuse olemust ja milliseid põhimõtteid ning võtteid peeti oluliseks ja kasutati suulise eelkursuse ajal või inglise keele õpingute algetapil kõige rohkem. Tulemuste saamiseks viidi läbi küsitlus ning kaks intervjuud ning uurimuses osales kokku 74 I kooliastme inglise keele õpetajat. Tulemused näitasid, et õpetajad mõistsid suulise eelkursuse olemust hästi ning toetasid selle kasutamist algetapil. Samuti ilmnes, et kuulamise, kõnelemise ja õigehäälduse arendamine olid kõige olulisemad ning sagedamini kasutusel olevad põhimõtted. Lisaks tuli uurimusest välja, et kõige sagedamini kasutati kuulamise ja kõnelemisega seotud keeleõpetuse võtteid.

Märksõnad: inglise keel kui võõrkeel, inglise keele õpetamine algklassiõpilastele

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Introduction

Byram (2008) writes that globalisation and internationalisation have strongly affected the foreign language learning process. He explains that, for example, in the European Union (EU) various countries have to interact with each other and therefore a new identity is created to the whole EU – a European Identity – , which is fostered by foreign language learning. It is believed that the most well-known foreign language in the world is English and that EFL (English as a Foreign Language) is often a synonym for foreign language learning. Brewster, Ellis and Girard (2002) add that English has either official or prominent status in various countries and pressure to teach English keeps on growing. They state that people support English learning because they strongly believe it is going to give them economic, cultural and educational benefits.

In the Estonian educational system, English is often the first foreign language, which is the reason why this thesis concentrates solely on learning English as a foreign language. Estonian National Curriculum of Basic School (2011) and the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (2001) demonstrate that nowadays foreign language learning concentrates strongly on developing communicative skills and using a foreign language comprises all abilities that help to develop general and social competences. In order to master that, the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (ibid.) adds that individuals as social agents have to perform several language activities which involve different language processes. Estonian National Curriculum of Basic School (2011) sets forth guidelines of how schools across the country should carry out teaching English as a foreign language, which form the foundation of the present thesis as well.

According to Gass and Selinker (2001), child foreign language acquisition is a long recognised part of developing a foreign language. They explain that studies on that particular component have been the basis of foreign language acquisition (FLA) for quite some time, which demonstrates clearly how important the topic is in the language learning process. Even though according to Lengyel and Singleton (1995) there are different views on this subject, the main premise is that the sooner students start learning the target language in an instructed environment, the better results occur in the long run, which suggests that early foreign language learning lays the foundations to the overall foreign language development. This explains why the present thesis also concentrates on teaching English as a foreign language in the first school stage at the initial stage, especially with the support of the oral preliminary course (hereinafter the "OPC"). The latter has not been researched enough in Estonia, which

also brings forward the importance of the present thesis. The empirical study sets out to give an overview, on the basis of teachers' responses, of how English as a foreign language is taught with the help of the OPC and which techniques are utilised in order to develop English language knowledge and skills during this period. In addition to that, the author examines how the foreign language teaching process takes place at the initial stage when the OPC is not used.

The topic-related literature uses the terms ESL (English as a Second Language), EFL (English as a Foreign Language) and TL (Target Language). These terms are all connected to the process of acquiring English, but they have some differences as well. Ellis (2008) explains that a second language is often necessary for managing in a community among people who have another native language (e.g. immigrants), but a foreign language is often studied at school and might not have an essential practical application. On the other hand, Saville-Troike (2006) brings out that a second language can have a formal acquisition and both languages are often referred to as a target language. Gass and Selinker (2001) add that both SLA (Second Language Acquisition) and FLA (Foreign Language Acquisition) occur when the native language has been learned. In Estonia, English is ordinarily learnt as a foreign language and for that reason the author of the thesis only uses the term *foreign language learning*.

Children as foreign language learners

There are different assumptions about age and learning English as a foreign language. Phillips (1993) brings out the general rule – the younger the students are, the more holistic learners they will be. She believes that this can have its advantages and disadvantages. For example, Ur (1996) explains that older language learners often understand better and think more logically. She adds that adolescents and young adults usually have more learning skills than children. Brewster et al. (2002) point out that children usually learn more slowly, forget things quickly and get tired easily. To the contrary, Cameron (2001) brings out some advantages that young learners have over older ones – children have better listening and pronunciation skills in the longer term and they are often more enthusiastic and easily motivated compared to older language learners. Ur (1996) disagrees with Cameron (2001) and explains that younger learners' motivation and enthusiasm is not higher, but more varying, whereas older language learners are more stable. According to Brewster et al. (2002), young learners are able to concentrate for a long time if the teacher presents the topic in an interesting way, which might always be difficult to accomplish. Pinter (2006) adds that younger language learners are less anxious and they are more dedicated to the learning

process than older learners. At the same time, Pinter (ibid.) brings out surveys (Blondin, 1998, referred to in Pinter, 2006) where there are very few disparities between learning a foreign language from primary school and learning a foreign language from secondary school. She states that older language learners have more effective learning strategies and they usually know why they are learning a foreign language. Gass and Selinker (2001) add that although adults can acquire a foreign language more quickly, their advantage is often short-lived.

In connection to the previous passage, it is crucial to examine when it would be a good time to start learning English as there are again various opinions regarding the topic. Probably one of the most well-known and controversial hypothesis concerning age and learning a foreign language is the Critical Period Hypothesis (hereinafter the "CPH"). Pinter (2006) explains that the CPH suggests that when children start learning a foreign language before the age 11-12 they are more likely to acquire the target language with native-like qualities. Several authors (e.g., Cameron, 2001; Gass & Selinker, 2001, Saville-Troike, 2006) agree with that theory. Saville-Troike (2006) claims that children develop native-like pronunciation because they are in a non-analytical regime. Ellis (2008) also presents some viewpoints with regard to the CPH. He brings forth that on the contrary to the CPH, older learners can often achieve better or similar results than children. According to Ellis (ibid.), the differences lie between implicit and explicit learning. He explains that late starting students do better in tests concerning explicit knowledge (e.g. grammar tests) but younger learners seem to acquire successfully implicit knowledge (e.g. listening comprehension, pronunciation skills). Ellis (ibid.) adds that this does not necessarily refer that older learners do not have a chance to develop correct pronunciation but implicit knowledge takes more exposure and practice which early learners often get. Lengyel and Singleton (1995) do not distinctively favour the previous hypothesis. They simply states that the CPH has been getting a strong empirical support but it is important to keep in mind that age is only one of many factors that determine whether one masters a foreign language or not. Lengyel and Singleton (ibid.) add that although early age in foreign language learning prolongs positive results, there cannot be a strict rule about the age factor in foreign language acquisition because an adult beginner can master a foreign language perfectly as well. Brewster et al. (2002) are of the same opinion and infer that learning at an early stage is influenced by several factors beneficial to acquiring a foreign language but early stage learning is not an advantage in itself.

Read (2007) gives a perfect conclusion – in order to learn a foreign language as soon as possible, learning has to be natural, interesting, relevant, social, supported appropriately, active and memorable. She adds that learning should take place in a warm and relaxed

atmosphere, where there is a sense of achievement because often the learning conditions are far more crucial than the age of students.

Oral Preliminary Course

Researchers may contemplate over the accurate time to start learning English as a foreign language but it is obvious that, for example, in educational systems the starting time is rather fixed. Pinter (2006) explains that in many countries in the world children do not learn English to fit in a new culture and English can be one of many compulsory subjects at school. She states that although learning a foreign language that way offers limited possibilities to practice language outside the controlled environment, teachers and parents are often aware of the useful aspects that learning a foreign language brings. In Estonia the first foreign language – which is usually English – is taught from the first school stage, either from the second or third grade.

The term "OPC" was used in the 2002 version of Estonian National Curriculum of Basic School and Gymnasium and by Org and Vahar (1997) in connection with the 1996 version of Estonian National Curriculum of Basic School and Gymnasium. Both of the sources recommend using the OPC to develop listening and speaking skills. Org and Vahar (1997) explain that during the OPC young learners can recognise the foreign language by its sound and predict the content of the speech by examining the speaker's gestures and facial expressions. They add that the development of listening skills is connected to mimicking the teacher, which is a prerequisite for developing speaking skills. In addition to that, Estonian National Curriculum of Basic School and Gymnasium (2002) emphasised the importance of acquiring the correct pronunciation during the initial studies of English. Org and Vahar (1997) believe that students can start reading and writing when the necessary material has been mastered orally. Although the current National Curriculum of Basic School of Estonia (2011) neither uses nor defines the term "OPC", the document still states that the development of listening and speaking skills and correct pronunciation is more crucial than developing reading and writing competences at the initial stage of English studies. Thus, the current National Curriculum of Basic School (ibid.) also supports the OPC-related principles pointed out above.

Ruutmets and Saluveer (2010), who write about the OPC, explain that the first encounter with English as a foreign language should occur as gradually as possible in order to minimise the fear of learning a new language. They believe that it is possible when learners start their English studies with developing their listening and speaking skills instead of reading and

writing. Pinter (2006) adds that developing speaking and listening skills is important because these are the competences a child is more able to acquire. Young language learners might not be confident in writing or reading in their native language, which means that these skills should be approached in foreign language learning when students' confidence rises.

The OPC shares features with the Input Hypothesis pointed out by Gass and Selinker (2001). They write that speaking can evolve from comprehensible input i.e. listening and if students understand the spoken language, using the correct grammar forms will come eventually. The aforementioned qualities describe the entity of the OPC rather well but teaching English as a foreign language through the OPC or at the initial stage has more details to concentrate on, which are presented in the following chapters.

Classroom Management during the OPC or at the initial stage of English studies

Brewster et al. (2002) and Moon (2000) explain that while introducing a new language to students at the initial stage, teachers have to concentrate on the following – creating and maintaining motivation, classroom control and discipline, instructing students and providing feedback for them. Phillips (1993) adds that in order to achieve the previously stated goals, teachers have to create routines for young learners that consist of a variety of tasks. She believes that routines make children feel secure and teachers ultimately save time on explaining tasks.

Moon (2000) notes that teachers talk a lot while introducing a target language to young learners. She is certain that students learn the new language through teacher talk. One of the ways of applying teacher talk is to give instructions to students in English. In Scrivener's (2005) opinion, giving instructions should start with getting the attention of students in order to ascertain that everyone is listening. He explains that when the full attention is achieved, the teacher can use short and simple sentences without giving information that is not needed at that point. Scrivener (ibid.) suggests demonstrating tasks rather than explaining too much. This is an easier and more convenient variant during the initial stage. Harmer (1998) explicates that instructions should be logical to children and in order to ensure that, teachers can practise necessary sentences or phrases before a lesson. And lastly, Scrivener (2005) recommends verifying whether all students understood the instructions. For that, McLaughlin (1985) urges teachers to use the first language for a portion of instruction to ensure clarity. Reilly and Ward (1997) agree with him and add that when children are already familiar with some English phrases, teachers can use only English.

An important part of managing a classroom is offering students different forms of work. At the initial stage, English studies commonly involve individual and whole-class based activities. Reilly and Ward (1997) explain that tasks such as choral work, chanting, singing, asking and answering questions require the whole class to participate, but students can work individually when they, for example, do arts and crafts activities. According to Harmer (1998), individual tasks allow learners to work at their own speed which is necessary during every lesson.

Reilly and Ward (1997) are of the opinion that young learners are not used to pair and group work based activities, however they need to learn co-operation skills. Brewster et al. (2002) state that implementing pair or group work on children who are not ready for such tasks can have negative consequences. Moon (2000) is of the same opinion but adds that children are by nature very sociable, therefore working in pairs or groups will come naturally to them although it might take some time to get accustomed to the new work forms. She describes pair work tasks as more manageable than group work activities due to the fact that the latter might offer more possibilities for pupils to misbehave. On the other hand, Brewster et al. (2002) believe that both work forms require equal explaining and training.

Circle time is a suitable form of whole-class work for teaching English at the initial stage. White (2009) believes that circle time activities raise the self-esteem of students and that circle time can be implemented with different topics throughout the course of English studies. He adds that students can express their feelings in a safe environment where collaborative learning methods can be tested. White (ibid.) is certain that most students want to work together as a group and students often take that as a privilege. Moon (2000) describes that during the circle time everyone, including the teacher, sits around in a circle and takes turns to say something. She explains that the group of students should be rather small in order to ensure an intimate atmosphere. Moon (ibid.) also suggests having specific rules in a circle - no laughing at each other, everyone has a turn, no-one is forced to speak, etc. On the possible usages of the circle time, Moon (ibid.) comments that students can either express personal information about themselves (e.g. "I can run", "I feel happy") or play games in a circle.

Teaching English during the OPC or at the initial stage of English studies

At the initial stage of English studies teachers often have to take into consideration the development of all language skills (listening, speaking, reading, writing) as well as teaching grammar, pronunciation and vocabulary. The National Curriculum of Basic School (2011) states that the priorities have to be listening, speaking, correct pronunciation and developing

vocabulary. Therefore the present thesis deals with these aspects in more detail, followed by a brief description of the development of reading and writing skills as well as grammar competences.

Developing listening skills. Gui-rong and Xiaou-yun (2011), Saville-Troike (2006) and Fang (2008) believe that through listening learners start to recognise different language systems, listening improves their language comprehension and contributes to their later productive competences. Wright (1995) states that listening competence is based on searching, predicting and guessing the meaning with positive attitudes, rather than understanding everything.

Ruutmets and Saluveer (2010) state that for developing listening skills it is important to choose materials that are in compliance with young learners' language knowledge, i.e. listening texts should be varied, short and without any background noise. They write that common listening materials at the early stage include songs, rhymes, chants, dialogues, teacher's instructions, etc.

Developing listening through Total Physical Response and Total Physical Response Storytelling. Several authors (e.g., Asher, 1984; Brewster et al., 2002; Larsen-Freeman, 2000; Linse, 2005; Pinter, 2006; Phillips, 1993; Reilly & Ward, 1997; Singh, 2011) suggest a method – Total Physical Response (TPR) -, which is based on language comprehension and which is highly suitable for developing the listening skills of young learners. Asher (1984) explains TPR as a method where language is presented through imperative sentences and students have to show how much they understand by acting out the commands. Larsen-Freeman (2000) states that the main aim is for students to familiarise with the target language. She adds that children should not be rushed to speak if they are not ready for that. As a result, the method minimises the level of stress and anxiety in foreign language learning. Linse (2005) agrees with Larsen-Freeman (2000) and adds that TPR subsumes the way children learn their native language – by speaking when they have enough knowledge and confidence. The method is largely based on following somebody's (teacher's, fellow-students') orders. Orders must be given one at a time so that students can keep up with the process (Linse, 2005). At first students can present instructions alongside with the teacher but later they are capable of acting commands out on their own (Larsen-Freeman, 2000).

TPR activities do not have to take up the whole lesson of foreign language learning. Educators can simply select one or two activities per lesson. Pinter (2006) offers two forms of TPR – "listen and respond" and "listen and do". She explains that the former represents

activities where young learners understand the instructions and act accordingly ("listen and clap your hands", "Simon says", etc.). The latter, "listen and do" tasks, often have an end product ("listen and draw", "listen and circle the correct answer", etc.). Linse (2005) is of the opinion that TPR activities can also include songs and finger-plays.

Some authors (e.g., Jianing, 2007; Reilly & Ward, 1997; Wright, 1995) recommend using TPR with storytelling. Werstler (2002) explains Total Physical Response Storytelling (TPRS) as a method that develops oral fluency among students, which implies that the most important aim is to speak and understand English as a foreign language. She adds that TPRS consists of clear input and practical outcome and is closely connected with TPR. Werstler (ibid.) specifies that firstly students need to acquire the necessary vocabulary using the techniques of TPR. She explains that the storytelling part takes place when the teacher presents mini-stories – often exaggerated and humorous – using gestures and previously learnt vocabulary and students have to act out the stories accordingly. When the teacher has presented the stories, children have a chance to retell what they have remembered. TPRS culminates with students producing a new story with the guidance of their teacher.

In Asher's (1984) opinion, TPR has several positive features. For example, he brings out that students learn to understand the target language without stress and the knowledge retains for a long time. He adds that using TPR shows positive result with different ages and personality types. Linse (2005) agrees with him and writes that TPR utilises the auditory, visual and tactile learning channels. She explains that students are usually engaged in listening, watching and afterwards acting out. All in all, TPR and TPRS are presented as effective learning methods but like every method, they also have some weaknesses. Brune (2004) believes that it can be complicated to assure that all the students are paying attention while they have to listen to others. He also brings out that for the teacher TPR and TPRS are very energy consuming. For example, Brune (ibid.) and Linse (2005) point out that the teacher has to come up with creative and entertaining stories, choose level appropriate vocabulary, pick various appealing real objects or pictures and be active throughout the lesson as well. On the other hand, Wright (1995) is of the opinion that if teachers are as active as possible, the better quality of listening and appreciation they get from students.

Developing listening using various sources. Phillips (1993) and Pinter (2006) bring out the teacher as the first and foremost source of listening material to young learners. They add that during the early stages of learning English, students do not have enough knowledge to communicate so they learn the basic language by listening to the teacher. That is why Phillips

(1993) suggests giving instructions in English as much as possible in order to provide sufficient authentic listening material. Also, she emphasises the importance of listening to the teacher because students can see her body language and gestures, which simplify language comprehension for children.

Various audio and video materials are another source of listening. Reilly and Ward (1997) advise using videos as a part of teaching English to young learners because they combine a story with animation and provide lots of input. Using audio materials can offer the same input but without any animation. Skopinskaya (1996) explains that audio materials can be either authentic (i.e. live recordings made in the street, radio commercials) or scripted. She adds that young learners mostly learn through scripted material which is based on the vocabulary of the course book. Reilly and Ward (1997) do not advise material that is longer than 10 minutes or has a difficult and unsuitable storyline for children. Reilly and Ward (ibid.) and Harmer (1998) add that teachers should not let students watch videos and listen to tapes passively and therefore they suggest activities that can be utilised before, while and after a listening act. For example, they recommend predicting the story and learning new vocabulary before listening. After preparing the children, Harmer (1998) stresses that children should always listen to the text more than once. He explains that the first listening is for merely getting the idea of the material and the second or the third time is to get some information. Video material should not be treated as watching television and in order to minimise that possibility, the teacher can play the video without sound in order for students to make predictions. While listening with the sound, the teacher can pause the video at a certain point and ask simple and verifying questions. After listening, Reilly and Ward (1997) suggest re-enacting the story or drawing pictures about it.

Another source of listening would be to listen to other students in the classroom or a native speaker. In the case of young English learners listening to their classmates is a more common option. On the other hand, Fang (2008) and Skopinskaya (1996) favour listening to a person who speaks English as a mother tongue in order to introduce as much authentic listening material as possible. Skopinskaya (1996) explains that it is crucial for low-level students to get accustomed to various voices besides their teacher's.

Developing speaking skills. Cameron (2001) presents speaking skill as a part of "discourse" which, in her words, is using English as a foreign language with people and for realistic purposes. She explains that in a classroom "discourse" occurs when students and the teacher are interacting. Cameron (ibid.) is certain that before the necessary "discourse" takes place,

young learners need to make sense of the foreign language. She believes that in order to do so, children use their previous language experiences along with mimicking the teacher. She states that most probably their language resources are not adequate enough, so beginners use a mixture of the target language and their first language. She specifies that this stems from "communicative pressure", which implies that children feel the social motivation to speak even without necessary knowledge. This is one of the reasons why young learners should start by listening to the teacher to collect some basic resources and afterwards they are ready for output i.e. speaking.

Ruutmets and Saluveer (2010) state that during the initial stages of language learning speaking activities are strictly controlled tasks because of children's limited knowledge and experiences. They explain that strict and controlled activities help students accustom with language structures and are based on mechanic repetition. Controlled speaking activities offer correct pronunciation and therefore students feel secure about speaking. Brewster et al. (2002) and Read (2007) add that in the early stages students acquire formulaic language which consists of greetings ("Hello", "Goodbye"), classroom language ("Stand up", "Listen and repeat"), social English ("How are you?"), permissions ("Can I clean the board?"), etc. Read (ibid.) believes that the use of formulaic language establishes classroom routine which is essential in learning to communicate with minimal linguistic abilities. Phillips (1993) adds that this helps students get used to the sound, feel and rhythm of English.

Pinter (2006) and Phillips (1993) state that when young learners get the necessary input from the teacher they soon want to participate in interactions with the teacher and other students. According to Pinter (2006), students start communicating by using chunks, which are phrases from previously heard input. The chunks applied by young learners can be fully fixed ("See you later!", "What do you think?" etc.) or partially fixed ("I have got…", "I like…" etc.).

Brewster et al. (2002) bring forth that speaking activities can be carried out individually, in pairs or groups as well as with the whole class. They add that the most common activity types are repetition, drama and role play, dialogues, songs, rhymes, chants and a variety of language games.

Using individual or choral repetition for drilling. Dachyshyn, Kirova and Paradis (2009) describe repetition as a non-threatening and effective technique for young English learners. Repetition can be either individual or choral and it can be used across different topics in order for students to hear and use language functions in conversations as much as possible.

In order to minimise the fear of speaking, Read (2007) and Linse (2005) suggest that teachers offer lots of choral speaking, where children repeat in unison. Linse (ibid.) explains that the teacher usually presents a sentence from a drill, a song or a poem and students respond to it together.

Larsen-Freeman (2000) explains using drills as an important part of repetition. She explicates that a drill is used in order to simplify a sentence or a dialogue by breaking it down into several parts and then students have to repeat the parts according to the teacher's instructions. Linse (2005) recommends substitution drills for young learners at early stages of English-language development where the teacher substitutes one word in each line of a drill and children have to repeat the sentences (e.g. this is a yellow dress, this is a red dress). Linse (ibid.) continues by writing that drills are useful for introducing new vocabulary as well as verifying the learnt material. She is certain that when drills are more personalized and require, for example, movements they are much more appealing to students.

Asking, answering questions, using dialogues and role-plays. Brewster et al. (2002) present asking and answering questions as a typical and yet effective activity at the initial stage of learning English. They explain that formulaic language often consists of various questions (e.g. Can you repeat? How are you?) and answers (e.g. I am fine, thank you.), which help memorise simple and useful language. In Krashen and Terrell's (1988) opinion, the target language production starts from answering different level questions, which leads to pupils producing single words or short phrases. They bring out that firstly students answer *yes-no* questions (e.g. Is Jane wearing a blue blouse?), after that the questions integrate to *either-or* level (e.g. Is this a dog or a cat?) and the final stage at a low-level is identification questions (e.g. What is this?). According to Brewster et al. (2002), another way to utilise questions and answers is by questionnaires and surveys where students interview each other about, for example, their likes and dislikes which demonstrates how to use English for real communication. During the OPC, questioning and answering should take place orally.

A very similar speaking activity to the previous one is a dialogue. Phillips (1993) is certain that it is the most popular speaking activity at a low level, which includes various short and set phrases. Linse (2005) and Larsen-Freeman (2000) agree with her and explain that dialogues provide controlled language which can be transferred into real life. Ruutmets and Saluveer (2010) add that dialogues are the appropriate middle ground between controlled activities and more natural communication. Dialogues can be read and translated, recited individually, in pairs or in unison, memorised and performed in the classroom. Also some less

conventional techniques could be exploited, e.g. ordering the parts of a dialogue, presenting a similar version of a dialogue or making up a follow-up story.

Another possibility to use dialogues is by transforming them into child-friendly role plays where children have to pretend they are someone else and for example, introduce themselves as that person (Linse, 2005). Role-plays help to imitate real-life situations and develop communication skills in the English classroom (Ruutmets & Saluveer, 2010). Scrivener (2005) explains that during a role-play students have new roles to portray, i.e. – students are usually given role cards that have information about their new identities. Larsen-Freeman (2000) adds that role-plays can be either very structured (the teacher tells students who they are and what they have to say) or less structured (the teacher tells students their roles and the situation but they can decide what they will say). At the initial stage of learning English, the former is definitely more advisable and age-appropriate.

Using storytelling and language games. Phillips (1993) states that when young learners have more confidence they can manipulate English more and therefore participate in less controlled activities like storytelling. Brewster and Ellis (1991) think that using stories is a fun and motivating way to introduce English as a foreign language. Reilly and Ward (1997) believe that teachers should appreciate storytelling and complement it with the dramatic tone of voice, mimicry and gestures. They suggest retelling a story rather than reading it from the book in order to create a close atmosphere where teachers can have a good contact with children. Brewster and Ellis (1991) suggest picking a suitable story for children and then retelling it to them, for example, once or twice each lesson over a specific period of time to give students enough repetition. In order to make stories understandable for students, complementary pictures can be used and some key words or phrases can be translated into students' mother tongue. After some time students become more familiar with the story and want to participate by repeating the key words and phrases. Very often children are able to memorise almost all of the text.

Linse (2005) presents language games as a useful activity that helps to develop speaking skills in English. She explains that games can be full of repetition while maximising the use of English. Bedson and Lewis (1999) believe that language games bring variety to the lesson and increase students' motivation to use the target language. Krashen and Terrell (1988) are of the same opinion and explicate that while young learners are playing their attention is on the game, not on the language forms they are using. If the activity is presented as a game, children take it more seriously. Krashen and Terrell (ibid.) state that this is the reason why

games are indispensable in the EFL classroom. Bedson and Lewis (1999) recommend using language games to introduce or revise various language items or to calm or energise children. They are certain that English teachers must keep in mind some suggestions in terms of using language games in the classroom: modifying the repertoire, not playing the game for too long and planning the game thoroughly.

Developing vocabulary. Saville-Troike (2006) notes that vocabulary is the most important aspect in developing foreign language acquisition. She adds that learning English as a foreign language vocabulary is based on three stages: firstly learners recognise the words that are presented to them, then they produce them in limited contexts and lastly they control completely the correct usage of the words. With teaching young language learners, these steps have to be equipped with certain techniques suitable for beginners and the revision of vocabulary should be continuous throughout the initial stage of learning (Ruutmets & Saluveer, 2010). Linse (2005) points out that there are two main ways to teach vocabulary to students – direct and indirect teaching. The former is based on teaching words and their meanings but the latter refers to introducing strategies to students in order to understand vocabulary on their own.

   Several authors (e.g., Brewster & Ellis, 1991; Linse, 2005; Phillips, 1993; Read, 2005; Reilly & Ward, 1997; Ruutmets & Saluveer, 2010; Thornbury, 2002) offer introducing new vocabulary to young learners with the help of pictures (e.g. flashcards), realia (e.g. classroom objects), puppets and body language (e.g. pantomime). They suggest presenting vocabulary in themes so it is easier for students to categorise and therefore memorise words. Read (2007) adds that with children teachers should teach the words that are closely related to their environment and personal experiences. McCarten (2007) agrees with her and states that young language learners do not have to be aware of all the meanings of some English words. Firstly, students have to understand and be able to use the easiest of meanings. For example, McCarten (ibid.) brings out the word *like,* which can refer to enjoying something with a grammatical pattern *I like cars* and this would be enough information for children to use at a low level even though the word has other meanings as well.

   Another option for learning vocabulary is through TPR because students have to listen and understand the instructions of the educator. Larsen-Freeman (2000) explains that during TPR vocabulary structures are accentuated over other language areas due to the fact that the imperatives are often single words or word chunks.

Different vocabulary games are also suitable when introducing and revising vocabulary at the initial stage of teaching English. Brewster and Ellis (1991) recommend using traditional and controlled games like bingo, dominoes and memory games. Linse (2005) describes more closely the game of Memory, where students need a set of matching vocabulary cards and they have to find as many matches as possible. With every card students have to form a sentence that prompts the card and if the student gets a pair of cards, he or she can keep it until the game ends. When the cards differ from each other, they are put face down in the same place they were taken. Phillips (1993) presents one other tool for vocabulary games – flashcards which are invaluable in introducing and revising vocabulary and can be used in various language games.

Brewster and Ellis (1991) and Linse (2005) emphasise the importance of documenting the learnt vocabulary with special notebooks, picture dictionaries, collages or posters made by students. Linse (ibid.) explains that these options develop various vocabulary acquisition strategies that provide more control over children's learning. Brewster and Ellis (1991) add that these books can be organised alphabetically or by topic. They believe it is a good idea to create not only individual vocabulary books but one for the whole class as well. To support vocabulary learning during the OPC, Ruutmets and Saluveer (2010) propose that teachers make small slips of papers with learnt words on them and hand them out to children who glue the words into their notebooks. They add that children can also draw pictures to complement the vocabulary learnt.

Developing pronunciation. There are 26 letters and 44 phonemes in the English language. This is clear evidence how difficult English pronunciation can be to young learners. According to Brewster and Ellis (1991), there will inevitably be many differences between the pronunciation of students' mother tongue and English. They affirm that children are great at imitating the educator's model of pronunciation but teachers should support the process with various activities that are connected with other parts of language learning (e.g. teaching vocabulary). Scrivener (2005) writes that arguing over what accent to use and produce seems unhelpful. He believes that students need to acquire a pronunciation that helps them to be understood in situations where they have to use English. Scrivener (ibid.) suggests that teachers should teach the same pronunciation that they speak but students should be aware of other accents in English as well.

Brewster and Ellis (1991) and Harmer (1998) present three main areas concerning teaching pronunciation to young learners – individual sounds, stress and intonation. Learning

individual sounds and using correct word or sentence stress are more significant at the initial stage of English learning than developing accurate intonation. This is supported by the fact that for the majority of the time children learn and use words or short phrases at first. Kelly (2000) is of the opinion that it is crucial to describe exactly how to pronounce phonemes by referring to lip and tongue positions and facial expressions. For example, while the sound *i:*, students can make a smiling face and hold the sound because it is a long vowel. Skopinskaya (1996) advises teachers to compare English sounds with the students' mother tongue. She suggests presenting similarly pronounced words in both languages and therefore students can understand the pronunciation (e.g. neat/niit). Ruutmets and Saluveer (2010) propose teaching phonemes along with vocabulary. They add that sounds should be introduced either individually or in pairs or groups and their learning should be supported by words or short sentences.

Estonian National Curriculum of Basic School (2011) and various authors (e.g. Brewster et al., 2002; Brown, 2006; Linse, 2005; Phillips, 1993; Scrivener, 2005; Skopinskaya, 1996; Read, 2007; Reilly & Reilly, 2005; Reilly & Ward, 1997) recommend using songs, poems, rhymes and chants with children who learn the pronunciation of English at the elementary stage. According to Skopinskaya (1996), poems are useful for practising separate phonemes or sound combinations because they provide repetition and alliteration of sounds. Brewster et al. (2002) add that songs and rhymes present how some sounds can run on together to simplify the pronunciation. Read (2007) agrees with them and explains that through songs, chants and poems children are able to imitate phonemes in a natural way and they help to develop correct stress, rhythm and intonation patterns. For example, Brewster et al. (2002) suggest clapping the beat of a poem in order to ascertain the rhythm.

Developing grammar, writing and reading skills. In the given thesis, developing grammar, writing and reading skills are presented shortly in one chapter because often the aspects are not dealt with during the OPC and if taught at the initial stage, they play a smaller role than the aspects highlighted earlier.

Lewis and Mol (2009) believe that grammar is one of the most controversial parts in teaching English as a foreign language. They explain that some teachers often describe grammar as the basis of all language learning and then there are educators who object to teaching grammar explicitly. Lewis and Mol (ibid.) are certain that with low-level students abstract English grammar teaching is not necessary. Krashen and Terrell (1988) agree with the idea and state that the use of grammar should be restricted to situations where it does not

intervene with communication. Scrivener (2005) is of the opinion that teachers should focus on presenting grammar through games and example sentences, for instance, rather than teaching abstract rules. According to Lewis and Mol (2009) and Scrivener (2005), the meaning of the language should be the priority and it must be possible to combine grammar into the other parts of the language in order to improve children's communicative performance. Scrivener (2005) remarks that real grammar learning occurs when students use the target language, not when they revise specific rules. Read (2007) agrees and adds that young children learn grammatical patterns implicitly with formulaic and unanalysed chunks of language which are introduced in the lesson context. She states that by learning chunks of language, children achieve confidence and are therefore more willing to participate in communicative activities and are enthusiastic about learning a new foreign language. The same principles are pointed out in the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (2001).

In addition to using course books and workbooks there are various grammar activities suitable for students who learn English at the initial stage. For example, Lewis and Mol (2009) offer guessing games with pictures that repeat a specific grammar pattern (e.g. What is it? Is it a …? – Yes, it is. No, it is not.). They explain that teachers can also use TPR activities (e.g. touch your nose, clap your hands and turn around) in order to verify grammar.

Reilly and Reilly (2005) note that there are various views regarding the time of introducing reading and writing skills to students who learn English as a foreign language. They confirm that in some countries English is taught orally for many years before pupils start reading and writing while in other countries these skills are being used from the beginning. During the OPC in Estonia children often write phonemes and read words or chunks of language, but overall, there is no special focus on developing reading and writing skills. The National Curriculum of Basic School (2011) specifies that low-level students mainly read and write what they have already learnt. Reilly and Reilly (2005) are certain that young learners can compose meaningful written work as long as the tasks are structured and age-appropriate. Krashen and Terrell (1988) give an example – after the teacher gives instructions orally during TPR, he or she can write the commands on the board and let students copy them. The authors explain that if the alphabets of the target and native languages do not differ that much, the adjustments for pupils are minor. The similar principles are brought forth in the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (2001) as well by stating that low-level students can write simple and short information (e.g. greetings and personal data). Kaye

(2007) adds that children should understand that they learn to write not write to learn which reveals the communicative purpose of writing.

Aims of the Empirical Research

   The empirical study aimed at getting an overview of how educators teach English as a foreign language at the initial phase in the first school stage, either with or without the OPC. To the best of the author's knowledge/as far as the author knows there have previously been no studies conducted on this topic in the University of Tartu or Estonia. The study set out to test the following research questions on the basis of teachers' responses:

1. How do teachers explain the term "OPC" and what are the positive and negative sides of the OPC for students in their teachers' opinions? Various authors (e.g. Brewster et al., 2002; Krashen & Terrell, 1988; Linse, 2005; Phillips, 1993; Pinter, 2006) bring forward the basic guidelines in order to teach English as a foreign language at the initial stage, although they do not offer a concrete definition of the OPC. Ruutmets and Saluveer (2010) use the term OPC and explicate it with similar principles as the authors mentioned above. As there is little specific information about the term OPC, the present study examined how Estonian teachers define it. Read (2007) has pointed out that there is no definite evidence as to at which school stage children should be introduced to English as a foreign language and this has caused a lot of controversy on the subject. There are authors (e.g. Cameron, 2001; Phillips, 1993) who approve of teaching English to young learners and bring out the positive sides. For example, Phillips (1993) states that during the beginning of language acquisition, young learners are great mimics and they are easy to motivate. On the other hand, there are authors (e.g. Brewster et al. 2002; McLaughlin, 1984) who are certain that teaching young learners has several downsides and teaching older students would be more efficacious.

2. Which general principles do teachers consider important while teaching English during the OPC or at the initial stage of English studies, and how often do they use them and does the importance of the principles correlate with their frequency of use? It has been stated by several authors (e.g. Linse, 2005; Phillips, 1993; Read, 2007; Reilly & Ward, 1997, Ruutmets & Saluveer, 2010) that at the initial stage of learning English, some principles are considered more significant than others. For example, Linse (2005) emphasises the importance of developing listening and speaking skills at the low level of learning. She is certain that these two skills set the foundation for

reading comprehension and writing skills. It can be hypothesised that teachers with more work experience consider developing listening and speaking skills more important than participants who have less work experience.

Due to the fact that developing listening and speaking skills is more important at the initial stage of English studies, it is likely that listening and speaking techniques are also more frequently used than techniques related to developing rest of the language skills. As an example, Larsen-Freeman (2000) suggests using TPR regularly at the beginning of language studies in order to develop speaking skills. The current study supposes that teachers with more work experience put listening and speaking oriented principles into practice more frequently than teachers with less work experience.

3. Which techniques and how often do teachers use to develop language skills during the OPC or at the initial stage of English studies? Some authors (e.g. Linse, 2005; Phillips, 1993; Ruutmets & Saluveer, 2010; Reilly & Ward, 1997) find that developing speaking and listening competences is more important at the initial stage of English studies than teaching reading and writing skills. Due to that it can be hypothesised that various listening and speaking techniques are more frequently used during the initial studies than reading and writing tasks. Also, it can be speculated that participants with more work experience use different listening and speaking activities more frequently than teachers with less work experience.

In addition to that, the present thesis aimed at finding out how many Estonian educators teach English through the OPC, what the duration of the OPC is, which study materials are used during the OPC, whether educators consider the OPC as a necessary stage in the foreign language acquisition process, whether there are any differences in the way the OPC is conducted in ordinary and specialist English-language classes and whether schools have agreed on certain principles for the OPC. Also teachers were surveyed regarding their opinions about the suitable age to start learning a foreign language.

Method

The empirical study used a quantitative research method to present the general overview on teaching English with the OPC or at the initial stage. In order to understand the teachers' thoughts and opinions a qualitative research method was also conducted, which in Laherand's (2008) opinion presents a detailed and wholesome picture of the subject. She adds that although qualitative and quantitative methods are opposites it is becoming more common to

find ways to combine these methods. In the current thesis both selected instruments – a survey and an interview – aimed at answering the previously stated research questions.

Sample

   The survey. The survey was conducted among teachers of the first school stage who teach English as a foreign language at the initial stage. Altogether 72 English teachers participated from different parts of Estonia – from Saare, Harju, Tartu, Pärnu and Viljandi Counties. All the teachers were female. 26 teachers have studied at Tartu University and 12 teachers at Tallinn University. Out of all the participants 14 were class teachers with English as a minor, eight were English teachers and seven teachers specified that they had studied English philology. The other participants did not specify the institution where they had studied and noted that they had a higher education or they had had some training in order to become an English teacher. For a more thorough overview of the participants see Table 1.

Table 1. *Participants in the survey*

	Number of teachers	Percentage of teachers (%)
Gender		
Female	72	100
Work experience		
Up to 10 (including 10)	33	45.8
11 and more years	39	54.2
Classes taught		
Ordinary classes	60	83.3
Specialist English-language classes	6	8.3
Both	6	8.3

The interview. The interview was carried out among two first school stage English teachers who teach English at the initial stage – a teacher who conducts the OPC throughout the whole year and a teacher who conducts the OPC for a single semester. Both interviewees were female and had earlier participated in the survey as well. The teacher who conducts the OPC for a single semester has taught English for seven years and the teacher who conducts the OPC throughout the whole year has taught English for one year. It was also planned to interview a teacher who does not conduct the OPC during the initial stage but due to the anonymity of the survey the author was not able to find and interview a qualified teacher.

Research Instruments

The questionnaire. The questionnaire for the teachers was compiled by the author of the thesis (see Appendix 1). It contained 23 items and it was completed in Estonian. The first part of the questionnaire dealt with demographic data. For instance, the teachers had to provide information about their gender, working experience and education. The rest of the questions focused on different aspects related to teaching English to young learners with the OPC or at the initial phase in the first school stage. The items in the questionnaires are related to the research questions in the following way:

The main part of the questionnaire (questions 4, 9, 10, 14-16) aimed at finding out how teachers explain the term OPC, what the positive and negative sides to the OPC are, which principles teachers consider important, how often they apply them and which techniques teachers use in order to develop language skills during the OPC or at the initial stage of teaching English. The principles brought out in the survey were selected because a number of authors in the topic-related literature presented them as key points in explaining the process of language teaching at the initial stage. The topic-related literature also formed the basis of common techniques presented in question 16, which are connected to developing the four language skills – listening, speaking, reading and writing. To get a better overview of them see Table 2.

Table 2. *Techniques connected to four language skills used in survey question no 16*

Listening	Speaking	Reading	Writing
Listening to the teacher	Choral repetition	Reading words	Writing letters
Listening to the video material	Individual repetition	Reading dialogues	Writing words
Listening to other students	Storytelling	Reading poems and songs	Writing phonemes
Listening to the CD or tape	Conducting role-play activities	Reading simple sentences	Writing simple sentences
Listening to a native speaker	Reciting short dialogues	Spelling	Doing written tasks
	Asking and answering questions		Writing short stories

The questionnaire also contained some items that were not directly connected to the research questions but they were included to get a better overview of certain topic-related issues. For example, the teachers were asked about the duration of the OPC at the initial stage and the materials they use during the early studies in English.

The questionnaire contained eight multiple-choice questions where the respondents also had an opportunity to add their own variant if they wished. Some questions were presented as tables and the participants had to rate the options given in a 4-point scale and if necessary give the answer "I do not know" separately. The questionnaire also included seven questions where the respondents could write freely about their opinions. The joint coefficient of internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha) of the three scale-based questions (questions 14-16) was .855, which indicates a high level of reliability.

The interview. To get more in depth results about teaching English with the OPC or at the initial stage of English studies, two semi-structured interviews were carried out by the author of the thesis. The author formed one set of questions (see Appendix 2) for both of the teachers.

The set of questions for the interview consisted of 44 items. The questions were divided into seven categories and each category consisted of 2-18 questions, which were compiled based on the research and survey questions. During the interviews the author asked specifying questions if necessary.

Data collection procedures

The survey. The survey was carried out from February to May, 2012. Out of the 32 questionnaires distributed directly to the teachers by the author 21 were returned. Five questionnaires were e-mailed to the teachers, but three of them returned. 48 questionnaires were completed via eFormular. The questionnaire took about 10-15 minutes to complete.

The interview. The author of the thesis contacted the interviewees after they had answered the questionnaire and they agreed to participate in the qualitative research as well. The author interviewed the participants personally and informed them about the aims of the research as well as the anonymity of the participation. The teachers were asked to answer the questions as they understood them and if necessary ask clarifying questions. The interviews were conducted at the homes of the interviewees in March and April 2013. The interviews were conducted in Estonian and took about 20-30 minutes.

Data analysis procedures

The survey. The data was coded and stored using Microsoft Excel 2010, data analysis and calculation of descriptive statistics – percentages, means, standard deviations, modes, minimum and maximum values – were performed with the help of IBM SPSS Statistics 20.0. Attention should be drawn to the fact that the data obtained with the help of questions 14-16

were coded in a reversed order. As a result, a low mean indicates the importance / high frequency of an item and a high mean the irrelevancy / low frequency of an item. Based on work experience, the participants of the survey were divided into two separate groups: teachers with up to 10 years (incl.) (Group 1; 33 members) and teachers with 11 and more years of teaching experience (Group 2; 39 members). As the data distribution was not normal, a non-parametric Mann-Whitney U test was run to determine whether, based on the teachers' work experience, responses to questions 14, 15 and 16 differed significantly. A Spearman Rank Order correlation was applied to determine the relationship between the most/least important general principles (question 14) and their frequency of use (question 15). By using an Independent Samples T-test, the average collective frequency ratings given to a specific language skill category (see Table 2) in question 16 were compared between the two groups of teachers.

The interview. The answers were recorded with a dictaphone. The recorded interviews were transcribed and after that the results were presented and analysed. The author also used transcription signs brought out by Laherand (2008). For example, (3) refers to a pause and the number between the brackets demonstrates the duration of the pause in seconds. The teachers' sentences brought out in the current thesis have not been changed.

Results

Results of the survey

The definition of the OPC and the positive and negative sides to it. While defining the term "OPC" (question 4) the participants brought forth several aspects. Most of the teachers presented more than one of them. 54 teachers stated that the OPC is based on developing listening and speaking competences along with correct pronunciation. 23 teachers explained the OPC as a course where basic vocabulary is learnt and 22 participants specified that learning takes place through games, songs and rhymes. In addition to that, the teachers explicated that the OPC is an introduction to the new foreign language (13) and to a new culture (1).

The survey also researched the positive and negative sides of the OPC (questions 9 and 10) based on the teacher's opinions. According to their answers, the benefits of the OPC are as follows: developing vocabulary, listening, speaking and pronunciation skills (26 teachers), orientation on games (23), introducing the language in a positive way (22), interesting and motivating tasks (11), a good transition to reading and writing (1). Only one teacher found

that there are no positive sides to the OPC and four teachers did not answer the question. 34 participants were certain that there are no negative sides to the OPC. The rest of the participants explained the possible negative aspects as follows: difficult to develop reading and writing competences after the OPC (14), too easy (8), too complicated (2) or boring and tedious (4) for students and it is difficult to grade pupils (1). Two teachers did not know how to reply and four participants did not answer the question.

General principles while teaching English during the OPC or at the initial stage: their importance and frequency of use. The teachers were given a selection of 18 general principles that can be applied during the OPC or at the initial stage of English studies. They were asked to rate the importance of the principles (question 14) and then specify how often they used them in their English lessons (question 15). The results showed that the development of correct pronunciation, listening and speaking skills and using songs, rhymes and chants were considered as the most important principles in teaching English at the initial stage. Developing listening skills and correct pronunciation particularly stood out, as 63 (87.5%) and 65 (90.3%) teachers out of 72, respectively (see Appendix 1), regarded these principles as being "very important". Not taking into account those who answered "Don't know", there were four principles which were exclusively valued either "very important" or "important" (developing listening skills; using instructions in English; using TPR; using songs, rhymes, chants).

Not surprisingly, the principles considered the least important were developing grammar and writing skills. For a more thorough overview regarding the importance of the principles see Table 3 below and Appendix 3.

Table 3. *The importance of general principles during the OPC or at the initial stage based on teachers' opinions*

	Min	Max	Mode	M	SD
1. Developing correct pronunciation	3	1	1	1.11	.36
2. Developing listening skills	2	1	1	1.13	.33
3. Developing speaking skills	3	1	1	1.24	.46
4. Using songs, rhymes, chants	2	1	1	1.25	.44
5. Using language games	3	1	1	1.39	.52
6. Developing vocabulary	3	1	1	1.4	.55
7. Using TPR	2	1	1	1.43	.50
8. Using instructions in English	2	1	1	1.46	.50
9. Using frontal work	3	1	1	1.55	.59
10. Using pair or group work	3	1	2	1.67	.63
11. Using individual work	3	1	2	1.79	.67
12. Using circle time activities	3	1	2	1.95	.62

13. Developing reading skills	4	1	2	2.04	.85
14. Using TV and computer	4	1	2	2.06	.75
15. Using fairy tales	4	1	0;2	2.08	.82
16. Using arts and crafts	4	1	2	2.08	.69
17. Developing writing skills	4	1	3	2.62	.79
18. Developing grammar skills	4	1	3	2.84	.73

Note. The answer „Don't know" has not been taken into account when presenting the descriptive statistics

As for question 14, the results obtained from Mann-Whitney U test showed a statistically significant difference (p<.02) concerning developing speaking skills – the teachers with less experience (Group 1) rated this principle as being more important.

It appeared that the most frequently applied principles were using instructions in English, developing vocabulary, correct pronunciation and speaking skills (see Table 4 below), which do not entirely coincide with how their importance was rated. Although generally, the highest valued principles were also the ones used most often.

There were similar minor discrepancies when comparing the principles considered the least important (e.g. using fairy tales, using TV and computer, using art and crafts) with how often they were used. Again, the order of the least frequently used principles was not in complete alignment with their order of importance, but on the whole the selection of the least important and least frequently used principles accorded with each other. For a complete overview of the frequency of using general principles see Table 4 and Appendix 4.

Table 4. *The frequency of using general principles during the OPC or at the initial stage*

	Min	Max	Mode	M	SD
1. Using instructions in English	2	1	1	1.03	.17
2. Developing vocabulary	2	1	1	1.06	.23
3. Developing correct pronunciation	2	1	1	1.08	.28
4. Developing speaking skills	3	1	1	1.13	.41
5. Developing listening skills	2	1	1	1.17	.38
6. Using frontal work	2	1	1	1.21	.41
7. Using TPR	3	1	1	1.32	.58
8. Using individual work	3	1	1	1.42	.63
9. Using pair or group work	4	1	1	1.63	.68
10. Using songs, rhymes, chants	4	1	1	1.74	.81
11. Developing reading skills	5	1	1	1.77	1.09
12. Using language games	4	1	2	1.82	.79
13. Developing writing skills	5	1	2	2.19	1.25
14. Developing grammar	5	1	2	2.44	1.2
15. Using circle time	5	1	3	2.92	1.25
16. Using arts and crafts	5	1	3	3.06	.86
17. Using TV and computer	5	1	2;4	3.2	1.05
18. Using fairy tales	5	2	3	3.46	1.01

While analysing the answers to question 15 with Mann-Whitney U test, a statistically significant difference appeared with regard to developing vocabulary (p<.03) and using TPR (p<.02), both of which found more frequent use among the members of Group 2, and using fairy tales (p<.01) – less frequently applied by the participants in Group 1.

As for the statistical correlation between the most/least important general principles and their frequency of use, the following figures were retrieved by applying the Spearman rank correlation test. It appeared that there was a very weak negative correlation regarding correct pronunciation (r=-.0.1), using instructions in English (r=-.16) and developing vocabulary (r=-.07), a weak positive correlation with regard to developing listening skills (r=.282), using songs, rhymes, chants (r=.302), using language games (r=.363) and developing grammar (r=.328). A moderate positive correlation appeared in connection with developing speaking skills (r=.529), using arts and crafts (r=.524), developing writing skills (r=.564) and using circle time (r=.559). There was a strong positive correlation regarding using fairy tales (r=.608) and using TV and computer (r=.705).

Language skills related techniques while teaching English during the OPC or at the initial stage: their frequency of use. The teachers were asked to rate how often they used certain techniques in order to develop language skills during the OPC or at the initial stage of English studies (question 16). The participants were not asked to consider the importance of these techniques because they were based on the general principles brought out in the previous questions. It appeared that the participants used listening to the teacher, choral repetition and listening to students the most frequently (see Table 5 below). The least frequently used options were the techniques related to writing tasks: writing short stories – overwhelmingly the least often used technique –, writing simple sentences and –, doing written tasks (e.g. gap-fill exercises). Other techniques that found rare use were listening to a native speaker, listening to the video material and storytelling. For the complete information regarding the frequency of using the techniques see Table 5 and Appendix 5.

Table 5. *The frequency of using techniques during the OPC or at the initial stage*

	Min	Max	Mode	M	SD
1. Listening to the teacher	5	1	1	1.06	.47
2. Choral repetition	2	1	1	1.15	.36
3. Listening to other students	3	1	1	1.19	.46
4. Individual repetition	3	1	1	1.26	.53
5. Listening to the CD or tape	4	1	1	1.39	.6
6. Asking and answering questions	5	1	1	1.39	.8

7. Reading words	5	1	1	1.56	.97
8. Writing letters	5	1	1	1.91	1.22
9. Reciting short dialogues	5	1	2	2.10	.92
10. Reading poems and songs	5	1	2	2.11	.97
11. Reading simple sentences (e.g. instructions)	5	1	1	2.13	1.28
12. Writing words	5	1	1	2.20	1.34
13. Reading dialogues	5	1	2	2.30	1.1
14. Conducting role play activities	5	1	2	2.42	1
15. Spelling	5	1	2	2.44	1.32
16. Writing phonemes	5	1	1	2.61	1.63
17. Writing simple sentences	5	1	2	2.73	1.43
18. Doing written tasks (e.g. gap-fill exercises)	5	1	2	2.75	1.42
19. Storytelling	5	1	2;3	2.83	1.22
20. Listening to the video material	5	1	2	2.96	1.11
21. Listening to a native speaker	5	1	5	3.38	1.61
22. Writing short stories	5	1	5	3.99	1.1

Mann-Whitney U test showed a statistically significant difference in the case of two items: choral repetition (p<.02) and conducting role play activities (p<.02). These techniques were less frequently used by the teachers with less experience (Group 1).

As can be seen from Table 2, the techniques used while teaching English during the OPC or at the initial stage were divided into four categories by language skill: listening, speaking, reading and writing. Table 6 below exhibits the average collective frequency ratings given to a specific language skill category (i.e. the average rating of all the techniques in a category). It appeared that the average frequency ratings of the two categories consisting of the techniques related to listening and speaking skills were higher than those of the categories comprising the techniques connected to reading and writing skills. The rankings given by Group 1 teachers were consistent with the total results. The category of the techniques connected to speaking skills ranked at the top also among Group 2, however, the results showed that Group 2 teachers used the reading-related techniques more frequently than the listening-related techniques.

Table 6. *The frequency of using techniques by language skill categories*

	Total		Group 1		Group2	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Listening	2	.48	2.07	.50	1.96	.47

Speaking	1.86	.55	2.05	.58	1.72	.51
Reading	2.11	.72	2.28	.86	1.94	.56
Writing	2.7	.95	2.68	.96	2.69	.96

By comparing the two groups of teachers and the average collective frequency ratings given to a specific language skill category using an Independent Samples T-test, it was revealed that there was a statistically significant difference concerning the techniques connected to speaking ($p<.02$). The mean score of frequency of the teachers in Group 1 was 2.05 while the mean score of the teachers in Group 2 was 1.72 (see Table 6 above), which indicated a higher rate of frequency of using the techniques connected to speaking among the teachers with more experience.

In addition to the above, the teachers were also asked some smaller questions in order to get a more specific overview on teaching English during the OPC or at the initial stage. The results connected to the questions are pointed out below.

The necessity and duration of the OPC. Firstly, it was examined how many participants taught English at the initial stage with the OPC (question 5). The results were as follows: 87.5% (63) of the educators taught English with the OPC and 12.5% (9) of the participants did not use it.

Secondly, the teachers were asked about the duration of the OPC at their school (question 6). Out of all the participants who taught English with the OPC (63), almost two thirds conducted it for a single semester of the year, the rest of the teachers either for half a year (ca 8%), for a whole year (ca 14%) or some other period of time (ca 17%), e.g. for a couple of weeks (4), up to a month (2) or 1-5 months (5). The results can be seen in Table 7.

Table 7. *Duration of the OPC*

	Number of teachers	Percentage of teachers (%)
One semester	38	60.3
Half a year	5	7.9
One year	9	14.3
Other	11	17.5

Thirdly, it was researched whether the participants thought it was necessary to teach English with the help of the OPC (question 7) and how they explained their answers (question 8). It appeared that 70 teachers (97.2%) were certain that conducting the OPC was necessary and only two (2.8%) teachers answered negatively. The teachers who agreed with using the OPC explained themselves as follows: the OPC offers time to get used to the new language

(33), it helps to develop correct pronunciation skills (24), it would be too complicated to start writing in the target language right away (15) and before writing skills can be mastered, listening and speaking competences have to be developed (13). The two participants who believed that teaching English with the OPC was not necessary clarified that it was crucial to start writing from the beginning of the language course. One teacher added that most of the words that are taught during the OPC are known for students and it would be confusing for them to learn the spelling of the words later.

Study materials used during the OPC or at the initial stage of English studies. At first, the survey aimed at finding out the study materials that the teachers use during the OPC or at the initial stage of English studies (question 11). Not surprisingly the results showed that the most popular materials were "I Love English 1" (33) and "English Step by Step 1" (11). The other options mentioned were "WOW" (6), "Spark" (4), "Welcome" (2), "Happy House" (2), "Way Ahead" (1) and "Yep" (1). Four participants did not specify the title of the book or workbook and eight teachers simply stated that they used various materials (e.g. pictures, toys, songs).

Next, teachers were asked whether they used extra materials in order to teach English with the OPC or at the initial stage, and if so, which ones (questions 12 and 13). Here 70 (97,2%) teachers answered positively and they resorted to various types of extra materials: the internet (23), visual materials (e.g. pictures, posters) and realia (20), self-made worksheets (15), collected worksheets (15), other books (14), songs and rhymes (13), games (12), CD-s and DVD-s (12) and guests (1). Three teachers did not specify their answers and simply stated that they would use anything age-appropriate and one teacher did not answer the question.

Differences between ordinary and specialist English-language classes in conducting the OPC. The survey enquired whether there were any differences in the way the OPC was conducted in ordinary and specialist English-language classes and if so, what the differences were (questions 17 and 18). Out of all the participants who taught English with the OPC (63) nine answered these questions. Two of them found that there were differences due to students' dissimilar abilities but they did not specify the differences any further. Seven teachers did not think there were any differences.

The age factor in teaching English at the initial stage. It was researched whether the teachers agreed with the critical period hypothesis (question 19) which suggests that when children start learning a foreign language before the age 11-12 they are more likely to acquire the

target language with native like qualities and the teachers also had to explain their opinions (question 20). 58 (80.5%) participants agreed with the hypothesis and 13 (18.1%) did not. One participant did not answer the question. The teachers who agreed with the critical period hypothesis explained their opinion as follows: children are receptive language learners (42) and they learn through games which keeps them motivated (4). Five teachers explained the hypothesis relying on their own experiences and one teacher stated that different studies have proven it. Five participants did not know how to explicate the subject and four teachers did not answer the question. Most of the teachers who disagreed with the hypothesis clarified that teaching English depends on several aspects and age is not the most important one and one teacher did not explain her opinion.

In addition to that, the teachers were asked to specify the age at which students should start learning English as a foreign language (question 21). The most popular answers were from the second grade (18), from the preschool or the first grade (16) or from the third grade (14). Nine teachers stated that either from the second or third grade and six teachers offered the range from the first to the third grade. Three participants suggested starting English studies from the fifth or sixth grade. Six teachers did not answer the question.

OPC-related principles in schools. It was examined whether the schools where the respondents work have agreed upon some principles that help teaching English with the OPC, and if yes, what they are (questions 22 and 23). The results showed that out of the teachers who conduct the OPC (64) 33 of them (45.8%) had certain OPC-related principles in their schools and 34 participants (47.2%) did not. Five teachers (6.9%) did not answer the question. Those teachers whose schools had certain principles specified them as follows: the nature of the OPC has been determined (e.g. the emphasis is on developing listening and speaking skills) (15), the time and materials have been agreed upon (8) and there is no grading during the OPC (7). Two teachers pointed out that the principles come from the course book and six educators did not explain their school's principles.

Results of the interview

In order to get a better overview of the interviews' results, two separate profiles of the interviewees were formed – a teacher who conducts the OPC throughout the first year of English studies (hereinafter "Teacher A") and a teacher who conducts the OPC for a single semester (hereinafter "Teacher B").

Firstly, the interviewees had to specify how long they have been teaching English at a low level and at which grade they start teaching English as a foreign language. Teacher A has been teaching English for a year and Teacher B has been teaching English for seven years. Teacher A teaches English from the second grade and Teacher B from the third grade. Both teachers teach English in ordinary classes.

Profile of Teacher A. Teacher A explicated the nature of the OPC by bringing out the main principles she follows while teaching English with the help of the OPC. She pointed out that during the OPC students acquire the basic vocabulary so that they can start expressing themselves in English from early on.

 "Minu arusaam on see, et lapsed omandavad eelkõige nagu sellised põhifraasid, mis nendel on vaja, ... et, paneb mingisuguse baasi nagu edaspidisele õppimisele, mingisugused kõige olulisemad sõnad näiteks, et nad saavad juba vaikselt ennast väljendama hakata."

Teacher A explained that her school has not agreed on any principles in relation to conducting the OPC. She added that the process of the OPC depends on the teacher's personality and that it is not necessary to agree upon any principles. Teacher A was not sure whether there are any differences between conducting the OPC in an ordinary and specialist English-language class, since she has not taught English to a specialist class.

According to teacher A, conducting the OPC is very important during the initial stage of English studies. She explained that teaching with the OPC offers a good environment where students can learn through games and therefore they will be more interested in language learning in the future. In addition to that, teacher A was certain that a year is a sufficient period for conducting the OPC.

"Sellepärast, et esiteks see laseb õpilastel nagu alguses sellises nagu pingevabamas õhkkonnas seda keelt hakata omandama. Et rohkem läbi mängu, et siis nendel tekib tegelikult selline võib-olla suurem huvi selle vastu."

Teacher A was of the opinion that the OPC is very important for students learning a new language and that children learn more from oral work. She added that conducting the OPC is more crucial for children, but, as teachers usually take students' interests into account, it is important for teachers as well. While describing the positive sides to the OPC, teacher A said that students often acquire the basic vocabulary quickly and it gives them a sense of achievement. She added that students are very interested in English at the initial stage because the OPC offers lots of fun activities for them. When asked about the possible negative sides to the OPC, Teacher A stated that if students start writing from the beginning they would learn

the language more intensively and faster but all in all, in her opinion, the OPC has no negative sides for students. The interviewee also pointed out that memorising words and writing phonemes are usually the most difficult activities for students during the OPC but the rest of it is quite easy.

"(6) No raske on esialgu nagu sõnade meeldejätmine, ja see, et me ju hääldusmärke ju kirjutame ja noh nende õppimine on raske. Aga lihtne, ega ta on üldiselt ju kõik lihtne. Seal ei ole ju midagi ületamatut…"

The interviewee mentioned that she uses "English Step by Step 1" for teaching English at the initial stage. She explicated that these materials offer enough support for conducting the OPC. In addition to that, Teacher A stated that she uses extra materials which are mostly from Youtube. She explained that using extra materials illustrates the teaching process and that songs and chants, for example, help students memorise words more quickly. The teacher uses extra materials at least once a week for 5-10 minutes, depending on the topic.

Teacher A rated the importance of several principles which help teach English with the OPC and she brought out the techniques she uses in order to develop these principles. Firstly, she was certain that teaching pronunciation skills is very important during the OPC. She explained that she demonstrates students how to pronounce words and they have to mimic her.

"No põhiliselt näitan ise ette kõike, väga ülepingutatult, et see on kõige tähtsam. Ja teiseks tõesti, et need märgid ka, et me õpime ikkagi selle järgi ka, aga üldiselt ma ise näitan ette ja lasen neil järgi teha …"

Secondly, Teacher A said that in her opinion developing grammar skills is of secondary importance during the OPC, and that she does not talk about grammar separately but presents the correct forms when necessary. Thirdly, the teacher stated that developing vocabulary is also very important because it gives the basis for learning a new language. She added that her students draw pictures of the words they learn, which help them revise vocabulary and play games (e.g. bingo). Next, Teacher A specified which language skills she develops during the OPC and how it is done. In her opinion the emphasis is on developing speaking, listening and writing competences. Teacher A added that her students improve writing skills by writing phonemes and new words. In order to develop speaking skills she offers her students as many opportunities to speak in the target language as possible.

"Et see rääkimine käib meil kogu aeg … nüüd juba mingeid selliseid küsimusi ja ütlusi ma ütlen inglise keeles ja siis nad peavad mulle reageerima…Aga ma lasen nendel ka hästi palju öelda, nii palju rääkida kui üldse võimalik."

Teacher A also pointed out that when they develop listening competences the students need to listen to her or to a video. The interviewee does not prepare her students for reading tasks.

Teacher A described that she mostly uses individual and frontal work, occasionally pair work, when conducting the OPC. She was certain that pair and group work are not that effective during the OPC because students often do not learn from the experience and conducting pair or group work tasks are more for fun. Teacher A believes that frontal and individual work forms are the most effective options. The interviewee said that the most popular language games she applies are different variations of bingo, which is a good game for memorising vocabulary, and "Simon says". In addition to that, the teacher noted that she uses songs, rhymes and poems in order to learn the alphabet and numbers, and that the frequency of using them depends on the topic. With regard to using TPR during the OPC, teacher A noted that she has not applied the method very frequently because she believes that TPR activities would be more suitable for third grade students. She also brought forth that students enjoy games and watching videos the most and that writing is definitely the least popular activity.

"*Mängud, videote vaatamine meeldib nendele kõige rohkem ja noh osadele meeldib ka värvida … kui saab kleepse kleepida, ja üldiselt joonistamine ka, aga jah see „Simon says",
kus nad saavad liigutada ennast ja siis videote vaatamine kõige rohkem meeldib.*"

The interviewee was certain that during the initial stage the teacher often has to use a lot of the mother tongue, otherwise students would not understand her but during the second half of the year, she believes, teachers should try to speak in English as much as possible.

Teacher A pointed out some principles that she follows in order to plan a lesson with the help of the OPC. She explained:

> Sellele, et tund oleks küllalt varieeruv, et seal ei oleks kogu aeg ühte sama asja teha (3) ja see oleneb nagu hästi klassist, sest et ühe grupiga on niiviisi, et ma saan seal tõesti teha erinevaid asju, mängida igasuguseid asju. Teise grupiga ma tean juba, et mul ei olegi, ma ei jõua lihtsalt. Et seal siis noh, põhiline on see, et kui on mingid uued sõnad, siis me need kirjutame vihikusse, … , see aeg on mul kindlasti planeeritud, siis me kordame suuliselt räägime ja siis töövihikust natuke, kleebivad, värvida. … et oleks siis nagu erinevad tegevused.

Teacher A was not certain whether planning a lesson during the OPC differs from planning a lesson at the initial stage without the OPC. She also explained that planning a lesson during the OPC can be difficult because lessons should not be boring. Otherwise planning is definitely easy due to the fact that the topics are rather simple. Finally, Teacher A described that during the OPC she grades her students when they retell some stories or do little word

tests and if they have been very diligent, they get some stickers instead of marks. Teacher A added that she has not conducted any bigger tests.

Profile of Teacher B. Teacher B explained that the OPC is an introductory course for learning a foreign language.

"*Arvan, et suuline eelkursus on keeleõppeks selline sissejuhatav osa, et laps saaks aimu, mis see võõras keel on, kuidas seda hääldada, et ta saaks julgust, kui ta algul ju ei oska võõras keeles hääldada. Selline sissejuhatav osa uude keelde.*"

The teacher described the OPC by bringing out some principles that are agreed upon in her school – the OPC is conducted for a single semester, students learn mostly through oral work, it is game oriented and students are not graded in marks. Teacher B believed that having these principles is definitely useful because they have been tested in practice and their effectiveness in conducting the OPC has previously been verified. She pointed out that there might be some differences in conducting the OPC between teaching English in an ordinary class and specialist English-language class. She explained that in specialist English-language classes there are more pupils who might have some previous knowledge of the target language.

   The teacher was certain that conducting the OPC is necessary at a low level of English studies because it gives students confidence to learn a new language in a positive way. Teacher B stated:

> Noh, ma arvan kindlasti, see on võõrkeele õppimisel on selline esimene etapp, mis annab julguse. Ühe võõra keele õppimisel annab ta lastele, võib-olla alguses muidu tundub hirmutav, aga see näitab lastele ära, et see on kõik lihtne, et nad võivad eksida, et nad saavad mängida, et see on vahva.

Teacher B was of the opinion that the duration of the OPC depends on at which grade the English studies begin. She added that if students start learning from the second grade the OPC should be conducted during the first half of the year but if students start learning English from the third grade a single semester would be enough. Teacher B explained that third grade students are older and often learn faster and the whole year of conducting the OPC can become tedious for them.

   According to Teacher B, the OPC is very important for students because it offers a good environment where children can speak in the target language without the fear of making mistakes. She was certain that conducting the OPC raises their confidence as well by saying:

> See ongi see sissejuhatus sinna keelde, et ta näeb, et ta saab, et ta julgeb hääldada, ta saab tagasisidet oma, et kas ta hääldab õigesti, valesti, ja ka ta saab nagu sellise enesekindluse, et niimoodi see õppimine käibki ja just läbi sellise suulise eelkuruse, kus on rohkem

mängu, kus on sellist (.), noh selline natuke võib-olla vabam õhkkond, et laps saab, muutub julgemaks.

The teacher believed that conducting the OPC is equally as important for the teacher because it gives her the opportunity to get to know students and their language levels. In her opinion the OPC has various positive sides: a relaxed environment, game oriented activities and most importantly children get the confidence to speak in the target language without having the fear of making mistakes. Teacher B noted that the OPC can have its negative sides as well. She pointed out that some students have more knowledge of English and therefore the OPC might be boring for them as the topics are relatively simple. The teacher was of the opinion that pronouncing in English after the teacher or a tape is uncomplicated for students but understanding and writing phonemes is a troublesome part of English studies during the OPC.

Teacher B stated that in her school the OPC is conducted with "I Love English 1". She added that these materials support conducting the OPC but she has to find some extra materials as well. The interviewee explicated that in order to make learning more interesting and versatile she uses various songs, games and videos. She added that her sources for extra materials include different books, the internet and CD-s and that she uses extra materials in every lesson.

Teacher B stressed the importance of teaching pronunciation skills during the OPC which, in her opinion, is the basis of learning English at the initial stage.
"*Ma arvan, et õige häälduse õpetamine on üks kõige tähtsam asi, õigest hääldusest ju algab kõik, et pärast on väga raske õiget hääldust õpetada, kui sa alguses ei ole seda teinud.*"
For that she uses pictures and also asks students to mimic her pronunciation. Teacher B did not consider developing grammar skills a very important element of the OPC because at the initial stage there are not many grammar-related topics. Although, she added that if students make grammar mistakes, she corrects them. According to the interviewee, teaching vocabulary is also very crucial during the OPC and for that she uses realia and tasks that provide constant revision. Teacher B stated that she develops mostly speaking, listening and writing competences during the OPC. In order to do so students are given opportunities to speak and listen to each other and they are asked to write the new vocabulary. The latter should make students aware of the fact that in English the pronunciation often differs from the spelling. Teacher B added that they also read the new vocabulary. She commented:

> No ongi, et lapsed ise saavad kogu aeg rääkida, siis me ju kuulame üksteist, kuulame õpetajat, kuulame plaadi pealt. Ja kirjutame näiteks ka juba neid uusi sõnu, mida me oleme õppinud küll hääldama. Kirjutame, näitame, et kirjapilt erineb sellest ja kirjutame ka neid vihikusse läbi ja harjutame natuke ja hääldusmärke, nii et nii palju ka kirjutamist.

The teacher noted that she uses frontal, individual and pair work the most and group work the least during the OPC. She believed that frontal and individual work forms are the most effective options during the OPC. The teacher added that using pair work is not that beneficial because students do not have enough knowledge to communicate with each other.

"*Et ma arvan kindlasti see frontaalne töö on väga efektiivne, kindlasti individuaalne, sest kui juba laps tahab ise saada kinnitust sellele ja tagasisidet, kuidas tal üksinda läheb.*"

Teacher B was certain that using language games during the OPC makes the learning process more interesting while revising already learnt vocabulary. She uses some game-oriented elements in every lesson but conducts bigger games once a week. Also in order to revise learnt material, she uses songs, rhymes, poems and TPR. Teacher B was of the opinion that students enjoy games and song the most and writing words or short phrases the least during the OPC. The teacher explained that using students' mother tongue during the OPC is crucial in order to ascertain that everyone understands what has been said and therefore she uses the mother tongue quite often.

Teacher B noted that in order to conduct the OPC, the lessons have to be interesting and versatile. She explained that planning a lesson during the OPC differs from planning a lesson without the OPC at the initial stage because during the OPC teachers cannot conduct lots of independent and written tasks.

"*No kui ma tavalises tunnis saan ka planeerida sellise osa, et lapsed saavad midagi iseseisvalt teha, siis suulise eelkuruse puhul see osa on praktiliselt ikkagi väga väike, iseseisva töö osa ei ole veel eriti. Ja väga pikka kirjutamise osa.*"

Teacher B was of the opinion that planning a lesson during the OPC is rather easy for the teacher because the material is simple. She mentioned that during the OPC students are not assessed with grades, instead, they get stickers. She also praises and corrects them orally. Teacher B added that she does not conduct any written tests during the OPC.

Discussion

The present study examined how English was taught during the OPC or at the initial phase in the first school stage. The data was collected by conducting a survey among 72 teachers and two interviews. The participants of the survey and interviewees were English teachers who taught the target language at the initial phase in the first school stage.

The definition of the OPC and the positive and negative sides to it

The results of the study showed that the teachers often defined the OPC as an introductory course where students develop listening and speaking skills along with vocabulary and correct pronunciation. The findings conform to what has been pointed out in the theoretical part of the thesis. According to Estonian National Curriculum of Basic School (2011), the emphasis during English studies in the first school stage should be on developing listening and speaking skills and acquiring the basic vocabulary and correct pronunciation. It can be concluded that the participants of the survey and the interviewees followed the requirements of the national curriculum while teaching English during the OPC or at the initial stage. Conducting the OPC is suggested as during that period students start distinguishing the sounds of the speech and mimicking the teacher (Org & Vahar, 1997), which, according to the National Curriculum of Basic School (2011), develops listening and speaking competences and forms the basis of correct pronunciation. Ruutmets and Saluveer (2010) also recommend using the OPC by following the previously mentioned aspects.

The findings revealed that the teachers supported using the OPC due to the fact that it gives their students courage to start expressing themselves in a new language and that the learning process is very game-oriented. As young learners do not understand the value of learning a foreign language, games often provide the motivational factor for them (Bedson & Lewis, 1999) as well as lots of communicative practice (Larsen-Freeman, 2000). Although Pinter (2006) does not refer to the term "OPC", she is of the opinion that introducing English as a foreign language to young learners awakens their curiosity and enthusiasm about language learning. Similar ideas were also brought out both in the survey and the interviews.

The findings of the study pointed out that there are but a few negative sides to the OPC, one being that reading and writing skills might be difficult to develop afterwards, because during the OPC the attention is on developing other language skills. The topic-related literature does not bring out such points but, for example, Brewster et al. (2002) believe that teaching English to young learners at the initial stage might have its obstacles because of the

attributes children possess that differ from the attributes of older learners. According to them, young learners get bored and distracted easily and most importantly, they are still developing their literacy in their first language. The results of the survey and the interviews indicated that the OPC might be boring and tedious for students because of the simplicity of the course, not because of the qualities that children have. Ellis (2008) explains that older students can be more efficient as language learners because they do better where grammar and vocabulary are concerned since they have mastered the necessary knowledge in their first language. The teachers did not consider the lack of the aforementioned skills to be a negative side to the OPC.

General principles while teaching English during the OPC or at the initial stage: their importance and frequency of use

   Teaching English at the initial stage either with or without the OPC is based on several principles – and techniques to put the principles into practice. The results of the study emphasised the importance of listening skills, but the development of correct pronunciation was considered even more crucial. To support the former, Pinter (2006) explains that young beginners should have lots of opportunities to listen to the target language and the necessary input will lead to the development of speaking skills which, in turn, culminates with producing correct pronunciation. The findings demonstrated that both teaching correct pronunciation and developing listening skills were valued very important and used frequently. The importance of developing listening skills was indicated by the frequent use of giving instructions in English.

   TPR – a method where teachers give out commands in the target language and students have to act accordingly – has been found useful in teaching English at the initial stage (Krashen & Terrell, 1988), especially for developing listening skills among young learners. Surprisingly, the results of the research showed that TPR was not among the most popular or frequently used principles during the OPC or at the initial stage. One of the interviewees even explained that she would use TPR with older students as it is active in nature and it would be difficult to control students.

   It appeared from the results that the development of speaking skills was also considered very important during the OPC or at the initial stage compared to the other principles. Brewster et al. (2002) state that, although at the initial stage children learn mostly formulaic language, they will eventually learn how to communicate in English. According to the results, the teachers also developed speaking skills frequently in their lessons. It can be assumed that

during the OPC the teachers start with developing listening skills which results in the development of speaking skills and correct pronunciation. This assumption coincides with how Pinter (2006) has described it as a true integration of the necessary language skills at the initial stage of English studies.

The results of the research brought out the least appreciated principles during the OPC or at the initial stage – developing grammar, writing and reading skills. These findings clearly support the nature of the OPC. Pinter (2006) has written – it would be controversial to teach reading, writing and grammar to learners who do not have these skills developed in their native language. Nevertheless, Pinter (ibid.) adds that students are often eager to read and write in the target language because it reinforces the learnt material and gives them a sense of achievement. Perhaps this is the reason why the results of the empirical study showed that reading and writing were not the least frequently used principles. It can be assumed that the teachers develop reading, writing and grammar with the purpose of easing the transition from the OPC or the initial stage to the next stage where the development of all the four language skills is required. Quite surprisingly, using fairy tales, arts and crafts and circle time activities ranked as the principles applied the least often and they were also not very highly appreciated. The topic-related literature, on the other hand, suggests using all these principles during the initial stage of English studies. There can be various explanations as to why the teachers did not often use the aforementioned principles. For example, the teachers might not have the necessary materials to conduct arts and crafts activities. In terms of using fairy tales, it can be quite time-consuming to adapt the original fairy tales students' language level.

It was assumed that the teachers with more work experience (Group 2) considered developing listening and speaking skills more important than the teachers with less work experience (Group 1). It appeared that there were no significant differences between the two groups concerning the development of listening skills. The results indicated that the teachers with less work experience rated developing speaking skills more important than the teachers with more work experience, which does not verify the aforementioned assumption. Teachers with less work experience may feel that they need to rely on some general principles, therefore it is possible they follow the national curriculum more carefully and thus they value the principles brought out in the curriculum more. It was also hypothesised that Group 2 teachers put listening and speaking oriented principles into practice more frequently than Group 1 teachers. The results showed that the teachers with more work experience used developing vocabulary, TPR-related activities and fairy tales more frequently than the teachers with less work experience, which indirectly confirmed the previous supposition as

using TPR-related activities and fairy tales can, but do not necessarily have to be connected with developing speaking and listening skills. Therefore, it is possible that Group 2 teachers used them more frequently in order to develop the aforementioned principles.

Furthermore, the results brought out the statistical correlations between the most/least important general principles and their frequency of use. For example, it appeared that there was a very weak negative correlation with regard to developing correct pronunciation, which indicated that whilst improving pronunciation was considered important, its frequency of use was slightly lower, albeit the correlation was too small to be statistically meaningful. In addition to that, the results showed that there was a weak positive correlation with regard to developing listening skills and a moderate positive correlation in connection with developing speaking skills, which allowed for the assumption that when developing listening and speaking skills were considered important, they were frequently used. The findings supported the nature of teaching English during the OPC or at the initial stage.

Language skills related techniques while teaching English during the OPC or at the initial stage: their frequency of use

Additionally, the results presented the most frequently applied techniques connected to the development of the language skills. The empirical evidence derived from the study demonstrated that the most frequently used techniques during the OPC or at the initial stage were all related to developing listening and speaking skills. The result conforms to the prediction made before the study. The findings suggested that listening to the teachers was one of the main techniques at the initial stage. Both of the interviewees also stated that teacher-talk is inevitable during the OPC. Krashen and Terrell (1988) support this technique by explaining that during English studies at the initial stage students often go through a period during which they are not producing the language but are still learning while receiving lots of comprehensible input. This explains why listening to the teacher has such a significant role in foreign language learning at the initial stage. Furthermore, the participants in the survey and the interviewees brought out that they often let students listen to each other, which can take place when students have received the input and are ready to communicate with one another. Another frequently used technique turned out to be choral repetition. According to Linse (2005), choral response is a suitable choice for introducing new language patterns to children. The frequent use of the technique can be explained by the fact that choral repetition gives students time to practise the learnt material in a less intimidating way than having to use the knowledge individually from the start.

The results of the research presented that the least frequently used techniques were mostly related to writing skills. For example, it appeared that the teachers did not often ask students to write stories or simple sentences during the OPC or at the initial stage. In addition to that, the findings indicated that both listening to a native speaker and listening to video material found rare use. It can be assumed that the teachers do not have possibilities to apply the techniques or that they consider them too challenging for beginners. Surprisingly, the results showed that the teachers used writing letters and words more often than writing phonemes. According to Ruutmets and Saluveer (2010), the latter helps students understand the pronunciation of the new language. Also, one of the widely used English textbooks in Estonia "Step by Step. Starter" (Peets & Tork-Sarapuu, 2003) focuses on writing phonemes, instead of writing words. Phillips (1993) states that often teachers ask younger learners to write words or phrases to practise their handwriting and simple written tasks should help to reflect the learnt material. Most of the reading based techniques were seldom used, but the results of the research brought out that reading words was used rather often. It is reasonable to believe that simple words and phrases and how to read and write them are taught in order to make language acquisition simpler and more effective for students in the next stages.

It was speculated that Group 2 teachers use different listening and speaking techniques more frequently than Group 1 teachers. The results showed that there was a statistically significant difference with regard to the category consisting of speaking-related techniques, with teachers with more experience using the techniques more often. As for single speaking techniques it appeared that the teachers with more work experience used choral repetition and role-play activities more frequently than the teachers with less work experience, which partially proves the aforementioned speculation because there were no statistically significant differences with regard to the category consisting of listening-related techniques. As speaking-related techniques, during which learners are often active, can be difficult to conduct at the initial stage, it is possible that teachers with more work experience know how to control children more than teachers with less work experience. In terms of listening-related techniques, it is a supposable result that all the teachers used them frequently at the initial stage since the importance of developing listening skills is equally understood by everybody.

Conclusion

According to Estonian National Curriculum of Basic School (2011), young learners' initial studies of English should start with the development of listening and speaking skills along with vocabulary and correct pronunciation. Because of that, it is recommended to conduct the

OPC (Org & Vahar, 1997; Ruutmets & Saluveer, 2010) which helps to introduce language skills to students gradually. All in all, the results of the empirical study and the interviews indicated that the teachers were aware of the nature of the OPC and used the necessary principles and techniques to teach English to young learners in the first school stage.

Limitations to and application of the study

There were some limitations to this study. Firstly, as there were no previous studies on the subject, the author had no research results/information to rely on when preparing the study. Secondly, the sample of the teachers who participated in the survey could have been larger in order to better generalise the results. Thirdly, it was initially planned to compare the opinions of the teachers who conducted the OPC with the teachers who did not. Since there were too few of the latter, the comparison between the two groups would have been unreliable. Furthermore, due to the anonymity of the survey, the author of the thesis was neither able to find nor interview a teacher who did not conduct the OPC, although the results of the empirical study showed that there were some participants who would have qualified. The insights of the teacher who did not conduct the OPC would have helped to present a more detailed overview on how English is taught at the initial phase in the first school stage. Lastly, there were not many sources which specifically referred to the term "OPC" and wrote about how to teach during the OPC. Instead, most of the topic-related literature described generally how young learners acquired English as a foreign language.

It can be hoped that the present study raises awareness of the importance of the OPC or English studies at the initial stage even more. Considering the fact that there was no previous research on the topic of the OPC in Estonia, the current thesis can encourage further research in the field. For example, the further research could compare teachers who conduct the OPC with teachers who do not.

Declaration of authenticity

I hereby confirm that the present thesis has been written independently and by myself. It complies with the regulations of the Institute of Education of Tartu University and meets the accepted standards with regard to originality and quality.

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Appendix 1. Questionnaire for Teachers

Lugupeetud inglise keele õpetaja!

Tere! Olen Ann Parbus, Tartu Ülikooli sotsiaal- ja haridusteaduskonna magistriastme teise aasta tudeng. Kirjutan enda lõputööd teemal „Inglise keele õpetamine algetapil esimese kooliastme õpilastele, kasutades suulise eelkursuse põhimõtteid" ning seoses sellega oleks ka Teie abi vaja. Palun vastake lühidalt allolevatele küsimustele, mis puudutavad inglise keelt algetapil õppivaid I kooliastme õpilasi. Küsimustele vastates palun mõelge õpilastele, kes õpivad inglise keelt esimest aastat. Vastamisel valige sobiv variant või kirjutage vastus. Teie isik jääb anonüümseks.

Sugu:

   a) Mees   b) Naine

1. **Kui kaua Te olete inglise keelt õpetanud I kooliastmes?**

   _____

2. **Milline on Teie ettevalmistus inglise keele õpetamiseks?**

   _____

3. **Millises klassis õpetate inglise keelt kui võõrkeelt algetapil I kooliastmes?**

   a) Tavaklassis   b) Süvaklassis   c) Nii tava- kui ka süvaklassis

4. **Palun defineerige mõistet „suuline eelkursus".**

   _____

5. **Kas viite läbi suulist eelkursust I kooliastmes inglise keele õpetamisel?**

    a) Jah   b) Ei

6. **Kui viite läbi suulist eelkursust, siis millises mahus Te seda teete?**

   a) Üks veerand   b) Pool aastat   c) Terve aasta   d) Muu (täpsustage)

7. **Kas arvate, et suulist eelkursust on vaja rakendada I kooliastme inglise keele õpetamisel?**

   a) Jah   b) Ei

8. **Palun põhjendage enda vastust.**

   _____

   Juhul, kui te suulist eelkursust läbi ei vii, siis palun liikuge 11. küsimuse juurde.

9. **Mis on teie arvates suulise eelkursuse positiivsed küljed õpilaste jaoks?**

   _____

10. **Mis on teie arvates suulise eelkursuse negatiivsed küljed õpilaste jaoks?**

    _____

11. **Milliseid õppematerjale kasutate suulise eelkursuse läbiviimisel? Juhul, kui te suulist eelkursust läbi ei vii, siis milliseid õppematerjale kasutate inglise keele õpetamisel I kooliastme algetapil õppivatele lastele? Kui kasutate õppekomplekti (õpik ja töövihik), siis palun täpsustage, millist.**

    _____

12. **Kas kasutate ka lisamaterjale?**

    a) Jah   b) Ei

13. **Kui jah, siis milliseid?**

    _____

14. **Kui oluliseks hindate järgmiste variantide kasutamist suulise eelkursuse raames? Juhul, kui te suulist eelkursust ei rakenda, siis kui oluliseks hindate variante inglise keele õpetamisel algetapil I kooliastmes?**

		Väga oluline	Oluline	Ei oska öelda	Vähe-oluline	Eba-oluline
1.	Kuulamisoskuse arendamine					
2.	Kõnelemisoskuse arendamine					
3.	Lugemisoskuse arendamine					
4.	Kirjutamisoskuse arendamine					
5.	Häälduse arendamine					
6.	Grammatika arendamine					
7.	Sõnavara arendamine					
8.	Frontaalse töö kasutamine					
9.	Individuaalse töö kasutamine					
10.	Paaris – või grupitöö kasutamine					
11.	Ingliskeelsete töökäskude kasutamine					
12.	Käsutäitmismeetodi (nn kuula ja korda tegevuste) kasutamine					
13.	Laulude, riimide ja salmide kasutamine					
14.	(Muinas)juttude kasutamine					

15.	Televiisori ja arvuti kasutamine (nt filmide või videote näitamine)					
16.	Kunsti- ja käsitöötegevuste kasutamine					
17.	Ringis toimuvate tegevuste kasutamine					
18.	Keelemängude kasutamine					

15. Kui sageli kasutate järgmiseid variante suulise eelkursuse raames? Juhul, kui Te suulist eelkursust ei rakenda, siis kui tihti kasutate järgmisi variante inglise keele õpetamisel algetapil I kooliastmes?

		Väga sageli (iga tund)	Sageli (kord nädalas)	Mõnikord (kord kuus)	Harva (kord veerandis)	Mitte kunagi
1.	Kuulamisoskuse arendamine					
2.	Kõnelemisoskuse arendamine					
3.	Lugemisoskuse arendamine					
4.	Kirjutamisoskuse arendamine					
5.	Häälduse arendamine					
6.	Grammatika arendamine					
7.	Sõnavara arendamine					
8.	Frontaalse töö kasutamine					
9.	Individuaalse töö kasutamine					
10.	Paaris – või grupitöö kasutamine					
11.	Ingliskeelsete töökäskude kasutamine					
12.	Käsutäitmismeetodi (nn kuula ja korda tegevuste) kasutamine					
13.	Laulude, riimide ja salmide kasutamine					
14.	(Muinas)juttude kasutamine					
15.	Televiisori ja arvuti kasutamine (nt filmide või videote näitamine)					
16.	Kunsti- ja käsitöötegevuste kasutamine					
17.	Ringis toimuvate tegevuste kasutamine					
18.	Keelemängude kasutamine					

16. Kui sageli kasutate järgmisi variante erinevate osaoskuste arendamiseks suulisel eelkursusel? Juhul, kui Te suulist eelkursust ei rakenda, siis kui sageli kasutate variante inglise keele õpetamisel algetapil I kooliastmes?

		Iga tund	Kord nädalas	Kord kuus	Kord veerandis	Mitte kunagi
1.	Kooris kordamine					
2.	Individuaalne kordamine					
3.	Õpetaja kuulamine					
4.	Videomaterjali kuulamine					
5.	Jutustamine					
6.	Kaasõpilaste kuulamine					
7.	Tähtede kirjutamine					
8.	Sõnade lugemine					
9.	Dialoogide lugemine					
10.	Rollimängu tegemine					
11.	Lihtlausete kirjutamine					
12.	Häälikumärkide kirjutamine					
13.	Luuletuste ja laulude lugemine					
14.	Lühidialoogide esitamine					
15.	CD-lt või kassetilt kuulamine					
16.	Küsimuste küsimine ja vastamine					
17.	Inglise keelt emakeelena rääkiva inimese kuulamine					
18.	Lihtlausete (sh tööjuhendite) lugemine					
19.	Kirjalike harjutuste tegemine (nt lünkharjutused)					
20.	Lühikeste jutukeste kirjutamine					
21.	Tähthaaval lugemine					
22.	Sõnade kirjutamine					

17. Kui viite suulist eelkursust läbi nii inglise keele tava- kui ka eriklassis, siis kas Teie poolt õpetatavates tavaklassides ja inglise keele eriklassides erineb suulise eelkursuse läbiviimine?
a) Jah   b) Ei   c) Ei rakenda suulist eelkursust

18. Kui jah, siis palun selgitage, mis osas.

_____

19. Kas olete nõus „kriitilise perioodi" hüpoteesiga, mis väidab, et õpilased, kes alustavad võõrkeele õpingutega enne 11 eluaastat, suudavad paremini keelt omandada, kui vanemad õpilased?

a) Jah   b) Ei

20. Palun põhjendage enda vastust.

_____

21. Millal peaks Teie arvates õpilane alustama inglise keele kui võõrkeele õpingutega?

_____

22. Kas teie koolis on kokku lepitud suulise eelkursuse raames rakendatavate põhimõtete osas?

a) Jah   b) Ei

23. Kui jah, siis nimetage kõige olulisemad põhimõtted, mille osas on kokku lepitud?

_____

Aitäh!

Küsitluse koostaja kontaktandmed: annparbus@gmail.com

Appendix 2. Interview questions

Sissejuhatus

1. Kui kaua olete inglise keelt õpetanud I kooliastmes algetapil?
2. Millises klassis õpetate praegu inglise keelt algetapil I kooliastmes?
3. Kas õpetate inglise keelt algetapil I kooliastmes nii süva- kui tavaklassis?
4. Kas viite läbi suulist eelkursust I kooliastmes inglise keele õpetamisel?

Mõiste ja põhimõtted

5. Palun selgitage oma arusaama suulisest eelkursusest.
6. Millised on peamised põhimõtted, millest te lähtute suulise eelkursuse läbiviimisel?
7. Kas teie koolis on kokku lepitud suulise eelkursuse raames rakendatavate põhimõtete osas? Kui jah, siis millised need põhimõtted on? Kas olete rahul kokku lepitud põhimõtetega? Palun põhjendage.
8. Kas teie meelest tuleb/tuleks ühiste rakendatavate põhimõtete loomine kasuks või kahjuks? Palun põhjendage.
9. Kas teie meelest on inglise keele õpetamisel suulise eelkursuse ajal tava- ja süvaklassides mingeid põhimõttelisi erinevusi? Kui jah, siis millised need on?

Maht ja kestus

10. Kas Teie meelest on vaja suulist eelkursust läbi viia? Palun põhjendage enda vastust
11. Millises mahus viite te suulist eelkursust praegu läbi?
12. Kui kaua peaks suuline eelkursus kestma? Palun põhjendage enda vastust.

Olulisus. Positiivsed ja negavtiivsed küljed

13. Kui oluliseks hindate suulist eelkursust õpilaste jaoks / õpetaja jaoks? Palun põhjendage enda vastust.
14. Mis on teie arvates suulise eelkursuse positiivsed küljed õpilaste jaoks?
15. Mis on teie arvates suulise eelkursuse negatiivsed küljed õpilaste jaoks?
16. Mis on suulise eelkursuse juures õpilastele lihtne/raske?

Õppematerjalid

17. Milliseid õppematerjale kasutate suulise eelkursuse läbiviimisel?

18. Kuidas valitud õppematerjalid toetavad suulise eelkursuse läbiviimist? Palun põhjendage.

19. Milliseid lisamaterjale kasutate suulise eelkursuse õpetamiseks?

20. Mis põhjusel te kasutate lisamaterjale?

21. Kui palju te kasutate lisamaterjale ning kust te neid leiate?

Tegevused ja võtted suulise eelkursuse ajal

22. Kui oluliseks peate õige häälduse õpetamist suulise eelkursuse ajal?

23. Milliseid võtteid te selleks kasutate?

24. Kui oluliseks peate grammatika õpetamist suulise eelkursuse ajal?

25. Milliseid võtteid te selleks kasutate?

26. Kui oluliseks peate sõnavara õpetamist suulise eelkursuse ajal?

27. Milliseid võtteid te selleks kasutate?

28. Milliseid osaoskusi arendate suulise eelkursuse ajal?

29. Milliseid võtteid kasutate osaoskuste arendamiseks? (Küsida nende osaoskuste kohta, mida õpetaja eelnevas küsimuses mainib.)

30. Kas ja kuidas valmistate lapsi ette lugemiseks ja kirjutamiseks? (Juhul, kui 7. ja 8. küsimuses sellest juttu ei olnud.)

31. Milliseid töövorme (frontaalne, individuaalne, paaris- ja rühmatöö) kasutate suulise eelkursuse ajal?

32. Milliseks hindate erinevate töövormide efektiivsust suulise eelkursuse ajal? Palun põhjendage.

33. Mis eesmärgil ja kui sageli kasutate keelemänge?

34. Mis eesmärgil ja kui sageli kasutate laule/riime/salme?

35. Mis eesmärgil ja kui sageli kasutate käsutäitmismeetodit („listen and do" tüüpi tegevusi)?

36. Millised tegevused on lastele kõige meelepärasemad?

37. Millised tegevused valmistavad neile kõige rohkem raskusi?

38. Kui palju peaks kasutama emakeelt suulise eelkursuse ajal? Palun põhjendage.

39. Kui palju kasutate teie emakeelt suulise eelkursuse ajal? Palun põhjendage.

Tunni planeerimine ja õpilaste hindamine

40. Millistest põhimõtetest lähtute suulise eelkursuse tunni planeerimisel?

41. Kas ja kuidas erineb suulise eelkursuse inglise keele tunni planeerimine tavalise inglise keele tunni planeerimisest I kooliastmes algetapil?

42. Kas suulise eelkursuse tunni planeerimine on õpetajate jaoks lihtsam või raskem? Palun põhjendage.

43. Mida ja kuidas (hinded, kleepsud, suuline kiitus/parandus vms) hindate suulise eelkursuse ajal?

44. Kas viite läbi hindelisi töid (tunnikontrollid, kontrolltööd) suulise eelkursuse ajal? Kui jah, siis kui sageli?

Appendix 3. The importance of general principles during the OPC or at the initial stage based on teachers' opinions

	Very important N %	Important N %	Not very important N %	Not important N %	Don't know N %
1. Developing listening skills	63 87.5	9 12.5	0 0	0 0	0 0
2. Developing speaking skills	54 75	15 20.8	1 1.4	0 0	2 2.8
3. Developing reading skills	21 29.6	25 35.2	20 28.2	2 2.8	3 4.2
4. Developing writing skills	5 7	24 33.8	32 45.1	8 11.3	2 2.8
5. Developing correct pronunciation	65 90.3	6 8.3	1 1.4	0 0	0 0
6. Developing grammar	2 2.8	18 25.4	37 52.1	11 15.5	3 4.2
7. Developing vocabulary	45 62.5	25 34.7	2 2.8	0 0	0 0
8. Using frontal work	32 45.1	29 40.8	3 4.2	0 0	7 9.9
9. Using individual work	23 32.9	34 48.6	9 12.9	0 0	4 5.7
10. Using pair or group work	29 40.8	35 49.3	6 8.5	0 0	1 1.4
11. Using instructions in English	37 51.4	32 44.4	0 0	0 0	3 4.2
12. Using TPR	39 54.9	29 40.8	0 0	0 0	3 4.2
13. Using songs, rhymes, chants	54 75	18 25	0 0	0 0	0 0
14. Using fairy tales	12 17.1	22 31.4	12 17.1	2 2.9	22 31.4
15. Using TV and computer	11 15.5	29 40.8	10 14.1	2 2.8	19 26.8
16. Using arts and crafts	9 12.9	30 42.9	11 15.7	1 1.4	19 27.1
17. Using circle time	12 16.9	35 49.3	9 12.7	0 0	15 21.1
18. Using language games	45 62.5	26 36.1	1 1.4	0 0	0 0

Note. N – number of participants, % - percentage among participants.

Appendix 4. The frequency of using general principles during the OPC or at the initial stage

	Very often N %	Often N %	Sometimes N %	Rarely N %	Never N %
1. Developing listening skills	60 *83.3*	12 *16.7*	0 *0*	0 *0*	0 *0*
2. Developing speaking skills	65 *90.3*	5 *6.9*	2 *2.8*	0 *0*	0 *0*
3. Developing reading skills	39 *55.7*	17 *24.3*	8 *11.4*	3 *4.3*	3 *4.3*
4. Developing writing skills	24 *34.3*	27 *38.6*	8 *11.4*	4 *5.7*	7 *10*
5. Developing correct pronunciation	66 *91.7*	6 *8.3*	0 *0*	0 *0*	0 *0*
6. Developing grammar	15 *21.4*	29 *41.4*	12 *17.1*	8 *11.4*	6 *8.6*
7. Developing vocabulary	68 *94.4*	4 *5.6*	0 *0*	0 *0*	0 *0*
8. Using frontal work	56 *78.9*	15 *21.1*	0 *0*	0 *0*	0 *0*
9. Using individual work	46 *64.8*	20 *28.2*	5 *7.0*	0 *0*	0 *0*
10. Using pair or group work	33 *46.5*	32 *45.1*	5 *7*	1 *1.4*	0 *0*
11. Using instructions in English	70 *97.2*	2 *2.8*	0 *0*	0 *0*	0 *0*
12. Using TPR	53 *73.6*	15 *20.8*	4 *5.6*	0 *0*	0 *0*
13. Using songs, rhymes, chants	32 *44.4*	30 *41.7*	7 *9.7*	3 *4.2*	0 *0*
14. Using fairy tales	0 *0*	13 *18.3*	26 *36.6*	18 *25.4*	14 *19.7*
15. Using TV and computer	1 *1.4*	22 *31*	18 *25.4*	22 *31*	8 *11.3*
16. Using arts and crafts	2 *2.8*	17 *23.9*	28 *39.4*	23 *32.4*	1 *1.4*
17. Using circle time	9 *12.7*	19 *26.8*	24 *33.8*	7 *9.9*	12 *16.9*
18. Using language games	27 *37.5*	34 *47.2*	8 *11.1*	3 *4.2*	0 *0*

Note. N – number of participants, % - percentage among participants.

Appendix 5. The frequency of using techniques during the OPC or at the initial stage

	Very often N %	Often N %	Sometimes N %	Rarely N %	Never N %
1. Choral repetition	61 / 84.7	11 / 15.3	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0
2. Individual repetition	56 / 77.8	13 / 18.1	3 / 4.2	0 / 0	0 / 0
3. Listening to the teacher	71 / 98.6	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	1 / 1.4
4. Listening to the video material	3 / 4.2	26 / 36.6	23 / 32.4	9 / 12.7	10 / 14.1
5. Storytelling	8 / 11.4	23 / 32.9	23 / 32.9	5 / 7.1	11 / 15.7
6. Listening to other students	60 / 83.3	10 / 13.9	2 / 2.8	0 / 0	0 / 0
7. Writing letters	34 / 49.3	22 / 31.9	3 / 4.3	5 / 7.2	5 / 7.2
8. Reading words	47 / 66.2	14 / 19.7	6 / 8.5	2 / 2.8	2 / 2.8
9. Reading dialogues	14 / 20	36 / 51.4	10 / 14.3	5 / 7.1	5 / 7.1
10. Conducting role play activities	10 / 14.1	34 / 47.9	17 / 23.9	7 / 9.9	3 / 4.2
11. Writing simple sentences	16 / 22.5	23 / 32.4	9 / 12.7	10 / 14.1	13 / 18.3
12. Writing phonemes	25 / 35.2	19 / 26.8	5 / 7.0	3 / 4.2	19 / 26.8
13. Reading poems and songs	21 / 29.2	29 / 40.3	17 / 23.6	3 / 4.2	2 / 2.8
14. Reciting short dialogues	18 / 25	36 / 50	13 / 18.1	3 / 4.2	2 / 2.8
15. Listening to the CD or tape	47 / 65.3	23 / 31.9	1 / 1.4	1 / 1.4	0 / 0
16. Asking and answering questions	51 / 71.8	16 / 22.5	2 / 2.8	0 / 0	2 / 2.8
17. Listening to a native speaker	15 / 21.1	8 / 11.3	12 / 16.9	7 / 9.9	29 / 40.8
18. Reading simple sentences (e.g. instructions)	27 / 38	26 / 36.6	8 / 11.3	2 / 2.8	8 / 11.3
19. Doing written tasks (e.g. gap-fill exercises)	13 / 18.3	28 / 39.4	9 / 12.7	6 / 8.5	15 / 21.1
20. Writing short stories	1 / 1.4	6 / 8.5	19 / 26.8	12 / 16.9	33 / 46.5
21. Spelling	19 / 26.8	25 / 35.2	14 / 19.7	3 / 4.2	10 / 14.1
22. Writing words	27 / 38.6	23 / 32.9	7 / 10	5 / 7.1	8 / 11.4

Note. N – number of participants, % - percentage among participants.

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                              (*lõputöö pealkiri*)

mille juhendaja on Kristel Ruutmets,
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