

Analysing Finnish primary EFL textbooks through a Bangladeshi lens

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ABSTRACT

A closer examination of Finland's exceptional educational achievement reveals that the country's education system bears fruit from a concerted effort that places a premium on textbooks. With Bangladesh's predominance of textbook-based methods, their Finnish counterparts appear critical in determining how textbooks can be bettered in offering young learners a more effective teaching-learning experience. This qualitative study applied deductive content analysis to examine five Finnish primary English as a foreign language (EFL) textbooks through a Bangladeshi lens. The analysis found that the textbooks in Finland used their native language, Finnish, to impart narrative-driven multimodal action-based English content as well as exercises. A highly visually rich textbook design accommodatively allowed different English learning approaches to merge with the Finnish teachers' autonomous method of instruction. Though the size of the content and exercises are upwardly voluminous, they are presented in a way that comes across as very appealing to the children. The study also advises avenues Bangladeshi EFL textbooks should explore.

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Introduction

Bangladesh is steadily transfiguring into a developed country (Wassener, 2012; Bhattacharya, 2019), while its education front is also making strides, such as the marked increase in female enrolment (Ahmad, 2021) and a literacy rate of 75.2% (Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, 2020), as opposed to around 17% in 1970 (Jamal, 2021). However, the education system still relies heavily on textbooks, and government-sanctioned textbooks such as the ones developed by National Curriculum and Textbook Board (NCTB) are the staple of the primary, secondary and higher secondary teaching-learning practices (Chowdhury & Sarkar, 2018; Smart & Jagannathan, 2018). Apart from the fact that they suffer from various issues (Roshid et al., 2019), this is quite explorative and begs a more definitive and deeper insight into the Bangladeshi textbooks' quality and efficacy. If textbooks are to be relied on, it goes without saying that good textbooks are the best palliative to employ.

Discussion about textbooks' relevance in the present-day educational discourse is somewhat divided (Ra & Jagannathan, 2018). Microsoft co-founder and philanthropist Bill Gates contends that textbooks are quickly becoming obsolete and that they are a "pretty limited way to learn something" (Gates & Gates, 2019, para. 82). Contrarily, Tim Oates, regarded as one of the world's top authorities on curriculum, upholds that high-quality textbooks are highly relevant today and are an essential component of the classroom, providing assistance for both students and instructors, stating:

High quality textbooks are not antithetical to high quality pedagogy – they are supportive of sensitive and effective approaches to high attainment, high equity and high enjoyment of learning. ... A supply of high quality textbooks may provide considerable support to both teachers and pupils. (Oates, 2014, pp. 19-20)

In the context of Bangladesh, often, textbooks are the sole source of teaching-learning material available to schoolchildren, their families, and educational institutions (Munir, 2010; Roshid et al., 2019). Therefore, amid the existing Bangladeshi acceptance and understanding of textbooks as a vital teaching-learning material, it can be posited that Oates's (2014) point about excellent textbooks needs to be foregrounded.

Moreover, a substantial number of studies maintain that "good" primary textbooks work wonders — they make teaching-learning better and enjoyable for the children (Bader & Pearce, 2013; Hussain, Hossain, & Rahman, 2018; Ivić et al., 2013; Loveridge et al., 1970; Schauer, 2019; Smart & Jagannathan, 2018). When children enjoy learning, the experience leaves a lasting positive impression that influences well into their adult lives (Pekrun et al., 2002; Trodd & Dickerson, 2018). In that way, textbooks in the context of Bangladesh can be considered a fundamental cornerstone in enabling young learners to become kind, well-informed and confident. This has to be realised with the sense in mind that textbooks for developing countries with all the stumbling blocks have a lot of catching up to do, compared to their developed counterparts (UNESCO, 2016).

Against this backdrop, Finland's textbooks appear as a shining example to appreciate, as

evident by its impressive education system that has excelled in international education rankings such as the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) year after year (Sahlberg, 2021; Schatz et al., 2015). Curiously, Finland's teaching-learning practices exhibit a very high-level textbook use making textbooks their major instructional material (Oates, 2014). As referred to earlier, this practice matches the Bangladeshi system. Additionally, Finnish textbooks, especially its primary English as a foreign language (EFL) textbooks, have been highly researched in terms of their standing in contrast with parallels from other countries (Ban & Oyabu, 2018; Ito, 2006, 2012; Tergujeff, 2010). Even in surprisingly anomalous conditions, Finnish textbooks were found to be faring well. For example, Yleisradio Oy (2014) accounts that after utilising Finnish mathematics textbooks, primary school children in a school in central Italy outperformed their peers in arithmetic aptitude.

Another perspective is while the importance of EFL textbooks for dual or multiple language learners is undoubted (Díaz-Rico, 2012), how language textbooks should be developed for such learners or how it adds to the whole picture in the context of these learners' engagement as well as language acquisition or learning has been insufficiently researched. The primary EFL textbooks in Finland are developed for dual or multiple language learners, meaning they centre on Finnish children in an EFL context, and the same is valid for Bangladeshi children who learn English along with Bangla (Wright et al., 2015). By investigating primary English textbooks in Finland and identifying what makes them such successful teaching-learning material for dual language learners, Bangladeshi primary English textbooks can be contextually juxtaposed, and an understanding of how to improve them can be developed.

Finland's foreign language education apparatus is also pertinent here. At variance from Bangladesh's straightforward design, where English is obligatorily studied alongside Bangla from grade one through grade twelve (Chowdhury, 2010), Finland offers within a unitary structure four different pathways — two are required while the other two are optional — of foreign language learning in its compulsory basic education stage that is for seven to 16 years olds (Inha, 2018). The pathways operate through four language curricula, namely A1, A2, B1, and B2.

According to its constitution, Finland's national languages are Finnish and Swedish (Ministry of Justice, Finland, 2019). In light of this, as detailed by Finnish National Agency for Education (2019), the compulsory A1 curriculum offers English or, in the case of Swedish-speaking Finns, Finnish to learn. Starting in 2020, A1 commences in the spring semester of grade one (before 2020, it used to start in the third grade). French, German, or Russian (or English in the case of Swedish speakers) are typically included in A2, which is an optional language that begins most commonly in grades four to five. B1 is the second required curriculum, and it starts in the sixth grade. It is typically the second national language, Swedish or Finnish, unless the student has already studied it as part of the A1 or A2 curriculum. Ultimately, B2 is an optional foreign language that may be taken starting in grades seven to nine. When it comes to foreign language introduction and instruction in Finnish basic education, there is some difference across schools in terms of how, when, and to what degree foreign languages

are taught. Inha (2018) outlines,

... the Finnish education system provides its pupils with a language repertoire of at least three languages: the mother tongue, the second national language, and one other foreign language, which is usually English. Almost 80% of Finns keep to these three languages. (p. 2)

This multilayered approach to foreign languages is exemplary and not summarily planned — Finland’s multilingual learning approach visions plurilingualism’s criticalness in the increasingly globalised world (Saarinen, 2020). The part about actively participating in the globalised era is also felt by Bangladesh (Hasina, 2019). Keeping that parallel in mind, the effectiveness with which Finnish textbooks contribute to the realisation of the Finnish goal may be something from which Bangladeshi textbooks may learn.

Methodology

This qualitative document analysis research (Asdal & Reinertsen, 2021; Beaudry & Miller, 2016; Gross, 2018) explored, through a Bangladeshi lens, the discernible qualities found in the Finnish primary English language textbooks to answer the overarching question, “What are the characteristics in the Finnish primary English language textbooks to stand out?”. Identifying documents analysis research as a “viable independent research method”, Gross (2018) pronounces,

Document analysis is a form of qualitative research that uses a systematic procedure to analyse documentary evidence and answer specific research questions. Similar to other methods of analysis in qualitative research, document analysis requires repeated review, examination, and interpretation of the data in order to gain meaning and empirical knowledge of the construct being studied. (p. 545)

The study employed deductive content analysis (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008; Hanington & Martin, 2019) to analyse the textbooks. Elo & Kyngäs (2008) explicated that “deductive content analysis is used when the structure of the analysis is operationalised on the basis of previous knowledge”. For the course of the study, along with the researchers’ prior understanding of primary textbooks, this knowledge is informed by Ito’s (2012) observations about English language textbooks in Finland as well as Richards’s (2001) understanding of textbooks in a language education programme.

The study used a Bangladeshi lens to steer its analysis, where the lens is defined as a construct of “preconceived concepts”, as viewed by Glaser (as cited in Stebbins, 2008, p. 326). This lens was informed by the researchers’ preceding scientific enquiries into primary textbooks in Bangladesh (Hussain, Hossain, & Sadek, 2017; Hussain, Hossain, & Rahman, 2018) as well as the current primary English textbooks NCTB offers and, in several instances, induced a juxtaposition with their Finnish counterparts. However, the study does not purport to be a comparative study.

The study reviewed five Finnish primary English language textbooks: *Come With Me! 1* and *Come With Me! 3* from the “*Come With Me*” series (Harjula et al., 2021), as well as from

the “Go for It!” series, Go for It! 3, Go for It! 5, and Go for It! 6 (Kanervo et al., 2021). The number value 1, 3, 5 or 6 relates to the grade level for which the textbook is intended. It should be noted that the textbooks in Finland follow the Finnish national core curriculum in essence (Keegan, 2020) and are not developed by a state-run agency (Ito, 2012), as opposed to the practice in Bangladesh (Karim, 2020). Finnish National Agency for Education (2018, pp. 12-13) reveals that teachers in Finland have “pedagogical autonomy” and that they are free to choose “the methods of teaching as well as textbooks and materials”. Resultantly, several publishers independently develop EFL textbooks, among which Sanoma Pro Oy and Kustannusosakeyhtiö Otava are the most extensive (Hähn, 2017). The textbooks are typically accompanied by corresponding workbooks as well as multimedia content to facilitate children’s multimodal learning, as signified by Kumpulainen and Sefton-Green (2019, p. 9), who affirm that integrating multimodality carried on “the ambition to create a more universal metalanguage with important consequences for the relationship of writing to other meaning-making disciplines”. However, this study only looks into the textbooks and the corresponding workbooks, not the supplemental materials. The textbooks analysed in this study are published by Sanoma Pro Oy.

Data Analysis

The textbooks were analysed employing deductive content analysis that called forth the formation of a categorisation matrix as illustrated by Elo and Kyngäs (2008). This categorisation matrix was informed by the researchers’ understandings about primary textbooks as well as by Ito (2012) and Richards (2001). Though Richards (2001) points out both the desirable and undesirable attributes in language textbooks, this study took the positive properties into account in developing the categories. The matrix consisted of the teaching-learning approach, content quality, and content attitude. Following the creation of the matrix, all of the data was reviewed for content and coded in order to determine their relationship to the categories that had been identified. The categories’ contents or the meanings ultimately fruited a number of interpretations that stood as the study’s findings.

Trustworthiness

This study expressly followed the principles of trustworthiness expounded by Elo and Kyngäs (2008). The research is detailed in sufficient depth so that a comprehensive grasp of how it was carried out is evident. It was also critical for the study to draw defensible conclusions from data that had been collected in an appropriate and trustworthy manner. Precise citations were utilised to corroborate the research’s credibility and demonstrate how the categories were informed.

The Results

The two series “Come With Me” and “Go for It!” stand on separate fictional literary premises to assist their pedagogy. Come With Me! 1 and Come With Me! 3, from the “Come With Me”

series (Harjula et al., 2021), make use of characters of bugs as well as children to drive home the lessons and extensively employ singing, storytelling and play as the teaching-learning apparatus. The other series, “Go for It!”, chronicles the adventure of a family and their animal companions all over the world, with Go for It! 3 putting them in the United Kingdom, Go for It! 5 in the rest of the English-speaking nations such as Scotland, New Zealand, Australia, and Ireland, and Go for It! 6 in other parts of the world (Kanervo et al., 2021). By way of context, the Bangladeshi Primary EFL textbooks from grade one through eight are called English for Today and do not draw on any story plot or narratives that arches over the textbooks as they progress over the grades. From grades six through eight, an additional textbook titled English Grammar and Composition is used (National Curriculum and Textbook Board, Ministry of Education, People’s Republic of Bangladesh, 2021).

The analysis described in detail below found that the reviewed Finnish textbooks, inter alia, employ high-quality English teaching-learning approaches such as action-based teaching-learning. They engage the native language Finnish and present rich multimodal curiosity-evoking content to navigate the lessons and exercises.

Using Native Language in Learning English

The first salient understanding to crystallise from the analysis is the textbooks’ strong use of the Finnish language in learning English. This differs strikingly from the practice in Bangladesh, where the EFL textbooks are devoid of Bangla, the first language of Bangladesh. The lower grade Finnish textbooks even use a babied form of Finnish to cater to the early learners. In *Come With Me! 1*, the Finnish expressions were broken up and hyphenated to deliver the English lesson, as displayed in Figure 1.

Figure 1

Using Finnish to Deliver English Lesson



Note. The heading lightens the original sentence “Kuuntele ja toista”, which translated from Finnish means “Listen and repeat”. The title then makes way for the English lesson where different movements such as walking, running and jumping are introduced. From *Come With Me! 1* (p. 30), by S. Harjula et al., 2021, Sanoma Pro Oy. Copyright 2021 Sanoma Pro Oy.

The calculus of employing Finnish to convey English constructs is prevalent ubiquitously in all the analysed books. The practice is more prominent when exercises are concerned. This treatment does not diminish in the upper-grade books; instead, it is manoeuvred to accommodate more complex questions. For example, in *Come With Me!* 3, an exercise asks the child in Finnish to solve a visual crossword puzzle in English (Harjula et al., 2021, p. 46). However, when an intricate exercise is to be solved, the books spell it out in Finnish to ease the learner. For instance, in *Go for It!* 6, one activity requires two children to use a die against a pool of English questions and respond in lengthy English statements rather than just yes or no responses (Kanervo et al., 2021, p. 6). The requirements and directions of this activity are detailed in Finnish, sparing any brevity to assure the learners' partaking in the elaborate exercise. It can be construed that the Finnish textbook developers treat the workbook exercises in a particular way and instrumentalise the young learners' relative mastery of the native language to delve into different levels of English. Additionally, this usage may help sustain or even enliven the EFL learning environment, making the feedback and encouragement from the instructors more receptive to the learners.

The analysis also found that Finnish was used to reinforce concepts of English with parallelable Finnish expressions. To inform about "Kysymyssanat" or "Interrogative Words", *Go for It!* 6 shows a tree stump marked "W" with its roots limning several interrogative words (Kanervo et al., 2021, p. 210). Next to that, the book displays English question words and their Finnish translations side by side. As shown in Figure 2, a lesson in *Go for It!* 6, titled in Finnish as "Apuverbejä" or "Auxiliary Verbs", demonstrated how the workings of English auxiliary verbs appear over against their Finnish equivalents.

Figure 2

Reinforcing Concepts of English with Parallelable Finnish Expressions

Apuverbejä

Apuverbin kanssa pääverbi on perusmuodossa.
The teams **must eat** jellyfish.
Joukkueiden täytyy syödä medusaa.

Kielteiseen lauseeseen lisätään kieltosana **not**.
You **mustn't forget** your life vest.
Et saa unohtaa pelustusliivejä.

must	täytyä
can	voida, osata
may	voida, saada
could	voisi
should	pitäisi
would	-isi
have to	täytyä

must not = mustn't ei saa
cannot = can't ei voi

Apuverbejä käytetään, kun ilmaistaan halua, toivetta, aikomusta tai pakkoa tehdä jotakin.

Note. Explanations are given in Finnish. The first line — "Apuverbin kanssa pääverbi on perusmuodossa"

— means, “With an auxiliary verb, the main verb is in the base form”. A table with auxiliary verbs in English and Finnish are also given. From *Go for It! 6* (p. 208), by P. Kanervo et al., 2021, Sanoma Pro Oy. Copyright 2021 Sanoma Pro Oy.

Prominent Use of Action-Based Teaching-Learning

The analysed textbooks use a panoply of English teaching-learning approaches in the contents with elements of immersion, action-based teaching-learning, content and language integrated learning, to name a few. These approaches are particularly well-suited for bilingual or multilingual users and involve the Finnish children in a more deeply engaging teaching-learning experience. Equitably distributed, all the reviewed textbooks exhibit these approaches or their harmony through the contents, exercises, and interactivity with the textbooks’ fictional characters. Almost all the contents are constructivist in nature and work toward various exciting activities for the children and are cautiously designed to allay monotony and complement children’s attention span. For example, in *Come With Me! 1*, Harjula et al. (2021, p. 49) depicts an activity where the young learner is engaged to play for selecting three pieces of clothing for a character. Each piece of clothing has its English word beside it, and the child’s English vocabulary, somewhat unbeknownst to the child, at least in the conventional sense, is enriched through a pleasurable activity.

Another example in *Go for It! 5* shows a song titled “Just Do It” that prompts the learners to participate in singing it (Kanervo et al., 2021, p.37). This song or team anthem follows previous lesson setups elucidating the fictional family’s journey to New Zealand and their discovery of the country’s national women rugby team. This and suchlike action-based learnings are featured in all the books that were reviewed. The analysis could not detect a steep slope in the distribution of the approaches going from lower to upper grades. Conversely, the primary EFL textbooks in Bangladesh use communicative language teaching-learning along with grammar-translation strategies that do exhibit activities but are not underpinned by a strong narrative and can be considered contrasted with their Finnish counterparts threadbare.

Activities Are Multimodal

The textbooks distinctly establish activities that let the children experience the lesson constructs and concomitant artefacts multimodally. Both the series that the study analysed continuously reciprocate with the supplemental materials to augment multimodal learning. Along with digital learning materials that comprise rich animation and audio, Harjula et al.’s (2021) “Come With Me!” series have picture cards, hand puppets and stamps — a number of physical accessories to stimulate learning. “Go for It!” series by Kanervo et al. (2021) also has a robust collection of digital education materials such as interactive tutorials, videos, and a dedicated app called “Arttu”. For example, the series offers an information pack titled “Fun and Festivals” that details the many festive traditions of the two largest and most influential English-speaking cultures, British and American. The series also offers a plethora of accompanying games, songs, drama and related activities through a digital learning platform called “Bingel” (<https://www.sanomapro.fi/bingel/>).

Apart from the supplemental materials, the activities in the textbooks aim squarely to animate

the young learners into various multimodal experiences. Almost all the reviewed books scaffold a system of actions such as listen, act, sing, move, speak, and play to build their pedagogy. In addition to using plain words to convey the motions, they are sometimes imparted using iconography. To illustrate, in a lesson in *Go for It! 3* where the children learn about different food names in English (along with their Finnish names, by the way), the actions which follow a text about a birthday party show in succession listen, sing, and act using icons (Kanervo et al., 2021, pp. 86-87). The “listen” action exhibits two children participating in what can be called a noisy activity involving favourite foods. The “sing” action triggers a song about pizzas. And the “act” action acts out a scene about apple tea. The textbooks, however, do not explicitly have designated spaces for the children to practise English handwriting as their Bangladeshi counterparts have.

Extensive Use of Visual Elements

The Finnish textbooks use different constructs to carry their contents, and they are extraordinarily visual in nature. Virtually all the pages have highly relatable and accompanying visual elements in them. Entire lessons take advantage of the power of the imagery, such as through comics, to transmit their information and essence. Figure 3 displays a comics spread over three pages that facilitates children to learn problem-solving using English (for example, the characters read a sign written in English). The comics also sets up the premise for the following lessons where the fictional characters visit Iceland, Mexico, the North Pole, Kenya, Finland and the neighbouring countries.

Figure 3
Using Comics to Transmit Lesson Contents



Note. A comics covering three consecutive pages are shown. From *Go for It! 6* (pp. 9-11), by P. Kanervo. The two series have separate design languages that determine how the visual elements participate articulately with cognate parts. The design language ensures a coherent and relatable appearance and sensitivity throughout all the books in the series and utilises a variety of methods ambidextrously, alleviating monotony. From the selection of colour palettes, illustrations and character design to typography and element placements, the textbooks are

incredibly intuitive and children-friendly.

The images are inclusive, covering different races, ages, genders, and professions. In a lesson in *Go for It! 3* titled “The World’s Best Toy Shop”, several persons are seen in front of a toy shop. The persons are from the left, a white teenager boy with brown hair, a white moustached adult man with blond hair, a white adult woman with brown hair, a white male child with blond hair, a white grey-haired bearded older adult man with a cane, a white adult woman with red hair, a suited black adult man with black hair, and a partially-seen white male (Kanervo et al., 2021, p. 71). The visual extravaganza, as well as their inclusiveness, are also evidenced in Figure 4.

Figure 4

Highly Visual Design of Textbooks



Note. The bright illustration expands over two pages and allows for soaking a multitude of information, from a mother hugging her child to children from different races and ethnicities playing. From *Come With Me! 3* (pp. 6-7), by S. Harjula et al., 2021, Sanoma Pro Oy. Copyright 2021 Sanoma Pro Oy.

Content Size Is Large

The analysis noticed that the content size and distribution of the textbooks are somewhat voluminous. The volume becomes greater as the textbooks evolve from lower to upper grades, with the one for grade one having less than 100 pages vis-à-vis more than 400 pages in the case of grade six. Table 1 bears the number of units and lessons as well as page counts of the reviewed books.

Table 1

Number of Units, Lessons, and Pages of the Analysed Textbooks

Name of the Textbook	Number of Units	Number of Lessons	Number of Pages		
			In Textbook	In Workbook	Total
Come With Me! 1	—	8	88	—	88
Come With Me! 3	4	12	120	184	304
Go for It! 3	5	15	144	184	328
Go for It! 5	5	15	160	224	384
Go for It! 6	5	15	176	232	408

The upward slope of the volume indicates that children are exposed to more content as they grow and become more adept at using English. As they experience more text in textbooks, their learnings are backed with a corresponding amount of exercises from workbooks. It is worth mentioning that the workbooks, as it has been noted, do not get unusually hard as they progress. Instead, the analysis realised that the workbooks give more and more elaborate tasks, asked in Finnish, to the children as they advance from one grade to another.

As stated earlier, the lesson contents — visual elements as well as texts — are meticulously placed inside the textbooks in a capacious arrangement. The analysis observed that the pages of the textbooks are not crammed with overbearing elements. Many of the pages have full-page illustrations or illustrations covering two facing pages. For example, in *Come With Me! 1*, an illustration overlaying two facing pages shows a visual journey, sans any long text, of all the lessons the children are going to go through in that book (Harjula et al., 2021, pp. 4-5). In *Go for It! 6*, a two-page spread shows photographs of six faraway locations, such as Mount Everest and the North Pole, with hardly any text (Kanervo et al., 2021, pp. 6-7). Thus, the high page count is not necessarily a corollary from a high letter count or dense text. The high page count can also be attributed to the textbook developers’ creative license, considering the level of artistry imbuing these textbooks.

Lessons and Exercises Are Fun

Versus somewhat hackneyed and expository lessons and exercises in the Bangladeshi EFL textbooks, one of the lingering thoughts from the analysis is the realisation that the contents are particularly interesting and amusing for the children. They tend not to depict mundane everyday run-of-the-mill activities. Many lessons contain a certain *je ne sais quoi* that can be deemed an enlightened understanding in the textbook developers’ part of what children in that particular age bracket find intriguing. For example, the lesson titled “They Made History” in

Go for It! 6 talks about the American Arctic explorer Robert Peary and his team. A section reads,

However, when they arrived at the Pole they had a problem. They didn't have an American flag with them. They forgot to take one. Luckily, Robert remembered his underpants. They had an American flag on them. So what did Robert do? He took his underpants off and used them as a flag. (Kanervo et al., 2021, p. 22)

The lesson essentially talks about Robert Peary's underpants making history and accentuates that using an image of Robert Peary in fur clothing with a pair of American-flag print underpants drawn over him.

From line arts that the children can colour to beautiful illustrations of pets such as dogs and kittens, robots and toy trains, the modules offer a very pleasurable experience that acts like the sinews of the textbooks' teaching-learning process. The characters travel from country to country on thrilling adventures, necessarily sowing a seed of wanderlust among the children.

Amid the many countries the textbooks mention, curiously, Bangladesh

is also present. In Go for It! 6, a photograph of golf ball-sized hailstones along with an actual golf ball was supplemented by the titbit that the biggest hailstones ever recorded occurred in Bangladesh in 1986 (Kanervo et al., 2021, p. 28). The modules also occasionally make references to personalities such as the fictional wizard protagonist Harry Potter from the eponymous book series in Come With Me! 3 (Harjula et al., 2021, p. 26), and filmmaker James Cameron of Avatar fame in Go for It! 6 (Kanervo et al., 2021, p. 23).

This relatability as well as felicity build upon the Finnish culture and the cultures of the English-speaking nations these books cover. And the charm does not stop in the lessons. They continue to the workbooks in a seamless instrumentality. The analysis maintains that the exercises in the workbooks heed that their recipients or users are children. Thus, most of the exercises are formed like a play or have play-like properties and have visual elements to augment their presentation. For example, an activity in Come With Me! 3 displays four pictures on which children are asked in Finnish to identify the locations in English, and for each of the pictures, a predetermined number of response boxes is provided (Harjula et al., 2021, p. 47).

For exercises that are on the more difficult side, they are also framed playfully. Go for It! 5 demonstrates an activity in which students are encouraged to conduct interviews with their peers to determine what kind of athlete they are (Kanervo et al., 2021, p. 48). The exercise then lists eight questions and provide examples of answers for all of them except the first one, which asks, "What's your favourite sport?". One of the playful questions, number seven, reads, "What do you do if you lose?". Three examples of answers are given: (a) I cry the whole day; (b) I try harder next time; (c) I never lose. A visual cue of several sports such as football (a football is shown), tennis (a tennis racket is shown), and cricket (a cricket bat and ball are shown) complement the activity.

Discussion

The study felt that the Finnish textbooks are an integral, if not the most integral, component of the Finnish primary education system. The undivided attention textbooks are given in an intricate macrocosm that involves many moving parts epitomises this. The books situate as a microcosm in the centre and as a conductor's baton help direct the whole teaching-learning orchestra. Instructional activities from highly qualified Finnish teachers (as a pre-service requirement, Finnish teachers must be master's degree holders [Finnish National Agency for Education, 2018]) begin with these textbooks. Then with the accompaniment of a world of supporting audio-visual materials, the textbooks provide the young learners with real-life action-based multimodal teaching-learning experiences inside and outside the classroom. This finding coincides with that of Oates (2014), who argues that when it came to the Finnish education system, the function played by textbooks in conditioning underlying conceptions was especially apparent. Vanha (2017, p. 48) also upholds this, stating that the textbooks "play a significant, self-evident role in English language teaching in Finland".

Using Finnish to teach English is another finding that the analysis of the study foregrounds. Kavaliauskienė et al. (2010) highlight that using the native language to learn English is seeing a positive sea change. Valencia (2019) contends that when students study English as a foreign language, the incorporation of their original language into their learning may aid them in achieving their learning objectives. The Finnish textbooks embrace this to the fullest. Usage of Finnish is entangled with every component of the textbooks, and by the looks of it, it is seen as a strength, not a flaw. Háhn (2017) reveals that children may reflect on their own language development in Finnish since it is the language in which they mainly express themselves and that the majority of children gain from the usage of Finnish since it allows them to properly comprehend and complete their English home assignments on their own time at their convenience. The Bangladeshi primary textbooks for learning English could take note of this. However, it must be emphasised that, unlike Bangla, Finnish uses Latin script shared by the English language. The Finnish alphabet consists of 29 letters (Pakarinen et al., 2018), with only three letters straying from the English alphabet. This may help use Finnish in learning a language such as English that can seem more familiar to the children's eyes. On the other hand, Bangla uses an entirely different writing system with its own idiosyncrasies of using, among other things, consonant conjuncts, diacritics and allographs. At any rate, for Bangladeshi children, the Bangla alphabet and the English alphabet are two utterly separate learning curves to conquer.

The study ascertained how the textbooks manoeuvred or participated in actualising different English learning approaches to maximise English learning among the Finnish children and how action-based learning is championed throughout the series. Metsälä (2017) also discovered the use of a variety of learning strategies in the Finnish system, the most distinguishing of which are action-based learning, communicative language learning, language shower/showering, total physical response, and the audiolingual method. The

present literature strongly supports the effectiveness of amalgamating multiple approaches in learning English (Burns & Richards, 2018; Cooze, 2017; Leung & Creese, 2010). Burns and Richards (2018, p. 2) declare that no single approach “can account for all aspects of the development of English as a second language”. This scenario is especially congruous with the autonomous world-view of the Finnish teachers who presumably can implement different strategies to different situations and learner types. In that connection, it can be considered that the textbooks act as an extension of that autonomy, and without that mutually sustaining system in place, the efficacy of the Finnish textbooks cannot be fully understood. The analysis also establishes the textbooks’ highly favourable attitude toward the power of the visual. A large body of research corroborates this rationale (Behnke, 2018; Elmiana, 2019; Hussain, Hossain, & Rahman, 2018). The design language that pilots these visual elements does so seemingly unflinchingly and with versatility. The book’s pages in a particular series radiate uniformity through their visual characteristics, typography and underlying principles, yet none of them appears dull or dreary. This is the most important hallmark of the aesthetics of the reviewed Finnish textbooks. The visual components tend not to be ornamental or decorative in nature and serve significant roles in the relatively copious lesson contents and exercises. In conjunction with the amplitude of companion digital materials via means of apps and online platforms, the textbooks apply these visual elements in full measure. Bangladeshi classrooms’ increasing digitality could take notice of this.

Another angle that helps the whole presentation coalesce together is the use of storytelling in these textbooks. The two series the study looked into employ engaging narratives to carry and relay the contents. The textbooks in a specific series maintain a narrative connection and chronology from one grade to another, though the subsequences can be regarded as standalone sequels. An erudite and trend-aware understanding of child psyche and interest equip these narratives, with visual and cognate elements playing their roles to culminate into what can be called a very fulfilling textbook experience for the children. Supporting this, Cameron (2001, p. 159) underlines that these narratives reflect comprehensive methods to language teaching and learning that put a high value on children’s participation in rich, genuine applications of the foreign language and that “stories offer a whole imaginary world, created by language, that children can enter and enjoy, learning language as they go”.

Limitations

Though every effort was made to understand and analyse the textbooks in a deeply meaningful way, the study used community-supported translations from Finnish speakers to understand Finnish in the textbooks as both of the researchers are not Finnish speakers. Another limitation is that the study looked into textbooks from only Sanoma Pro Oy, arguably the most prominent of the several available publishers of primary EFL textbooks in Finland. However, the two series the study looked into were developed by two independent teams within Sanoma Pro Oy. Although this information was factored in and the researchers abide by Bowen’s (2009) counsel in ameliorating potential biases, there may be researcher bias that could not be entirely excluded.

Conclusion

Textbooks hold a very special, very significant place in the educational landscape of Bangladesh. So much so, images of children with new textbooks amid a mustard flower field is a popular placeholder in depicting the relationship between textbooks and formal schooling in Bangladesh (Bashar, 2016; Uddin, 2019). These photos may seem staged to the untrained eye, and the combination of mustard flowers and children getting textbooks may appear too idyllic. In Bangladesh, however, mustard flowers do bloom around January (Ahmed, 2015), and since 2010, the textbook festival where millions of textbooks are distributed to the children for free has been held on New Year's Day (Bashar, 2016). Both of which make those photos a beautiful natural occurrence. The perfumery emanating from the smell of new textbooks along with the scent of bright yellow mustard flowers can be an illustration of how generations of Bangladeshi children associate with textbooks as they begin a new grade. The textbooks, this study argues, thusly become socially important materials that implore scrupulous attention — attention that can benefit greatly from what can be learnt from textbooks in Finland, whose education, among other indices, leads the KidsRights Index 2021 (conversely, Bangladesh's education ranking in it is 127) (KidsRights Foundation, 2021). Perhaps it is as good a time as any to reckon, specifically considering the prevailing scene of textbook usage in Bangladesh, that if “more learnable textbooks” are developed and selected, Britton et al. (2016, p. 13) enlighten us, “more learning will occur”.

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