Teachers’ Role in Developing Healthy Self-esteem in Young Learners:

A study of English language teachers in Finland

Junyi Yang

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University of Eastern Finland, Philosophical Faculty
School of Applied Educational Science and Teacher Education, Joensuu campus
Master’s Degree Program in Early Language Education for Intercultural Communication
Self-esteem plays an important factor in happiness. Concerned to young learners’ well-being, the thesis explores teachers’ role in supporting young learners to develop healthy self-esteem. Finnish National Core Curriculum for Basic Education 2014 addresses self-esteem as a national goal of education; hence, the study lays focus on Finnish teachers. The purpose is to gain the understanding of Finnish English teachers’ perception and action regarding young learners’ self-esteem so as to afford insights for Chinese English teachers. Three Finnish English teachers participated in the research. Stimulated recall interview was applied in data collection to probe teachers’ rationale behind teaching. The results suggest that Finnish English teachers have a sound understanding of self-esteem. They comply with the national curriculum and take young learners’ self-esteem into account while teaching. In classroom practice, they respect and care for young learners, guaranteeing their feeling of acceptance; they demonstrate virtue and encourage young learners to follow; they utilize various strategies and activities to ensure young learners’ feeling of influence in class; they discourage competition yet encourage young learners to achieve individual goals. Based on Finnish English teachers’ words and deeds, a recommendation for Chinese English teachers is provided.
Dedicated to my beloved grandmother.
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1 Introduction

1.1 Background

Aristotle once said, “Happiness is the meaning and the purpose of life, the whole aim and end of human existence.” (Susniene & Jurkauskas, 2009, p. 58) In modern time, happiness is still a key goal of life. In fact, parents asked what they hope for their children, the first and foremost answer is happiness. Other minor expectations include to learn successfully, to develop a good personality and to grow up as caring and responsible human beings (Roberts, 2002, p. xv).

When I was an English teacher in mainland China, I was concerned, more than academic outcome, about the affective and social well-being of my students. For example, how do they view themselves? How do they interact with peers and teachers? How do they react to refusal, obstacles, and failure? How can they form good habits and attitude? As I believe, we teachers play a crucial role in our students’ lives, not merely providing knowledge and skills but supporting, helping them maintain a physical and mental health, foster good habits, and of utmost importance, live a good life.

Thus, my research focuses on self-esteem, considered as the heart of how one feels, behaves and relates to others. Lawrence (2006, p. 9) regarded self-esteem as “the most important need one has to preserve in a society where generally people no longer starve, and where primitive drives are easily expressed.” Moreover, studies have shown the connections between self-esteem and life satisfaction (Diener, 1995, p. 654), happiness (Baumeister, 2003, p. 25), sense of authenticity and well-being (Kernis, 2003a, p. 89), self-actualization and living a meaningful life (Mruk, 2013b, p. 4). Hence, self-esteem is an optimal instrument to delve into children’s happiness and well-being.

Monolingualism is the new illiteracy in the twentieth century (Livaccari, 2013, p. 14). This statement may sound surprising at the beginning but once thinking it through, we have to admit the importance of mastering a second language. In fact, English, as a school subject, has
received substantial attention in my home country, China. The Chinese government deems English education as a key to access to the world of opportunities. Chinese parents believe that mastering English will provide their children with numerous opportunities in the future (Liu, 2016, p. 138). Consequently, many schools introduce English education at Grade 1, which is age six or seven, despite the requirement in national curriculum (Chinese Ministry of Education, 2011) is at Grade 3 (Qi, 2016, p. 3). In other words, for Chinese students, English education lasts throughout their school life. Hui (2010, p. 167-168) investigated Chinese primary school children, revealing that teacher support significantly affects pupils’ school well-being. Studies in Chinese middle and late adolescents also confirm this effect (Tian, 2013, p. 991). The current research aims to study Finnish English teachers’ classroom practice and daily work, in order to examine how they support young learners in enhancing self-esteem; ultimately, to inspire their Chinese counterparts.

An attribute of the thesis is utilizing stimulated recall interview as the main tool to collect data. This method allows teachers to become aware of their automatic behaviors, to decode pedagogical decision-making, as well as to explain details explicitly (Nind, 2016). By videotaping the classroom practice of teachers, and using the video to recall their reflection, the study can probe deeply into Finnish English teachers’ words and deeds, providing a fascinating insight of teachers’ role in developing healthy self-esteem in young learners.

1.2 Outline of the thesis

The thesis comprises seven chapters. Chapter 2 lays out a theoretical framework of self-esteem, the key concept of the study. To precisely present the meaning of self-esteem, this chapter includes its history of development, different categories of definition, the concept of healthy self-esteem and the relevant terminologies. Also, self-esteem is introduced in context, manifesting a pre-understanding in relation to young learners, language education, and teachers.
In order to familiarize readers with the background of the study, chapter 3 briefly introduces Finnish Basic Education, teachers, and English language education.

Chapter 4 and 5 demonstrate the process of research conduction, from research questions and design to data collection and analysis. Since research questions serve as the guide for comprehending the whole study, I place them in a separate chapter. Subsequently, chapter 5 describes methods, research design, informants, data collection, processing, analysis as well as validity, reliability, and ethics in more detail.

Chapter 6 provides the findings to answer research questions, where the discussion is made in relation to theoretical framework and previous studies. Chapter 7 further summarizes the study, and evaluates it with regard to the strengths and limitations. Recommendation for Chinese English teachers is given at the end.
2 Theoretical Framework of Self-esteem

2.1 On the concept of self-esteem

Self-esteem is not a new concept. William James (1890, p. 297) conducted pioneer research on self-esteem, and defined it as the ratio of successes to pretensions. He determined self-esteem by how successful we think we are in the area we value. Since then, a gradually growing number of researchers have studied self-esteem, generating different definitions, and developing different theories. Charles Cooley (1902, p. 152) in his “looking-glass self” theory proposed that we humans incline to judge ourselves according to how we believe others perceive us. Hence, the concept of self-esteem includes the influence of others. Robert White (1963, p. 129), in line with William James, linked self-esteem with competence and mastery. Famous for his self-esteem scale, Morris Rosenberg understood self-esteem as “favorable or unfavorable attitude towards oneself” (Rosenberg, 1965, p. 18). Around the same time, Stanley Coppersmith published the book *The Antecedents of Self-Esteem*, where he regarded self-esteem as “a personal judgment of worthiness” (Coppersmith, 1967, p. 4) that is affected by our success, value, aspiration, and defenses. Later on, Nathaniel Branden incorporated two interrelated aspects, stating that self-esteem “entails a sense of personal efficacy and a sense of personal worth…the integrated sum of self-confidence and self-respect…the conviction that one is competent to live and worthy of living” (Branden, 1969, p. 110). Following him, Seymour Epstein, an influential psychologist, regarded self-esteem as a basic human need. In his cognitive-experiential self-theory of personality, he argued that we humans tend to enhance self-esteem both consciously and unconsciously (Epstein, 1997, p. 28). The high popularity and widespread interests of self-esteem lead to a so-called “self-esteem movement” (Gown, 2007, p. 41). Coming to the twenty-first century, Lawrence Denis (2006, p. 5-8) defined self-esteem as the discrepancy between self-image, what we actually are, and ideal self, what we
want to become. Quite recently, positive psychology emerged where self-esteem serves as a
topic in the field (Carr, 2011, p. 235-240).

Table 1. The category of self-esteem’s definitions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category of definition</th>
<th>Representative authors</th>
<th>Key definition of self-esteem</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Competence-based</td>
<td>William James(1890)</td>
<td>Whether being capable and adept shapes our self-esteem.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Robert White(1963)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worthiness-based</td>
<td>Morris Rosenberg(1965)</td>
<td>Self-esteem is a feeling of worthiness; it is our evaluation of whether we respect our valuable and ourselves as human beings.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Stanley Coppersmith(1969)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two-dimensional</td>
<td>Nathaniel Branden(1969)</td>
<td>Self-esteem is a feeling of personal efficacy and worthiness, it indicates that one is competent to live and worthy of living.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Christopher Mruk (1999)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discrepancy theory</td>
<td>Lawrence Denis (2006)</td>
<td>Self-esteem is the gap between real self and ideal self.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

To organize all definitions listed above, I categorize them into four (see table 2.1). In this study, I employ the two-dimensional view of self-esteem. The reason is threefold. First, in Chinese, we call self-esteem 自尊 (Zi zun), which literally means self-respect or dignity. As far as I understand, this dignity derives from our belief of not only what we are but also what we can do. In comparison with the first two definitions that either focuses on competence or worthiness, viewing self-esteem from both competence and worthiness points of view is more comprehensive. Second, to fulfill the scientific rule of adopting “operational definitions” (Mruk, 2013a, p. 157), the two-dimensional definition triumphs over the discrepancy theory. Indeed, analyzing two specific aspects of self-esteem is more practical than measuring the discrepancy between real self and ideal self. Third, the two-dimensional definition seems to represent the current trend. Many studies I found insightful applied two-dimensional self-esteem (Ben-Shachar, 2003; Plummer & Harper, 2007; Miller et al., 2010; Dimaro et al., 2015).
In sum, the present study defines self-esteem as an evaluative belief ones hold for themselves on who they are (worthiness) and what they can do (competence).

![Diagram of the source of self-esteem](image)

Figure 1. The source of self-esteem (based on Mruk, 2013b, p. 73-76).

Mruk (2013b, p. 73-76) referenced the work of Coopersmith (1967) and Epstein (1979), and reorganized the source of self-esteem. I concluded Mruk’s remarks into Figure 1. Four sources respectively contribute to the feeling of worthiness and competence. They each contain a pair of antonym, representing the opposite extremes of the source. Acceptance versus rejection refer to whether one is valued by others during the interpersonal actions. Virtue versus guilt depend on how much one follows a higher standard of behaviors in order to be regarded as a worthy man. Influence versus powerless stand for one’s ability to interact with the surroundings that lays impact and leads change. Achievements versus failures indicate how much one’s success in the specific area or domain that is significant for individuals. As far as I see it, the source of self-esteem largely facilitates one’s understanding of self-esteem in the dimension of worthiness and competence. Furthermore, the source of self-esteem helps with identifying teachers’ influence on young learners’ self-esteem; hence, it will be utilized in later sections.
2.2 Healthy self-esteem

Once we defined self-esteem, the following step is about healthy self-esteem. What kind of self-esteem can be considered as healthy? Previous studies applied different expressions to indicate the type of self-esteem, such as high and low self-esteem (Baumeister et al., 2003; Coudevylle et al., 2011; Zeigler-Hill, 2013), positive and negative self-esteem (Bracken & Lamprecht, 2003), as well as optimal and fragile self-esteem (Kernis, 2003). Yet, since these types are based on different definitions of self-esteem, I can hardly employ any of them in the present study. As for healthy self-esteem, some referred it without defining it (Peters Mayer, 2008; Plummer & Harper, 2007); others concluded it in a rather complex way as “high self-esteem that is relatively non-contingent, stable, and accompanied by high implicit self-esteem… is also non-narcissistic” (Jordan & Zeigler-Hill, 2013, p. 90).

![Self-esteem Matrix](adapted from Mruk, 2013b, p. 148).

Figure 2. Complete self-esteem matrix and healthy self-esteem (adapted from Mruk, 2013b, p. 148).
Fortunately, Christopher Mruk (1999, 2013b) afforded some inspiration. He advocates two-dimensional definition and presented a “meaning matrix” of self-esteem (Mruk, 2013b, p. 148). I adapted the matrix with the source of self-esteem and highlighted the focus of this study (see Figure 2). In this matrix, the horizontal line demonstrates the scale of competence from poor to good; the vertical axis marks the continuum of worthiness from low to high, dividing the coordinate into four quadrants. Coordinate +10 and -10 are the extreme ends, and coordinate +7 and -7 are the cut-off values to distinguish nonclinical from clinical, statistically frequent from infrequent (Mruk, 2013b, p. 145).

This thesis concentrates on the upper right quadrant as highlighted where healthy self-esteem locates. Even though Mruk (2013b, p. 148) named it medium and authentic self-esteem, he, too, regards it as the healthy and positive level. This quadrant comprises good competence and high worthiness. In general, people belong to this category have healthy self-esteem and a considerably secure view of themselves. On the one hand, upholding a sense of self-worth and valuing their importance, they hardly need constant confirmation of worthiness from other people. On the other hand, satisficing with their competence and believing in themselves, they are comfortable without relentlessly pursuing success to prove themselves. To combine with the source of self-esteem, healthy self-esteem derived from the acceptance from others, the behavior of virtue, achievement, as well as the power and skills to influence others (Carr, 2011, p. 236).

In contrast, other quadrants represent less healthy self-esteem. People who have a feeling of high worthiness and a poor competence might be self-centered or even leads to narcissistic. On the opposite, people with a low worthiness and a good competence may end up being over-achieving or antisocial. These unbalanced self-estees are categorized as defensive self-esteem. As for people who perceive themselves with a low worth and poor competence, they are negative and more likely to be depressed (Mruk, 2013b, p. 151-160.)
2.3 Relevant terminology to self-esteem

This section introduces the self-terms that are highly related to self-esteem. I placed it here because these terminologies appeared numerous times when I read about self-esteem. To better understand self-esteem, it is necessary to discuss the related concepts as well. A shortlist for the most frequent and relevant terms consists of self-concept, self-image, self-confidence, and self-efficacy.

Self-concept

This term may cause the greatest confusion in distinguishing self-esteem. In fact, more than a few researchers regard self-concept and self-esteem as synonyms (Byrne, 1996; Bear et al., 1997; Bracken & Lamprecht, 2003; March & Craven, 2006). For example, Marsh and Craven (2006) continuously interchanged the two terms, while Bracken and Lamprecht (2003, p. 105) contended that the distinction between self-concept, self-esteem, and self-image can be minimal. In a sheer contrast, Coelho et al. (2017, p. 559) described self-concept as a set of perception, whereas self-esteem is referred as a way of feeling. To some extent, they differentiated the two concepts between descriptive and evaluative belief about oneself. Besides, when Lawrence (2006, p. 2) explained the discrepancy theory of self-esteem, he asserted that self-concept is an umbrella term that consists of self-image, ideal self and self-esteem. Thus, self-concept and self-esteem have an inclusive relationship. I also incline to agree that self-concept is an inclusive term. As the name suggests, it is the concept of someone’s own, and an overall understanding of oneself.

Many studies of self-concept cited the hierarchical model (see Figure 3) that created by Shavelson et al. (1976, p. 413). In the model, self-concept is subdivided into a number of specific domains, of which one may have his or her own judgment. These self-judgments reversely influence ones’ general self-concept. The hierarchical model also fits in with self-esteem, since we can perceive our worthiness and competence in all different domains. This
thesis is interested in nonacademic self-esteem, where the focus mainly lays on social and emotional aspects.

![Hierarchical model of self-concept](image)

*Figure 3. The hierarchical model of self-concept (Shavelson et al., 1976, p. 413).*

**Self-image**

In order to understand self-image, it is practical to start with the word “image”. According to Merriam-Webster (2018), “image” has various meanings, which can be summarized as either concrete or abstract. The concrete meanings refer to tangible, visual representation and imitation of someone or something. While the abstract includes the mental picture, conception, and the impression of someone or something. Adding self at the front, self-image, on the one hand, often associates with one’s body and physical appearance, reflecting how ones see themselves. On the other hand, it represents a conception of oneself (Bailey, 2003, p. 383). To
distinguish it from other self-relevant terms, Miller and Moran (2012, p. 37) pointed out that self-image generally suggests descriptive interpretation.

**Self-confidence**

Thanks to commercials and self-help books, most people are not only familiar with the term self-confidence but also informed with the importance of having self-confidence. Nevertheless, the popularity barely makes differentiating from self-esteem easier. The widespread definition of self-confidence comes from Rosenberg (1965, p. 30), “positive or negative attitude towards oneself”. Later, he added that people with high self-confidence have a good self-image, high self-worth, and more self-respect (Rosenberg, 1979, p. 61). The description applies to self-esteem also, however. As Maclellan (2014, p. 60) concluded, many researchers interchangeably used self-confidence and self-esteem, causing a puzzling situation. Despite all the discussion and confusion, this study endorses Coudevyille (2011, p. 671) that self-confidence is a positive belief in oneself, which is correlated to healthy self-esteem.

**Self-efficacy**

Self-efficacy is a comparatively new concept in the section, which was, to the best of my knowledge, first brought up by Bandura in 1977 (Phan, 2017, p. 116). He introduced TSSE (task-specific self-efficacy) theory, and defined it as "the conviction that one can successfully execute the behavior required to produce the required outcome" (Bandura, 1977, p. 193). Another influential definition came from Sherer et al. (Stanley & Murphy, 1997, p. 81), who invented The Self-Efficacy Scale. They considered self-efficacy as an expectation we have based on our experience, which also affects our expectation of success in a new situation. This definition contained the formation and function of self-efficacy that it comes from previous experience and works as a self-predication for future success. Combining the definitions, we perceive self-efficacy as one’s belief in achieving a specific task. In the light of this, self-efficacy is similar to a dimension of self-esteem, competence (Miller & Moran, 2012, p. 37).
2.4 Self-esteem in the context

2.4.1 Young learners’ self-esteem

ELT (English Language Teaching) professionals often use young learners to refer children age from five to twelve (Ellis, 2014, p. 75). This time of period is normally from preschool to primary school, where children experience transformation biologically, psychologically, and socially (Leary & Tangney, 2003, p. 617). For psychological development, Harter (2015, p. 492-493) concluded that our self-cognition develops in the six stages. Wherein young learners experience the first three: early childhood, middle childhood and late childhood. In early childhood, young learners gradually become aware of themselves and begin to differentiate themselves from the others. At this stage, their self-concept is still confined to concrete and tangible perception. Once turning into middle childhood, young learners start to compare and internalize others’ standard and opinion. Meanwhile, the self-assessment emerges that they endow the capability to evaluate themselves realistically. After that, in late childhood, young learners define themselves on the base of their values, thoughts and opinions, altering their self-descriptions to be more in details and abstract.

In comparison with the development of childhood, opinions on self-esteem development seem to be strikingly varied. Trzesniewski et al. (2013, p. 64-65) advocated the rank-order stability of self-esteem throughout the lifespan. Their research indicated a comparatively low stability of self-esteem in childhood from age six to eleven as well as maintains moderate across adolescence from age twelve to seventeen. Whereas Schaffhuser et al. (2017, p. 776-777) reviewed previous studies and found mixed results. Some of the studies showed self-esteem increasing in childhood while others evidenced the opposite that revealed no patterns. The third opinion regards individual difference in self-esteem development. A seventeen-year longitudinal research found three different patterns of the development, namely “consistently high”, “chronically low”, and “U-shaped” (Birkeland et al., 2012, p. 50-51). Set aside the
different outlooks on self-esteem development, Fedorenko and Bykova (2016, p. 2774) concluded that self-esteem development takes place across ones’ entire life, and the guidelines formulate in childhood and uphold throughout life.

In the current study, we ought to understand young learner’s self-esteem in two dimensions: worthiness and competence. Developmental psychology suggests our feeling of worthiness emerges in early childhood, while the feeling of competence thrives in middle childhood (Rubio, 2014, p. 46). In this regard, it is vital and meaningful to look into young learners’ self-esteem and support them to develop healthy self-esteem.

2.4.2 Language education and self-esteem

Various studies investigated the relationship between language education achievement and self-esteem. Take some recent studies as examples. Tilfarlioglu and Delbesoglugil (2014, p. 2223) carried out an investigation into self-regulation, self-esteem, attitude and foreign language achievement among 383 high school students in Turkey, where they proved a positive connection between foreign language achievement and self-esteem. Zarei and Zarei (2015, p. 1) conducted a research with 141 English-major Iranian university students, and the result showed that learners’ language proficiency lays no effect on their self-esteem. Aiming to test the correlation between English Language proficiency and self-esteem, Dev and Quqieh (2016, p. 147) collected data from 200 students in Abu Dhabi University yet they found no significant correlation in between.

Despite the inconsistent conclusion between language education achievement and self-esteem, I aim to explore the connection between language education itself and self-esteem. To begin with, language education has blossomed and developed over the past century with an array of versatile theories, approaches, methods, and techniques emerged. From grammar-translation approach evolved to communicative approach, modern language classroom views
communication as its ultimate goal (Darwish, 2016, p. 183). Even serves as a school subject, language education is, without a doubt, different from other subjects. For first, language is, more than knowledge and skills, a communication tool; second, language carries a social nature and it belongs to our social being (William, 1994, p. 77). In addition, language education linked with the conveyance of one’s identity:

“The learning of a foreign language involves far more than simply learning skills or a system of rules, or a grammar; it involves an alteration in self-image, the adoption of new social and cultural behaviors and ways of being, and therefore has a significant impact on the social nature of the learner.” (William, 1994, p. 77)

Similarly, Livaccari (2013, p. 14) emphasized the social-emotional dimension of language education, which, as he argued, deserves the same amount of attention as language proficiency and cognitive development. These claims proved a connection between language education and self-esteem. In fact, in the book Self-Esteem and Foreign Language Learning, Rubio (2007, p. 7) declared language learning is an ego-involving process where self-esteem plays a significant factor.

2.4.3 Teachers’ role in developing young learners’ self-esteem

In social psychology, the term “significant others” refers to persons who play a crucial role in and have a great impact on our life (Andersen & Chen, 2002, p. 619). Studies have established that significant others can determine ones’ self-esteem (Horberg & Chen, 2010, p. 77). For children of school age, their significant others are generally parents, peers, and teachers (Lawrence, 2006, p. 13).

The previous research drew an agreement that the teacher is a dominant character in influencing learners’ self-esteem and sequentially lays an effect on their achievements and behavior (Miller & Moran, 2012, p. 2). In the light of this mutual understanding, studies on
different aspects of teachers’ role revealed insightful findings. Kususanto et al. (2010, p. 708) found that teachers’ perceived ideas of learners could manifest through behavior and be detected by learners, which in turns affect learners’ self-esteem. A longitudinal research done by Reddy et al. (2003, p. 119) indicated that teachers’ support and involvement could result in learners’ higher self-esteem. According to Mruk (2013b, p. 7), the teaching conduction, including teaching approaches, activities, and classroom management, all affects learners’ self-esteem. Additionally, he mentioned the power of teacher being a role model, and providing constant support would contribute to a positive self-perception. What’s more, Burns (1982, p. 254) concluded that teacher’s self-concept correlates with children’s self-concept. He explained, teachers who have a positive view of themselves personally and professionally show the propensity for believing in pupils’ capacity and creating a supportive classroom environment, leading to pupils’ high self-esteem.

In the book Self-esteem: a guide for teachers, Miller and Moran (2012, p. 31-35) quoted Michael Argyle’s social interaction theory (1969, p. 363-368) to investigate the formation of self-esteem. I compared their interpretation with the original version; as they contextualized classroom settings and teachers’ role, I decided to apply Miller and Moran’s model (2012, p. 31-35) in the study. Four aspects in the course of social interaction that affect our self-esteem: the reaction of others, comparison with others, the effects of roles played, and identification with role models.

The reaction of others

In agreement with Charles Cooley’s “looking-glass self” (1902), this model emphasized the reaction of others as the most common and influential aspect (Miller & Moran, 2012, p. 31). Especially of people who we considered to be “ascendant” over us (Yeung & Martin, 2003, p. 873). In the classroom, the teacher is the ascendant figure. Not only do their gesture, movement,
facial expression, eye contact, verbal or non-verbal feedback lay an impact on learners’ self-esteem, they can mediate how learners themselves react to each other (Wubbels, 2005, p. 4).

**Comparison with others**

Through comparing with others, we learn the standard of good and bad, and we know our position. Very often, learners compare performance with their classmates and pay attention to winning and losing, affecting their sense of achievement and self-esteem. Teachers can shape learners’ perception on comparison: whether to compare or not, who to compare, what to compare, and how to compare (Miller & Moran, 2012, p. 32.)

**The effects of roles played**

As a member of society, we play different roles, affecting our self-perception. These roles refer to not only one’s personal identity, such as age, gender, body image, family relationship, and occupation; but also some temperate roles ones play in a given situation, for example, a role-playing game. In the classroom, apart from the most obvious role as learners, children can play other different roles. Wherein teachers have a large effect on, whether intentionally or unintentionally, directly or indirectly (Miller & Moran, 2012, p. 33.)

**Identification with role models**

Role models help us identify our ideal self (Miller & Moran, 2012, p. 33-34). By looking up our role models, we want to become them or at least share their attributes, which intangibly set a standard for our self-esteem. In school hood, teachers set an important model (Seeker & Deniz, 2016, p. 2). As Muhamad et al. (2013, p. 29) noted, teachers who have positive self-concept can make a good role model for pupils, and through positive demonstration, they help pupils with building up positive self-concept.
3 The Setting of the Study

3.1 Finnish Basic Education System

Starting in the twenty-first century, Finnish education frequently appears with the word “miracle”, thanks to PISA (Program for International Student Assessment) results. The first-year PISA result in 2000 reported Finland as a leading country in reading literacy, mathematics and science skills of ninth graders among all participants (Kuusilehto-Awale & Lahtero, 2014, p. 6). Ever since, Finnish education has received substantial attention and people are eager to figure out what the Finnish education system is. This section sheds light on Finnish basic education, where introduces the general information of Finnish basic education as well as National Core Curriculum for Basic Education 2014.

3.1.1 Introduction to Finnish Basic Education

Resulting from the historical and cultural background, learning and education are highly valued in Finnish society (Sahlberg, 2015, p. 99). The Finnish educational system provides every pupil with equal opportunity irrespective of sex, social status, places of residence or ethnic group (Niemi, 2016, p. 26). Basic education is free for all pupils, which consists of nine years from Grade 1 to 9. Pupils go to pre-school at age six, and they start Grade 1 at age seven (FNBE 1, 2010). At school, they are guaranteed with a warm meal, health care as well as transportation (FNBE, 2016a).

In Finland, the Ministry of Education and Culture is responsible for education policy; the Finnish National Agency for Education (used to be Finnish National Board of Education) is in charge of implementing the policy and developing the national core curriculum (FNBE, 2017).

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1 FNBE stands for Finnish National Board of Education. The organization changed its name to Finnish National Agency for Education in 2017. Yet, this thesis mainly references the work before 2017. To keep the coherence, I continue to use FNBE.
Nevertheless, education providers are granted autonomy to develop curriculum and implement school planning (Sahlberg, 2015, p. 122). Within the framework of the national curriculum, namely objectives and core content of each subject, municipalities, principals and teachers can design their own curricula (FNBE, 2004). A senior lecturer at the University of Eastern Finland perfectly described this feature: “No two leaves are alike, and no two classes in Finland are the same” (Pellikka, 2016).

The objective of Finnish basic education underlines the humanity, citizenship, as well as knowledge and skills for life. It manifests the emphasis Finnish education placed on pupils’ social and affective development (Tirri, 2016, p. 55). In school, the teaching-studying-learning process also aims at providing the holistic education. Excluding content knowledge, pupils are supported to develop “individuality” and “sociability” (Tirri, 2016, p. 60).

3.1.2 National Core Curriculum for Basic Education 2014

The national core curriculum affords the general guideline for education and supports education providers to complementing (FNBE, 2016c). For the past thirty years, the national core curriculum has been reformed every decade, in 1994, 2004, and 2014 (Vitikka et al., 2016, p. 84). The current version renewed at the end of 2014, and took effect from August 2016. To tackle with the rapidly changing world, it introduced many new adjustments (Halinen, 2015). Among them, multidisciplinary learning is one of the major reforms and probably the most heated topic. By integrating different subjects and learning contents, learners attain the ability to combine the knowledge together and understand cross-curricular relationships (FNBE, 2016c); teachers receive more opportunities to collaborate with colleagues and learn from each other (Ward, 2017, p. 16). Another noteworthy new concept is transversal competence, meaning “an entity consisting of knowledge, skills, values, attitudes and will.” (FNBE, 2016b, p. 33). The core curriculum engendered seven transversal competences (see Figure 4). They
are jointed and reciprocal, together contributing to meet the objectives of Finnish basic education.

![Diagram of Seven transversal competences for comprehensive school pupils](image)

**Figure 4. Seven transversal competences for comprehensive school pupils (Halinen, 2016)**

Regarding the context of the present study, the core curriculum offers several relevant concepts and important remarks. First, in the national goals of education, healthy self-esteem serves as a key component of a human being and social citizen, given that “education must support the pupils’ growth into balanced adults with healthy self-esteem.” (FNBE, 2016b, p. 31) Second, the underlying values of basic education emphasize the uniqueness of each pupil. It promotes the recognition of ones’ strengths and uniqueness, encouraging pupils to respect
and appreciate themselves. Third, “Educated persons strive to act correctly and show respect for themselves, other people and the environment. An effort towards self-regulation and accepting responsibility for our own development and well-being are also part of general knowledge and ability.” (FNBE, 2016b, p. 25) The underlying values also point out that we are responsible for our growth, which can be applied to healthy self-esteem development.

3.2 Finnish teachers and teacher education

Sahlberg (2015, p. 98) regarded Finnish teachers as “Finnish Advantage” and a necessity for the educational success. Since the late 1970s, teacher training has raised to Master’s degree level for all basic educations (Niemi, 2016, p. 32). The well-educated teachers earn the trust of the whole society and hold high social strata. In fact, upper-secondary school graduates in Finland consider teachers as a most popular occupation, together with doctors, engineers, and lawyers (Sahlberg, 2015, p. 101). Owing to such popularity of the teacher profession, the selection for student teacher is so strict and competitive that only the most suitable and capable candidates have the privilege to enter. The statistic shows that primary school teacher-training program accepts approximately 10% of the applicant each year (FNBE, 2015). The student teacher selection consists of two phases, Matriculation Examination (nation-hold high school graduation exam) scores and a book exam shortlist the candidates at first; and then following with practical tests and interviews (Paksui et al, 2013, p. 85).

In Finland, primary class teachers in charge of several subjects for a class in Grade 1 to Grade 6. Subject teachers normally teach one subject in comprehensive school. Their education programs are similar, both consisting of three themes: “(i) the theory of education, (ii) pedagogical content knowledge, and (iii) subject didactics and practice.” (Sahlberg, 2015, p. 110) The differences lie in the studying arrangement and the final thesis: class teachers major in education while subject teachers major in the specific subject. For example, English-
majored student teachers study four-year language studies, including literature, linguistic and language practice, plus one-year teacher training (Larsen-Ostermark, 2009, p. 404). Finnish teacher education programs emphasize on practical-based and research-based training, which prepares Finnish teachers to work in various environments, to create excellent curriculum as well as to make a difference for the educational system (Paksuniemi et al, 2013, p. 87).

Apart from autonomous, well-educated and trustworthy, Finnish teachers are also known as the combination of discipline and love (Paksuniemi et al, 2013, p. 85). On the one hand, teachers are responsible for student assessment and demonstrating rules, so they maintain the authority. On the other hand, in order to promote the pupils’ potential growth, teachers are manifesting the practicing caring (Toom & Husu, 2016, p. 44). The father of Finnish primary education, Uno Cygnaeus, used the term “pedagogical love” (Paksuniemi et al, 2013, p. 86) to describe this kind of teacher hood that carries care and trust in their pupils.

3.3 English Language education in Finland

Finland has two national languages, Finnish and Swedish. Finnish pupils study at least three languages in primary school: mother tongue at Grade 1, the first foreign language at Grade 3, and another national language at Grade 6 (Kantelinen & Hildén, 2016, p. 158). For the first foreign language, statistics in 2010 showed that the majority chose English (Nuolijärvi, 2011, p. 112). English is so widespread in Finnish society that young learners value the importance of English skills (Jalkanen, 2017, p. 55-56). Even though English education begins at Grade 3, young learners are exposed to English every day (Kantelinen & Hildén, 2016, p. 157-158). Outside the classroom, they meet foreigners, surf the internet and watch TV which is not dubbed. Inside the classroom, an approach named language shower is started at Grades 1 to introduce foreign languages and arise young learners’ language awareness in a fun way (FNBE, 2016b, p. 136).
Fun and playfulness are mentioned in foreign language education for all grades in National Core Curriculum for Basic Education (FNBE, 2016b, p. 197 & p. 348). Besides, the curriculum addressed language as a prerequisite for thinking and learning that language education is multidisciplinary and every teacher is involved (FNBE, 2016b, p. 135-136). As Kantelinen and Hildén (2016, p. 159) concluded, language education in Finland aims for meaningful and functional learning, where learners’ own experience, social interaction, and personal reflection are highly valued. In classroom practice, a mix of communicative approach and grammar study is applied to achieve language proficiency, real-life purposes, learner autonomy, and intercultural communication competence (Kantelinen & Hildén, 2016, p. 163). In addition, English language education shares the overall goals of basic education, including individual growth and healthy self-esteem (Kantelinen & Hildén, 2012, p. 165).

A variety of assessment takes place in English classroom, including self-assessment, peer-assessment, and teacher assessment. During the course, Finnish English teachers carry out an on-going assessment to guide and support young learners. At the end of school years, they assess the learning outcome referencing the learning objectives in the national curriculum, which is adapted from CEFR (Common European Framework of Reference for Languages) National Core Curriculum for Basic Education 2014 acknowledges that school and teachers play significant roles in young learners’ self-concept, and it emphasizes the purpose of assessment is to promote learning (FNBE, 2016b, p. 52-53 & p. 238-239.)
4 Research Questions

The thesis focuses on exploring teachers’ words and deeds in terms of their influence on young learners’ self-esteem. For a country that underlines healthy self-esteem as a national goal of education, Finnish teachers deserve a holistic study on the subject. The aim is to investigate Finnish teachers’ perception and action in supporting young learners to develop healthy self-esteem. This study concentrates on young learners, which mainly refers to primary school pupils. English, rather than other subjects, was chosen for mainly four reasons. First, it emerged from my personal motivation; English language education is my previous job, current study, and future career, which carries my passion. Second, as elucidated in section 2.2.2, language teaching and learning possess certain characters that particularly affect young learners’ self-esteem. Furthermore, English education is such a trend in China that, without any exaggeration, it is an indispensable component in every pupil’s life. Last, but not least, investigating English teachers eases the practical process; that is, no considerable language barrier.

Overall, the research questions addressed as follows:

1. What is Finnish English teachers’ perception of young learners’ self-esteem?
2. How do Finnish English teachers support young learners to develop their healthy self-esteem?

Acknowledging the generality of the topic, the study aims at gaining understanding about Finnish English teachers’ classroom practice regarding their young learners’ self-esteem. Optimistically, it can inspire Chinese English teachers, and ultimately improve the happiness of Chinese young learners, by baby steps.
5 Methodology

5.1 Research methods

For better understanding teachers’ perception and interpreting teachers’ behavior, the study applied qualitative approach. As Cohen et al. (2013, p. 219) remark, qualitative approach allows informants to speak up, and it seeks for different definitions, patterns, themes, categories and regularities that underneath human behavior. Apart from a specified conceptual framework, qualitative approach renders flexibility in presenting and explaining experiences and meanings (Praise, 2006, p. 686-687). In order to answer the two research questions, I combined two qualitative methods in data collection: stimulated recall interview (Gas & Mackey, 2000) and semi-constructed interview (Edwards & Holland, 2013, p. 29).

Stimulated recall interview is a subset of the introspective method; by using a stimulus of an event, it prompts interviewees to recall their internal thought process during the situation (Lyle, 2003, p. 861). The method is widely used in the educational field of research. A primary reason could be:

“To understand adequately the choices teachers make in classrooms, the grounds for their decisions and judgments about pupils, and the cognitive processes through which they select and sequence the actions they have learned to take while teaching, we must study their thought processes before, during and after teaching.” (Gas & Mackey, 2000, p. 10)

Therefore, stimulated recall interview utterly meets the need of present study to dig into teachers’ behavior as well as the rationale behind it, with regard to developing young learners’ healthy self-esteem.

Concerning stimulated recall interview is majorly accountable for the second research question, I integrated semi-constructed interview to ascertain teachers’ perception. The semi-constructed interview comprises of four topics: general information, personal definition of self-esteem, the value on self-esteem, and teachers’ own self-esteem. With the aid of specific topics
in flexible order and format, the interviewee might feel freer to talk, and the interviewer is able to ask follow-ups and tailor the questions accordingly (Rabionet, 2011, p. 564).

5.2 Research design

I referenced Gass & Mackey’s (2000, p. 153-155) sample research protocol, and drafted a detailed research protocol (see APPENDIX 1). Wherein many factors deserve considering. The stimulated recall interview procedure is rather complex that normally includes videotaping, note taking, and interview (Gass & Mackey, 2000, p. 57). Videotaping entails several practical matters, such as where to set the camera, what should the camera capture, and how to guarantee the volume in a classroom setting (Lyle, 2003, p. 868-871). Once finishing recording, Fox-Turnbull (2011, p. 205) advises taking field notes during the observation would facilitate the following interview. As for the interview, its goals are to probe the thinking behind the actual behavior, to reason the decision-making, and to make the implicit explicit (Nind, 2016). Thus, questions such as “What were you thinking?” “Why did you say that?” should be asked. Additionally, research indicated that sooner the interview takes place, more accurate the recall will be (Gass & Mackey, 2000, p. 18). As a result, the plan is to carry out all the interviews on the same day as videotaping. Besides, whether to play the full video or only segments varies with different research objectives (Nind, 2016). For the current study, because of the integration of two methods, playing segments is optimal for timing consideration (Cohen et al., 2013). Meanwhile, informants are encouraged to stop the record and reflect on any segment, for ensuring their feeling of ownership (Nind, 2016), as well as enriching the data set. As for the sequence of two types of interviews, I followed semi-constructed interview→ stimulated recall interview. The reason is that I reckon semi-constructed interview allows informants to be familiar with the topic and enables them to understand the context. Figure 5 indicates the general research design, where further detail will be explained in the next section.
Figure 5. Research design (adapted from Tuomainen, 2015, p. 47)
5.3 Data collection

5.3.1 Informants

The target group of the study is Finnish English teachers who teach in primary schools. They do not need to be particularly interested in self-esteem, or in any way significant. The aim is the typical, conventional, average Finnish English teachers. So I used typical-case and convenience sampling. With the aid of my supervisor, I targeted some teachers and managed to get two consents at the first contact. Then, by sending email to all the teachers I have met through previous observation, the third informant turned up (the email content see APPENDIX 4). Table 2 exhibits their information, where three things worth mentioning. First, to protect the anonymity, each informant has a typical English name as the pseudonym. It was either picked up by the informant or they assent to my suggestion. Second, Kate is a native English speaker, while she has not only received her teacher education in Finland but also been teaching all along in Finland. Therefore, it is convincing that she belongs to Finnish English teacher category. Last, in response to the new curriculum reform, some schools in Finland prolong the lesson from 45 minutes to 75 minutes for third graders and above. Mary works at one of these schools. Yet, lesson duration did no harm for the study, only could provide more data.

Table 2. Information of the participated informants.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interviewee</th>
<th>Mary</th>
<th>Roy</th>
<th>Kate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year of teaching experience</td>
<td>20-25 years</td>
<td>5-10 years</td>
<td>15-20 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nationality</td>
<td>Finnish</td>
<td>Finnish</td>
<td>Non-Finnish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Profession</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>English &amp; Class</td>
<td>English &amp; Class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade of participated young learners</td>
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<td>5th</td>
<td>3rd</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of participated young learners</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lesson duration</td>
<td>75 min</td>
<td>45 min</td>
<td>45 min</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview duration</td>
<td>100 min</td>
<td>80 min</td>
<td>90 min</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5.3.2 Data collection process

In August and September 2017, I made contact and confirmed with the informants. In October, we communicated the research objective and interview procedure. It is noteworthy that videotaping at the classroom in Finland requires parents’ permission, even though my research subject is the teacher. So I drafted the permission slip and Kate helped with a slight adjustment (see APPENDIX 2). To better serve the purpose, I asked a Finnish friend, who is an English-major senior year student in teacher training program, to translate the permission slip into Finnish (see APPENDIX 3). The slip was sent to three teachers and they handed it to parents by either the printed-version or Wilma, a Finnish website for home-school communication. One parent, among thirty-seven, disapproved the videotaping. The teacher and I fully respected the parent’s decision. When shooting the video, we managed to avoid the pupil from the camera.

In order to examine whether the interview question was clear, as well as stimulated recall method could dig all the data that needed, a pilot study was carried out at the beginning of November 2017. Since its intention was to test the interview, instead of recording a video as stimulus, I decided to take notes and describe each scenario to the interviewee. The interviewee for pilot study was my fellow student, an experienced English teacher. At the time, we were taking the professional practice in teacher training school. So I observed her lesson, noted down the remarks and interviewed her on the same day. The interview took place in a study room in the school library, which lasted for 40 minutes. The result was encouraging, for it not only offered a close look at the interview question, but also proved that the data collection tool was suitable for answering the research question. A credit to my fellow student, whose valuable opinion contributed to improving the research protocol.

All interviews were completed later in November 2017. With each informant, we discussed and decided the time of interview together. Informants took account of time arrangement and offered the suggestion on the group of students that suited best for our schedule. All interviews
took place in the same classroom as the lesson, and they were conducted in English. Each interview consisted of three stages.

The first stage of the interview was to prepare for stimulated recall. To arrange for the filming, I always arrived at least fifteen minutes earlier (Hatch, 2007, p. 52). The camera (iPad) was set up at the back of the classroom, which, for most of the time, faced the front of the teacher and the back of the learner. Before every lesson, with the teacher’s permission, I introduced myself to the pupils, informed them of the research, promised about the ethical issue, as well as thanked them for participating. During the lesson, I mostly acted as an observer with the camera in the background. Except that in Mary’s lesson, she invited me to become a participant for a couple of times. For example, she asked young learners to teach me the Finnish word of the personal pronoun and let them translate some Finnish vocabularies for me. Seeing through the camera, I noted down all the detail that attracted my attention and related to the research topic. That included, but not limited to, a sentence, a word, a gesture, a movement, an expression, an eye contact. Meanwhile, I wrote down the time point for every note. To avoid missing any valuable detail, the original plan was to make time for scrutinizing the video by myself before the interview. Yet, due to the time limitation, it only realized in the first interview. Nevertheless, as far as I see it, it made no significant distinction. I assumed it was because I paid full attention during the lesson that in the review I did not find anything that I missed out, only to make some time points more precisely.

The second stage of the interview was the semi-constructed interview. With the teachers’ permission, the whole process, together with stimulated recall interview, was audio recorded. The question was listed in research protocol (see APPENDIX 1). Although in practice, under the premise of covering all the questions, all three interviews varied. I altered orders of some questions, wording, as well as added more follow-up inquiries to gain understanding and keep the dialogue smooth (Rabionet, 2011, p. 564).
The third stage of the interview was stimulated recall interview where the informants were invited to introspect on their actions in connection with certain video segments. Before we started, I told informants to feel free to stop me and reflect on anything that I missed out. Starting at the beginning of the video, even we skipped over some parts, teachers were still able to recall in a short time. If in some cases they found it hard to remember, we managed to solve that by rewinding and watching again. One particular situation was that due to time overlapping, we stopped during one stimulated recall interview and carried on the next morning. According to Gass and Mackey (2000, p. 18), the accuracy can be guaranteed within 48 hours. Though the teacher admitted that it became harder to remember vividly overnight, we still succeeded in recalling the rest of interview.

5.4 Data processing and analysis

Transcribing is a crucial task, which not only consumes time, but also deserves caution to prevent data loss (Cohen et al, 2013, p. 426). To reflect the original interview as much as possible, I transcribed the interview word-by-word. Specifically, I kept the form of oral speech, including laughter, pauses, word repetitions, colloquial phrases and so forth. An online website assisted the transcribing process, where it could generate text through dictation (Transcribe, 2018). Kvale (2007, p. 132) recommends to let the interviewees confirm the transcription so that the quotes can reflect the habitual language without offending the interviewees. Hence, after transcribing and proofreading, I sent the transcription to my informants. They all confirmed the transcription, with some minor editing of typos, vocabularies, grammars, and modes of expression.

Content analysis is “making replicable and valid inferences from text (or other meaningful matter) to the contexts of their use” (Krippendorff, 2013, p. 24). The present thesis utilized content analysis for twofold reasons. On the one hand, content analysis affords new perception,
deepens our understanding and inspires practical improvement (Krippendorff, 2013, p. 24). On the other hand, Gass and Mackey (2000) in their book Stimulated recall methodology in second language research also employed content analysis, setting an example for analyzing stimulated recall interview data.

The analysis was conducted manually following the content analysis process (see Figure 6). In research design, I have assigned two data collection methods to answer each research question, so it was rather easy to definite data population, sample, context, and unit. Exceptions existed, however. For some data of semi-constructed interview covered the second research question, or vice versa, I coded them and constructed them into the category they belonged to. While coding, I determined to find “similarities and differences”, “consistencies and inconsistencies”, “variations and homogeneity of responses”, as well as “deviant and extreme cases” (Gibbs, 2007, p. 96). I adhered Mruk’s source of self-esteem (2013b, p. 73-76) to identify teachers’ words and deeds that affect the self-esteem of young learners. Codes such as acceptance, atmosphere, care, demonstration, differentiation, encouragement, equality, eye
contact, fondness, lose face, model, no competition, patience, praise, respect, sensitivity sympathy, trust, virtue were generated. After that, I categorized the code with reference to social interaction model (Argyle, 1969, p. 363-368; Miller & Moran, 2012, p. 31-35). When summarizing and presenting the results, I went back and forth between step 6 to 9 (see Figure 6), trying to adjust and make more sense of the data. Certain changes have made. The results are presented in chapter 6.

5.5 Validity and reliability

Validity and reliability are important criteria for an effective and reliable study (Cohen et al., 2013, p. 179 & p. 199). Validity refers to the correctness of a research in reflecting the truth and phenomena; in other words, whether a research investigates what it aims to investigate (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 246). There are seven stages in validation regarding qualitative research: “thematizing”, “designing”, “interviewing”, “transcribing”, “analyzing”, “validating” and “reporting” (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 248-249). The theoretical framework of this study derived from sound theories and studies. Through prudent comparison, I referenced Mruk’s (1999, 2013b) work to define and study the core concept self-esteem, guaranteeing the coherence and validity. The research design subjected to answering the research questions. Thanks to previous research guideline and sample, I managed to plan the research with a clear logic. Adhering to the suggestion of Cohen et al. (2013, p. 180), the interview was carried out carefully in a natural setting. Both in the semi-constructed interview and stimulated recall interview, my questions allowed informants to talk openly. Followed the principle in the book of Cohen et al. (2013, p. 426), transcription process reflects the authenticity. Assisted by theoretical background, I analyzed and concluded the data inductively, providing valid research findings.
According to Cohen et al. (2013, p. 199), reliability stands for dependability or trustworthiness of a study. They continue to state, in the qualitative research, “Reliability includes fidelity to real life, context- and situation specificity, authenticity, comprehensiveness, detail, honesty, depth of response and meaningfulness to the respondents.” (Cohen et al., 2013, p. 204) In my study, from research design to choice of methods, from informants’ selection to interview process, from data processing to data analysis, each stage I abided by the guideline from previous studies (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009; Cohen et al., 2013) and discussed with my supervisor. Among all, a few things are worth mentioning. To make sure that I deliver my message in an appropriate manner, I drafted all my script and practiced in the pilot study. To reduce bias and ensure my informants feel comfortable to talk, I followed Cohen et al.’s (2013, p. 425) guideline of conducting an interview. Besides, to improve the reliability of the data, the transcription was sent to and confirmed by the informants.

5.6 Ethical aspects

As for ethical issues, the study adhered to the guideline of Finnish National Advisory Board on Research Ethics (2009). All informants were voluntary, and they gave consent to me either orally or via email. In the same way, I offered them the information needed regarding the study, including the topic, purpose, data collecting methods and length of time. When two of them asked for details, I sent them the simplified research protocol. Since the research involved pupils, guardians’ permission was taken into account. As my promise to the pupils and their guardians, only the teacher and I watched the video record. After the interview, I kept them in OneDrive, where I am the only one who knows the password to access. Concerning the informants’ privacy, they were presented with a pseudonym. With the aid of my supervisor, we made a deliberate decision on information of the informants that showed in table 2, ensuring no one would be identified “easily and without unreasonable costs” (National Advisory Board on Research Ethics, 2009, p. 10). With regard to the audio record and transcription, I stored
them on my computer and USB flash. My computer requires a password that only I know. In addition, while studying in the library, I always locked the computer whenever I left the desk so as to protect the data. All the data, including video records, audio records, my field notes, and transcriptions will be deleted and destroyed when the study completed (National Advisory Board on Research Ethics, 2009, p. 13).
6 Results and Discussion

This chapter presents the result of data analysis. In line with the research questions, section 6.1 conveys Finnish English teachers’ perception of young learners’ self-esteem; section 6.2 manifests how they support young learners to develop healthy self-esteem.

To approach the topic of interest, I invited the teachers to share their teaching philosophy as a prelude. I believe knowing their main purpose of teaching can deepen the understanding of Finnish English teachers, which will contribute to the research.

It is interesting to note that none of them initiated the answer with academic achievements of learners. Roy’s motto illustrated an innovative attitude of teaching. He stated, “To try something new; if it doesn’t work, try to improve.” The other two teachers indicated a learners-oriented purpose, where they prioritized learners’ need, respected them as human beings, and put trust in their abilities.

*I want to meet every person as a person, as an individual. And I would like my students to feel that they are seen and heard. And I am there for them, especially and specifically for them. (Mary)*

*To see the students, the pupils as holistic beings. To see that they have things that they're stronger at and things they're weaker at. So I think seeing your learners as somebody who can learn. (Kate)*

Their answers were greatly consistent with the underlying value addressed in the National Core Curriculum for Basic Education 2014 (FNBE, 2016b, p. 15). Moreover, when mentioning education and learning, they all mentioned “learning to learn” skill. To them, guiding pupils to find the best way to learn as well as supporting pupils to master languages learning skills are prominent for an English teacher. Kate put it in a perfect metaphor:
I see learning very much as a set of different locks. Each learner might have a different lock, and they’re able to learn things. But the teacher needs to find the right key or make the right key to open the lock, so that the learning can happen. (Kate)

Their teaching philosophy discloses the so-called “pedagogical love” (Paksuniemi et al, 2013, p. 86). This caring for pupils makes the topic transition to self-esteem very smoothly.

6.1 Teachers’ perception of self-esteem

Data reveal teachers’ perception of self-esteem in several aspects. I categorized them and presented in subtitles as following: definition of self-esteem; the importance of self-esteem; the changeable self-esteem; the crucial period for learners’ self-esteem; teachers’ own self-esteem.

Definition of self-esteem

To make the questions more concrete and interviewee-friendly, I encouraged my informants to firstly comment on their young learners’ self-esteem, and then generalize what kind of behaviors or characteristics they would perceive as self-esteem. Their answer, even with the simplest word, suggested a profound understanding of the subject. Two of them associated healthy self-esteem with self-confidence, in response to the discussion in section 2.2: self-confidence is a positive attitude of oneself, which correlates with healthy self-esteem (Coudevylle, 2011, p. 671). More significantly, their description signified a two-dimensional view of self-esteem.

Self-esteem is the idea that you have of yourself, in comparison with other people I guess. And how confident you are in your own abilities, and also for me it's the ability to be yourself, if you're a bit different but you accept that. (Kate)

Confident, don’t take yourself too seriously…not afraid of making mistakes. (Roy)

Kate overtly expressed the concept in two aspects: confident about ability and acceptance of who you are, corresponding respectively to self-competence and self-worth. In Roy’s
statement, “don’t take yourself too seriously” relates to ones’ feeling of worthiness, and “not afraid of making mistakes” indicates ones’ positive attitude of their competence.

I assumed teachers’ such clear and fundamental understanding of the topic could be derived from their research-based background (Kantelinen & Hildén, 2016, p. 159-160). In fact, during the interview, two out of three teachers mentioned that they have piece by piece collected their theoretical knowledge from the research study.

The importance of self-esteem

Overall, teachers in the interview attached great importance to self-esteem. They all confirmed that they come across the topic of self-esteem from time to time in parents meeting as well as discussion among colleagues. Roy asserted that healthy self-esteem results in the courage to speak English, which leads to better language skills, contributing to the academic outcome. His view is similar to Phan’s (2016, p. 130) conclusion that healthy self-esteem is a good motivation for achieving schooling outcomes. Mary deemed self-esteem to be a substantial factor in leading a good life. Kate associated self-esteem with ones’ future. Their beliefs are identical to recent research findings (Simsek, 2013; Tonsing & Ow, 2018), also consistent with my initial intention for choosing this research topic.

Democracy, citizenship, and self-esteem and all these things... they are the skills that are going to be so important in the future when people are going into working environments. It's not going to be what you know, because you can get knowledge, and you can get fact. But it's how you interact with people and how you are able to work in groups, because that's becoming more and more prominent. The age I am now, I've seen friends' children grow up. And I've seen children go through school who were in my own children's classes. I've heard about girls, especially, self-harming, suicide attempt, they're depressed, they got really low self-esteem. And as a teacher, I think "okay, should I have seen something earlier? Is there something that I should have done, could have done, that might have
helped this?” May be, maybe not. But I always make sure that, if there is anything that occurs that's social-emotional in nature, I deal with it straight away. We do rather too much than too little. (Kate)

I quoted the whole text of Kate’s speech as it is so sincere and touching. Such concerns not only indicated the importance of self-esteem, but also demonstrated how Finnish English teachers care about their young learners, corresponding to the findings in later section 6.2.1.

**The changeable self-esteem**

Teachers in the study unanimously agreed that self-esteem could be developed. Their reasons were different yet reciprocal to each other. Roy told me a story to support this statement. It is about a boy in his class who was terrified of giving presentations. When Roy knew about it, he first shared some useful tips with the whole class about public speech. Then he made a total fool of himself in front of everyone to demonstrate that it is not that scary to give a speech in public. After that, he talked to the boy in private and encouraged him. After several trials, the boy decided to give it a try and it went very successfully. Roy praised the boy, for he had overcome his fear and become more confident. Kate also believed that self-esteem could be improved via guiding. She argued that the key is to make the concept less abstract for pupils. By deconstructing self-esteem into different pieces, we can focus on one at a time and plan different activities to work on it. Mary elucidated low self-esteem could be resulted from family issues, social encounters and so on. Yet, she contended that it is never too late to “blossom” as long as you get someone who believes in you. Her understanding is consistent with Helm’s (2007, p. 110); children who lack family support could still succeed if the teacher dedicates to support.

In sum, teachers not only believed that self-esteem is changeable, but also explicitly or implicitly denoted that they could be the ones who make the change happen. This idea reflects what National Core Curriculum for Basic Education 2014 (FNBE, 2016b, p. 49) advocates,
teachers have particular significance on pupils’ self-concept and they ought to support pupils’ overall growing and learning.

The crucial period for learners’ self-esteem

All teachers in the interview underlined the social and affective development of pupils at the primary level. They regarded primary school level as a fundamental time, not only for healthy self-esteem but to build up the basic skills for future, such as how to work in a team, communicate with others, and behave in different situations.

*But to me, at the moment it's more important to learn, or to try to support them how to lead a good life. Because these are the skills they need in the future. And if you don't do that in the primary school, in the primary level, together with parents, classroom teachers, subject teachers; if you just let it sleep, I think it's game over so to say.* (Mary)

*Research shows that the third grade is the age when the children start to become more aware of themselves, and how they are different to other people. And (which) can have some kind of impact on their self-esteem.* (Kate)

Their opinion correlates with Tarasova’s (2016, p. 130-131) research finding that children’s self-awareness and social skills develop notably in primary school.

Teachers’ own self-esteem

When asked about their own self-esteem, teachers expressed diverse self-assessment. Nevertheless, the different self-esteem seemingly stopped no one from supporting young learners to build up healthy self-esteem.

*I think I can relate to those children who also, not suffer but sometimes, have feeling of low self-esteem. I think I know what it feels like. Everybody wants to be liked; everybody wants to get some attention; everybody wants the feeling to belong to some certain groups. You don't want to feel like an outsider, or left out. I had those feelings, and I'm*
sure everybody else should have. I think it's a good way of understanding, sympathy perhaps. (Mary)

I have very good self-esteem. I always try to be myself in the classroom. If I make a mistake, I say, "oh, I made a mistake" and I laugh about it. And they say "okay, look, she's laughing about it, and she's a teacher. And she's got a doctorate. "They know I have a doctor, so then they maybe “I won’t get so hung up about it if I make a mistake.” And I like to use humor. That is something I got from my family when I was a child. We were always laughing and joking, and I think that helps you to get through anything. (Kate)

They think, in a positive way, I'm weird. haha haha. Because I always tell weird stuff...It is one of my strategies to wake them up again. Because students get bored...You need to have some kind of fun stuff, some kind of weird stuff... I'm not trying to be funny other than I'm not. (Roy)

Their answer suggested that they incline to lay a positive effect on their young learners’ self-esteem. Their strategy is to somehow related to their young learners as well as to present the authenticity of their own self-esteem. This strategy could be supported by Burns (1982, p. 254), teachers’ authentic self-esteem results in a supportive classroom atmosphere, which benefits pupils’ self-esteem.

Additionally, Roy offered a different perspective on the subject. He argued that after years of teaching, no longer did he think about his self-esteem or worry about himself. Instead, his full attention goes to the pupils. This argument not only ascertained his healthy self-esteem, but also displayed a genuinely learner-centered mindset. Supposedly, Roy is not the only Finnish teacher who thinks this way. As Terri (2016, p. 64) points out, many teachers in Finland put emphasis on young learners rather than themselves.

Rubio (2007, p. 7) considers understanding the concept of self-esteem and awareness of one’s own self-esteem as the first step for teachers to build up their learners’ self-esteem.
Apparently, teachers in my study have all reached the first step. Not only did they have a profound understanding of self-esteem as well as awareness of their own self-esteem; they also acknowledged the importance of self-esteem and regarded primary level as a crucial period for self-esteem development. Now let us move on to see how they put in practice.

6.2 How teachers support young learners’ development of healthy self-esteem

This section contains answers to the second research question, which is the central topic of the research. I identify teachers’ role using the source of self-esteem from Mruk (2013b, p. 73-76), and present the results through the social interaction model (Argyle, 1969, p. 363-368; Miller & Moran, 2012, p. 31-35). The sections 6.2.1-6.2.4 respectively display how the teachers support young learners to develop healthy self-esteem through four social interactions: the reaction of others, comparison with others, the effects of roles played, and identification with role models. In section 6.2.5, the results are reviewed and categorized into four sources of self-esteem: acceptance, virtue, influence, and achievement.

6.2.1 Through the reaction of others

The reaction of others greatly shapes one’s self-esteem (Miller & Moran, 2012, p. 31). In the classroom setting, for a young learner, “others” mainly refer to the teacher and the peers. In the data, teacher’s role manifested in two dimensions: directly reacting to young learners and indirectly mediating the peers’ reaction. In the first dimension, Finnish English teachers demonstrate respect, care, encouragement, and sensitivity. In the second dimension, they chiefly work on atmosphere to mediate the interaction between young learners. I display the model in Figure 7 and elucidate as follows.
i. Respect

All teachers treated their young learners with a sense of respect, as I see it, delivering the message that teachers and young learners are equal. That respect was shown in different formats during their interaction, such as eye contact, body postures, the tone of voice, and freedom of choice.

_While we are greeting, I want them to look at me, not outside, not toes, me. Because it’s polite to look at the person you are speaking to. That’s also part of this upbringing._ (Mary)

As Myllyneva (2016, p. 51) points out, eye contact conveys informative and communicative information. Via eye contact, teachers demonstrated the manner of politeness, and communicated a mutual respect. Learners, reversely, received the acceptance as a worthy person. Meanwhile, all teachers established an equality between young learners through body postures. They all have occasionally kneeled down or sit around young learners during the
lesson. According to Müller (2014, p. 1353), this way shows no sign of dominance or role of superior.

*I’m conscious of being an adult, and towering over somebody. And I think it’s more neutral, like we’re eye-to-eye. (Kate)*

*I’m at the same level, so I’m not coming from upwards. (Roy)*

The tone of voice mainly referred to politeness, which will be discussed later through identification of role model. As for the freedom of choice, I noticed the teachers offered flexibility for young learners to make decisions.

*I said, “I suggest you to...” because there are many ways to do this. Just give it a try. (Roy)*

*I just said, “If you want to change seat, you can sit here”. I didn’t ask her to move. So it was up to her; she could choose. (Mary)*

This respect not only increases young learners’ self-worth as being accepted and valued, but also builds up their self-competence as being capable of influencing the surroundings. Teachers treating young learners with respect corresponds to Wallace’s conclusion (2016, p. 181), receiving respect from others affects one’s self-esteem that is useful in school practice.

### ii. Care

In addition to respect, teachers’ care for young learners is also palpable. In fact, during the interview, teachers, more than one time, associated young learners with their own children. This genuine care manifested in various ways: willing to stop and listen to learners; feeling sympathy when they suffered; addressing them with various cute ways; as well as body language, such as patting their heads and hugging them.

*This (calling them “my dear”) is something just there. I don’t think about it. I use that even with my own children. It just means a dear person or friend. (Roy)*
They always want to share things about themselves. So very often, they tell things at the beginning and at the end of the lesson.... He was blowing his nose constantly, and I felt sorry for him. Because my son currently has a very bad flu, so I can feel him. It’s not nice. (Mary)

I do it because I like them. I call them my little fluffy bunnies and stuff like that. I think it’s nice for them to feel a bit special. (Kate)

Roberts and Rosie (2002, p. 41-42) advocate that teachers’ close attention greatly affects children, where students could better cope with the problem if teachers accept how they feel. Similarly, Finnish English teachers expressed the care, sympathy, and fondness which confirm the worthiness of their young learners, contributing to healthy self-esteem.

iii. Encouragement

Encouragement is seemingly an inevitable element of building up one’s self-esteem. Teachers in my data used verbal and non-verbal way to encourage young learners. During the recording, I collected their positive feedback and found the total amount varied by individual. Some gave many positive feedbacks: smile, nod, praise, thumbs up, even applaud; the other appeared to be stricter in comparison. Yet, they have one thing in common. Namely, they all appreciated trials, efforts, and progress.

*With the homework, I always say “If you tried and you did your best, that’s enough.”*

*Always do your best, and that’s enough.* (Mary)

*If we are constantly praising children, say “that’s marvelous, oh well done, great, great.”*

*It loses currency after that.* (Kate)

This kind of encouragement in line with Dweck’s self-theories (2000, p. 127-131). As she contends, efforts appraisal is more constructive than intelligence appraisal. By helping young learners to realize that effort is necessary and the obstacle is enlightening, they could easier develop healthy self-esteem. Additionally, knowing the young learners is also vital for a
meaningful encouragement. Different pupils have different expression or behaviors when facing setbacks. We came across one girl in Roy’s class. In the middle of a game, she said, “I don’t want to play this anymore”. Roy approached her and said, “Can I help you?” Then they solved a puzzle together. Once it got solved, the girl became so excited and even shouted “Yay!” In the interview, Roy explained it was a typical behavior of that girl. When she complains “it is boring”, it actually means “it is too difficult for me”. So instead of changing the game or ignoring her, he encouraged her and offered help. Likewise, other two teachers knew how to encourage their young learners.

She was hesitating. She almost lost the confidence of answering. She was about to say “I don’t remember anymore.” So, I went “Come on, you can do it.” And then she said the right answer. (Mary)

(I encouraged them to organize by themselves because) I think this group has the ability to be independent thinkers. (Kate)

iv. Sensitivity

Sensitivity refers to the ability to understand others’ feeling. In classroom settings, teacher sensitivity describes to which extent teachers aware and respond to learners’ feeling and needs (Bush et al., 2015, p. 15). I chose “sensitivity” as one category of reaction because I observed many situations where teachers prioritize pupils’ feeling in their interaction. Acknowledging that speaking a foreign language in front of everyone is uneasy, teachers in the study underlined preventing young learners from “losing face”. It is interesting to notice this highlighted Chinese calque (Hung, 2014, p. 223) in Finnish English teachers’ pedagogical view.

She looks a bit lost. The others were starting to form groups, but she was kind of unsure which one to go. So I thought maybe she needs a little reinsurance or push. (Kate)

(When telling them don’t forget the book next time) I can see that one girl went really small, so I gave her a smile. And she was kind of relied. So you want to say in a very firm
way, “this is a very serious matter.” You can enlighten it by smiling. And they will go, “she means it, but it is not the end of the world.” (Mary)

A girl was saying, “Ahhh, I did it wrong!” So I said, “Don’t worry, it is just a game.” A friendly, kind of, trying to comfort her. Coz it is just a game. (Roy)

Their sensitivity conforms to the implication of Crichton et al. (2017, p. 62) that in order to protect self-esteem, teachers shall be sensitive to young learners’ feeling of insecure. Besides, Mary shared a practical example to illustrate the importance of sensitivity. As an ESL (English as a second language) teacher, one has probably asked a question to learners, “Where did you go during the holiday?” Nonetheless, Mary suggested that it might make young learners feel awful if they go nowhere. So instead, she invites learners to talk about something new they have come across during the holiday, which could be a new food, a new friend, etc. In this way, it is personal yet harmless, and everybody has something to share. This sensitivity prevents young learners from feeling like a failure, protecting their self-competence.

v. Atmosphere

Regarding the reaction of young learners’ peers, teacher’s role illustrated mainly in creating a supportive atmosphere. Unanimously, Finnish English teachers accentuated the impact of learning atmosphere for one’s self-esteem, wherein they serve as a facilitator. Language learning is a process of trial and error, and learners are supposed to make mistakes while learning (Aronld, 2007, p. 18). Teachers, together with their young learners, created a safe and supportive atmosphere where everyone is allowed to make mistakes.

It is a safe environment; they know that I’m here, their friends are here. Even if somebody said something stupid or irrelevant, there won’t be this kind of mean laughter. Because they know that I won’t allow it in my classroom. I said, “it’s okay to laugh when everybody is laughing, but laughing at somebody is not good.” (Roy)
I’d think that shows good self-esteem that he can say I didn’t understand. The others wouldn’t say “you are stupid.” That’s not the atmosphere that we have in the class, nobody would ever say something like that. (Kate)

The learning atmosphere was so safe that she was able to say (“I don’t understand”) in front of anybody. (Mary)

The reaction of the peers and the teacher is full of kindness and respect; consequently, young learners are easier to learn from mistakes, improve their language skills as well as gain worthiness with the source of acceptance and achievement. Besides, maintaining a good atmosphere signifies a virtue of “right and justice” (Mrük, 2013b, p. 74). By complying with the standard, learners feel self-worth with the source of virtue. Overall, a safe and supportive atmosphere secures young learners’ feeling of worthiness and competence, boosting their healthy self-esteem. In accord with Finnish English teachers’ behavior, Demirdag (2015, p. 195) also advocate teachers to be prudent in managing their classroom atmosphere as it will affect students’ self-esteem and learning.

6.2.2 Through comparison with others

Comparisons, to a great extent, shape ones’ perception of self-identity (Möller & Marsh, 2013, p. 544). From the data, I discern two types of comparison among young learners in the Finnish English classroom. They are social comparison and temporal comparison (Möller & Marsh, 2013, p. 545), namely, young learners comparing with each other and comparing with themselves. Respectively, Finnish English teachers uphold different attitudes towards the two types of comparison. They tend to discourage social comparison and encourage temporal comparison (see Figure 8).
i. **Social comparison**

Social comparison appears when people relate themselves to others in terms of ability, achievement, personalities and so on (Moller & Marsh, 2013, p. 546). For we human beings, it happens so frequently that almost seems to be irresistible (Mussweiler, 2006, p. 35-36). However, Finnish English teachers, as the data reveal, intended to diminish the social comparison. They granted equal opportunity to young learners, in spite of who they are and what they can do. They paid attention to every single learner, encouraged taking turns, and invited less-active learners to get involved in various ways. Their reasons are as following:

*You know that there are kids who are better at getting the thoughts out there quicker.*

*And then there are the ones who are quieter. So you have to call on them sometimes, to get them use to it.* *(Kate)*

*I try to meet everybody during the lesson, if possible.* *(Roy)*
You don’t want to single out any child. You want everybody to feel that “I’m important. Perhaps I’m not so good at English, but I am still important.” Everybody deserves the opportunity to be listened to. (Mary)

Finnish English teachers’ behaviors correspond to Lawrence’s (2006, p. 81) suggestion to teachers that they shall guarantee some sort of personal contact to each young learn every day. Starting from their own behavior, teachers avoided social comparison. Furthermore, they tried to alter young learners’ mindset of competition. For example, I witnessed Kate handing out exam papers while repetitively addressing learning itself rather than competing.

“It only matters what you got; it doesn’t matter what other people got. It is not a competition.” (Kate)

I wanted this activity to be fun. I wanted it to be quite tied and both teams will feel: “We did it! We are winning!” (Mary)

By encouraging equal opportunity and discouraging competition, teachers diminished young learners’ social comparison. In compensation, young learners are motivated to compare with themselves, which enters the temporal comparison.

ii. Temporal comparison

Temporal comparison applies when people compare their current ability, achievement and so forth with their previous ones (Möller & Marsh, 2013, p. 548). Finnish English teachers promoted the exact idea. They made clear that everybody is different and evaluated young learners based on their own level. Mary noted the big variation among the young learners in English language skills and believed it would be unfair to compare them with each other. Inspired by Lenz’s (2016) strength-based pedagogy and Vuorinen’s (2018) positive pedagogy, Mary adopts “strength pedagogy” in her daily practice. By identifying individual’s uniqueness and strength, she tries to let young learners themselves be aware of and work on their own strengths. Kate introduced an activity she used to have for building up young learners’ self-
esteem, which was called “brilliant bricks”. The bricks awarded the child who had done something exceptional compare to his or her own level, and the “brick winner” could decorate it and put it on the classroom wall. As Kate explained, the individual difference was stressed in this activity thereby children learnt that they are not all the same, and they do not have to be the same.

*I want school to be a place where everybody comes and learns something at their own level. Children are at their own base level, and they develop. They set their own objective.*

(*Kate*)

*During the parents meeting, we discuss how the student behaves. We don’t give the number; instead, we discuss what the goals and how he or she has been fulfilled these goals.* (*Roy*)

The promotion of individual’s development in Finnish English class not only corresponds to the underlying value in National Core Curriculum for Basic Education 2014 (FNBE, 2016b, p. 21) but also reflects the previous research on self-concept in foreign language class where the authors encourage teachers to focus on temporal comparison (Janssen et al., 2013, p. 172).

### 6.2.3 Through the effect of roles played by young learners

The role ones played affects their self-esteem, both in a feeling of worthiness and competence: self-worth might be modified by the trust that an assigned role is placed, and self-competence could be altered by the influence that a role brings (Miller and Moran, 2012, p. 33). Through observation and data analysis, three roles of young learners are found in Finnish English lessons: learners, assistants, and teachers. Their English teacher, accordingly, functions differently in terms of supporting young learners’ self-esteem (see Figure 9).
Figure 9. Through the effect of roles played by young learners

i. **Learners**

This is young learners’ major role as who they are. Apart from what has been already mentioned, it is noteworthy that teachers attach great significance to group work and peer-learning in language education. I witnessed numerous group-work activities throughout observations, in practice of their speaking and listening skills, communicative skills, as well as peer assessment.

*As you probably noticed, we don’t do individual work here, very very rarely. It is always pair, team, or group work… They get extra support from each other.* (Mary)

*You need to know how to work by yourself and also in a pair or a group.* (Roy)

Peer learning is a functional way of learning a foreign language (Ballinger & Sato, 2016, p. 2). Teachers might not aim for self-esteem enhancement while according to Helton and Smith (2014, p. 85), the awareness of children’s self-concept increased during peer interaction, and their self-esteem might be improved along with learning to interact with peers. Moreover, Finnish English teachers emphasized that they are learning together with their learners.
As you can see, I sometimes didn’t know it myself. So this is a pretty fun way because they know that we are learning together. (Roy)

It’s not that I’m saying, “I am the teacher; I am perfect, and I know everything. You are wrong.” But it’s like, we do things together. (Kate)

Teachers’ mindset of learning together, once again, proves the fact that they respect their young learners as equal human beings. In addition, young learners benefit from it for the feeling that they progress together with their teachers, which contributes to their self-competence (Mrük, 2013b, p. 75-76).

ii. Assistants

Teachers in the data appointed young learners as their little assistants to do classroom jobs. In primary school level, their responsibilities are minor ones, such as distributing handouts, wiping the whiteboard, or collecting homework. Even so, it is seemingly a privilege for young learners to help the teacher and get everyone’s attention.

*Without realizing myself, I wanted to praise or give her this little prize. You can do the cleaning because you are doing so well. (Mary)*

In Kate’s class, they have a system of on-duty classroom assistants: one week for a turn, and each turn has two assistants. Remarkably, as Kate introduced, young learners were the ones who discussed the duty and finalized the on-duty board. This assistant role may provide young learners a sense of control, which suggested by Miller and Moran (2012, p. 92), could lead to a better feeling of competence.

iii. Teachers

Both my previous experience and the data proved that young learners playing teachers’ role is rather common in Finnish English classroom. Teachers facilitate role-play activities for young learners to teach each other. For example, as mentioned in data collection process, I participated in Mary’s lesson where she asked young learners to teach me Finnish. Her intention was to
check if they understood the English vocabulary, so she “used” me to achieve this goal in a fun way. In her opinion, being teachers makes young learners “shine”. As far as I see, they did sparkle with excitement and joy while teaching me. Besides, I realized that sometimes it requires no complicated facilitation to arrange a situation for learners to act as teachers. A change of expression will do the trick. Demonstrated by Mary, instead of saying “can you tell me”, she expressed “please help me” and “can somebody teach me?” Young learners seem delighted to “teach” her.

*It makes the question more motivated. Everybody enjoys teaching everybody else. (Mary)*

Role-play ensures a learner-centered teaching style, where young learners take the active part in learning (Robinson et al., 2016, p. 596-597). In accordance with the role of assistants, young learners play as teachers may boost their feeling of competence, resulting in healthy self-esteem.

### 6.2.4 Through identification of role model

According to Argyle (1969, p. 367-368), our self-cognition is under the impact of how much we identify ourselves to our role model. In this regard, as Miller and Moran suggest (2012, p. 33-34), teachers’ role manifests in two processes: modeling and model-setting (see Figure 10). Modeling means teachers behave as a model, demonstrating all the words and deeds that they want young learners to follow; model-setting refers to teachers setting up role models for young learners, whom they can learn from (2012, p. 33-34).

![Figure 10. Through identification of role model](image)

**i. Modeling**

**ii. Model-setting**
Without a doubt, it is teachers’ duty to teach and demonstrate academic knowledge. For language teachers, it includes pronunciation, expression, translation, communication etc. Aside from academy, I notice that Finnish English teachers highlight modeling of social and moral aspects.

*I think it’s good to apologize for interrupting their work. And hopefully teaching them if they see me working, they will be able to tell the same.* (Roy)

*Well, that’s (being polite, always say “please” and “thank you”) teaching by example.*

*Coz I like kids to learn good manners. And if I don’t show them, then they won’t learn it.* (Kate)

In teachers’ opinion, their social and moral modeling is “teaching by doing”, from which pupils can learn to become social citizens with good manners. As Niemi (2016, p. 32) implied, teachers weigh heavily in promoting moral justice. Muhammad et al. (2017, p. 229) undertook a research on teachers’ politeness, where they found that teachers’ politeness lays great impact on students’ and their self-esteem.

### ii. Model setting

In my observation, I found that Finnish English teachers seldom openly set anyone as a role model. Instead, they prefer to praise young learners in private.

*S sometimes I don’t like to do it (praise someone) in front of the whole class. I like to do it more quietly, like say to somebody, “I noticed you did a really good job with something.” I think sometimes that means more to the child that the teacher actually taking the time to come outside of the situation and say something to them.* (Kate)

*I always give very easy feedback after the lesson. If I need to give some negative feedback, I’d rather do it in private. Because it’s much more effective, and the child doesn’t lose his or her face. Or sometimes they do very well, and I will say, “Wow, you have developed, well done!”* (Mary)
This way of behaving corroborates the previous finding of temporal comparison. Teachers believe that each learner has their own strength and they shall always be compared with themselves when it comes to academic outcomes. Consequently, it is contradictory to set up a role model for everyone else to compare with and learn from.

Although, model-setting exists with regard to good manners. For example, Mary used the phrase “thank you for thanking me” to set up a good example and praise the behavior. The good spreads where others would also start to say “thank you”. As Miller and Moran (2012, p. 145-146) concluded, the difference between praising “work” and “behavior” is easily neglected that people tend to praise “work” than “behavior”. However, the data in the current study suggest that praising behavior could generate more good deeds in the school setting since young learners can learn from the good behavior. Moreover, this set-up good manner is one kind of virtue which belongs to the source of self-esteem. By learning and following the good manner, young learners gain a sense of worthiness (Mruk, 2013b, p. 74).

6.2.5 Review of the results
This section seeks the answer to the way Finnish English teachers support their young learners in developing healthy self-esteem. The results indicate that Finnish English teachers in the research highly comply with the National Core Curriculum and carry out its guideline into their classroom practice. Specifically, they acknowledge the significance of healthy self-esteem and implementing this goal through daily words and deeds. I conclude the key points according to the source of self-esteem (Mruk, 2013b, p. 73-76).

To increase young learners’ feeling of acceptance, Finnish English teachers undertake the following actions. First, they interact with young learners as equal human beings. They demonstrate personal eye contact, friendly body posture and polite tone of voice, conveying that they respect their young learners. In addition to themselves, they advocate this manner to
young learners in the classroom where everyone can respect each other. Second, they genuinely care for young learners, not only with studies but in all domains. Third, they offer equal opportunities to all young learners regardless of who they are or what they can do.

To fulfill young learners’ sense of virtue, Finnish English teachers, on the one hand, set up standards such as a supportive learning atmosphere, politeness, and other good manners; on the other hand, praise young learners for achieving or obeying the standards.

To guarantee young learners’ feeling of influence, Finnish English teachers mainly function in three aspects. Firstly, they value young learners’ opinion and afford them with freedom of choice. Secondly, they promote peer learning and group work, emphasizing that they are learning together, from each other. Thirdly, they appoint assistants and delegate classroom responsibilities to young learners.

To help young learners with a sense of achievement, Finnish English teachers play a role as follows. First, they place more attention on young learners’ trials, efforts, and progress in the learning process, rather than performance. Second, they are sensitive and reacting promptly to young learners’ feelings and emotions, preventing them from feeling like a failure. Furthermore, they discourage competition and lighten young learners' comparison with peers; instead, they evaluate young learners with reference to individual’s own level. Last, they spot the good and uniqueness of young learners, and encourage them to discover and work on their own strengths.
7 Conclusion

7.1 Summary of the study

The study aimed at exploring teachers’ role in developing young learners’ healthy self-esteem, and focused on English language teachers in Finland. Teachers’ role is investigated through their perception and action regarding young learners’ self-esteem. The research questions were:


Finnish education values individual’s overall growth. The National Core Curriculum for Basic Education 2014 accentuates healthy self-esteem as a national education goal. The underlying values and overall goals are implemented in Finnish school and classroom. From a Chinese point of view, I aspired to discover how Finnish English teachers perceive and fulfill the goal, so that a constructive recommendation can be provided for their Chinese counterparts. In the end, I have managed to find the answers to my research questions.

Three English language teachers in eastern Finland participated in the research. They underwent both semi-constructed and stimulated recalled interview. The data were studied with the qualitative content analysis. The result suggested that Finnish English teachers in the research have a fundamental understanding of self-esteem, to which they attached great value. Furthermore, they believed that primary level is a crucial period and they intended to support their young learners in developing healthy self-esteem.

In reference to the source of self-esteem and social interaction theory, the study reveals that Finnish English teachers adhere to the national curriculum, and take the young learners’ self-esteem into account in daily practice. Teachers in this study respect young learners as equal human beings; genuinely care for them; encourage their trials, efforts, progress; stay sensitive and react promptly to their feelings and emotions; create and maintain a supportive and safe learning atmosphere; discourage competition; encourage young learners to discover and
develop one’s own strengths; promote teamwork, classroom jobs, and mutual learning; modeling in academic, social, and moral aspects. All of which, judging from the source of self-esteem (Mruk, 2013b, p. 73-76), contribute to young learners’ healthy self-esteem. Yet, the effect awaits to be discovered and evaluated.

7.2 Strengths and limitations of the study

Viewing from a Chinese teacher’s perspective, the study discerns the characteristics of Finnish English teachers that of vastly distinct from teachers in China. Finnish teachers might find the result as common sense, whereas Chinese teachers could actually benefit from it, which is down to my goal of the research. Meanwhile, I, as a teacher researcher, have obtained plentiful advantages from the study. As Niemi and Nevgi (2014, p. 133) contend, teachers in need of research capacity to learn, reflect, dialogue and improve their work. Through this research, I am granted not only valuable experience to enrich the research capacity but also a more holistic understanding of the topic, making me a better teacher. Furthermore, I believe this study, to some extent, brings changes to the informants as well. During stimulate recalled interview, teachers all commented on a few things as "the unexpected", which they have never thought about or reflected on. Some of them expressed the wish to amend things, such as a gesture, a strict eye contact, a shush sound, a seating plan, and an activity. I simply hope my study offers a little help for their introspection and future practice.

As for the limitations, admittedly, the sample number is small and the observation for one lesson is fairly short. Although the current informants have provided me abundant data, an increase of informants and observation would possibly generate more patterns and findings. Besides, the research studies young learners’ self-esteem yet their perspective is missing. This caused difficulty especially in analyzing their identification with the role model. Adding young
learners’ perspective would make the findings more comprehensive. I shall take it into consideration in the future research.

7.3 Recommendation for Chinese English teachers

As I state at the beginning of the thesis, my utmost goal is to learn from Finnish English teachers and offer insights for Chinese English teachers to support young learners to develop their healthy self-esteem. Gladly, I accomplish the goal. Based on the findings of the research, I generate ten recommendations for Chinese English teachers with Finnish examples. They are presented in English and Chinese (see APPENDIX 5 & 6).

Given the condition of the education in China with regard to the education system, student numbers, curriculum, teachers and other resources (OECD, 2016), I acknowledge the vast difference between China and Finland. However, I believe the recommendation is applicable and achievable with a willing heart.

Let us end with a quote from my informant Kate:

*Nothing at school is so bad that we have to take someone’s self-esteem away.*
References


Epstein, S. (1997). This I have learned from over 40 years of personality research. Journal of Personality, 65(1), pp. 3-32.


Appendices

APPENDIX 1: Research protocol

Research Protocol

Data collection can be divided into three stages:

1. Classroom practice
2. Semi-constructed interview
3. Stimulated recall interview

Classroom Practice

Researcher Responsibilities:

- Informs students’ parents and gets their permission for the research.
- Arrives in advance to prepare for video-recording (setting up equipment).
- Makes sure the videotape is working during the class.
- Observes and takes notes.

Instructions for Researcher:

- Permission slip for parents please see at the end.
- Say hello to the students, introduce myself:

  Hello everyone, my name is Junyi Yang; I am a master’s student in UEF. Currently I am working on my master thesis, namely a big project that I have done in order to graduate and get the degree. This is a part of my project, please noted that I am not going to record you, I will focus on the teacher, so please relax.

  - After the class, find a quiet place and watch the tape over. Try to keep record of every word and deed that is worth digging in, remember to note down the time and remarks.

Semi-constructed Interview

Researcher Responsibilities:

- Sets down with the participant, carry out the interview.
- Keeps time management that try to limit the whole session within 75 minutes.
• Makes sure the audiotape is working during the semi-constructed interview.

Instructions for Researcher:

• Thanks for participation, briefly present what is going to happen:

Thank you very much for granting me this opportunity to interview you. In the interview, we are first going to discuss a few topics that related to learners’ self-esteem, and then we will move to the videotape and the reflection.

• Semi-constructed Interview topics/questions:

General Information
1. Could you please tell me a little about yourself, for example: educational background and teaching career?
2. How long have you been teaching this group of students?

Personal Definition of Self-esteem
3. How do you see self-esteem of your pupils?
4. I wonder what kind of features or behaviors you put into “self-esteem” category, in another word, how do you define it?
5. Do you think self-esteem can be changed? Why? If yes, then how?

Value on Self-esteem
6. I would like to know if you would discuss self-esteem related topic of pupils with your colleagues. Any examples?
7. How about with parents? Do you normally address it during the meeting or in other types of communication?
8. Some teachers say it’s quite puzzled to balance academic outcome with social and affective outcome, do you agree? Why?
9. Based on your own experience, can you give me a proportion of these two aspects? May I ask for the reason?
   (Do you take self-esteem into account while teaching? If the answer is yes, then how?)

Teachers’ self-esteem
10. Do you consider you who has a health self-esteem? Why?
11. Some studies argued that teacher’s self-esteem could influence students’ self-esteem. Do you believe that self-esteem of yours may influence that of your students’? And why?

Stimulated Recall Interview

Researcher Responsibilities:

• Replays the video record, asks the participant to reflect on the selected segments.
• Makes sure the audiotape is working during the stimulated recall interview.

Instructions for Researcher:

• Introduce to the participant how it works:
First of all, we are going to watch the video together. As we both can see what you were doing but it is only you know what you were thinking, so I would like to know what is in your mind when you teach and react. Please feel free to stop the video and share your thoughts at the time. I will also press pause if I got a question to ask you. Since time is limited, we are going to focus on some segments.

- Ask questions based on the video, for example:

  Could you please tell me what you were thinking when you do that?
  Do you remember what you were thinking at the moment?
  Do you often do this?
  Why did you call him but not the others?
  Why did you divide the group in this way?
  Why did you give her this feedback?
  Why did you change your position/move?
  Why did you say this instead of saying something else?

- Wrap up the interview:

  So far these are all my questions, do you have any questions? Or anything you want to add? I am really appreciated your participation. Thanks very much for your help and your time!
APPENDIX 2: Permission to Videotape (in English)

Permission to Videotape

Dear Parent/Guardian,

My name is Junyi Yang. I am a master’s degree student majoring in Early Language Education for Intercultural Communication, at the University of Eastern Finland. I am currently working on a research project for my master’s thesis, the topic of which is Teachers’ role in developing young learners’ positive self-esteem. For this, I am going to use stimulated recall method where the teacher’s instruction will be videotaped during a lesson. Even though the primary focus of the videotape will be on the teacher, and not on the pupils in the class, pupils may also appear on the videotape during the recording.

For this reason, I am requesting your permission to allow your child to participate as part of the videotaping of the teacher’s classroom instruction. Please note all videotapes will be kept confidential.

Sincerely,
Junyi Yang

Permission Slip (Return to your child’s teacher)

Pupil’s name____________________________________________________________

School/Teacher____________________________________________________

I am the parent/legal guardian of the student named above. I have received and read your letter regarding the videotaping of a lesson.

☐ I give permission to you to include my child’s image in videotape as he or she participates in the lesson.

☐ I do not give permission to videotape my child.

Signature of parent or guardian___________________________________________

Date____________________________________________
APPENDIX 3: Permission to Videotape (in Finnish)

Käyttöoikeus videonauhalle

Hyvää vanhempia / huoltaja,


Tästä syystä pyydän lupaa sallia lapsesi osallistua nauhoittamalleeni oppitunnille. Videoitu materiaali on luottamuksellista eikä sitä luovuteta kolmansille osapuolille.

Ystävällisin terveisin,

Junyi Yang

_________________________

Sallittu lupa (Palautetaan opettajalle)

Oppilaan nimi ________________________________________________________________

Opettaja______________________________________________________________

Olen edellä mainitun opiskelijan vanhemi / huoltaja. Olen saanut ja lukenut kirjeenne opetuksen videointia varten.

☐ Annan luvan sisällyttää lapsen kuva videonauhaan, kun hän osallistuu oppitunnille.

☐ En anna lupa lapseni nauhoittamiseen.

Vanhemman tai huoltajan allekirjoitus___________________________________________

Päiväys__________________________________________________________
APPENDIX 4: E-mail sent to interview informants

E-mail sent to interview informants

Dear ________,

Hope my email finds you well. My name is Yang Junyi, I am a second-year Master’s student majored in Early Language Education for Intercultural Communication, based in Joensuu. I am writing to kindly ask if you are willing to be a participant of my research. My master’s thesis aims to investigate teachers’ role in supporting young learners to build up their healthy self-esteem. As many studies showed, self-esteem has a strong connection with one’s happiness and well-being, thus I would like to study how we teachers can do to enhance children's self-esteem, so that they can grow up leading a rather happy life. I am going to apply stimulated recall interview to collect data, namely, video recording teachers' classroom practice (for one lesson) and using it as stimulus to call for reflection and the rationale behind the decision-making. I acknowledge that it is more complex than a single interview, but I am sure when we make it happen, it will be beneficial for both sides. Please noted that the video type will only be used for research purpose that I will not show it to the third person. Furthermore, the copyright belongs to the participant. I would be more than grateful if you consider my request. Thanks for your time; I am looking forward to your reply!

Best Regards,

Junyi
APPENDIX 5: Recommendations for Chinese English teachers (in English)

Learning from Finnish English teachers

Self-esteem Matters!

Recommendations for Chinese English teachers

**TIPS**

1. Respect young learners as equal human beings; give them choices, not orders.
2. Care for your young learners same as you care for your own children. If it’s too hard, at least care for their feelings.
3. Everyone has strengths. Encourage young learners to compare with themselves, not each other.
4. The more you know about your young learners, the better you can take care of them and help them develop.
5. Rather than intelligence, appreciate your young learners’ trial, effort, and progress.
6. Offer young learners with equal opportunity yet differentiated instruction and assessment.
7. Modeling is powerful. Starting from yourself, create a supportive learning atmosphere.
8. Distributing some classroom jobs for young learners might benefit their self-esteem.
9. If you want to set up a role model, do it for good behaviors and manners, not academic performance.
10. Teaching requires lifelong learning, keep tuned in the latest research.

**FINNISH WAY**

Teachers are appreciated, but they are not dominant figures in class. Teachers and young learners are equal; they address each other with the first name and treat each other with respect.

Teachers show their genuine care to young learners, not merely in learning, but in all domains. They take care of young learners’ feeling, preventing them from losing face, getting depressed or unhappy.

Teachers apply strength pedagogy, positive pedagogy to spot the good of young learners. Competition barely exists in Finnish classroom; instead, young learners are encouraged to develop their own strengths.

Teachers’ knowledge of young learners is their important possession, which includes but not limited to young learners’ personality, hobbies, family issues, likes and dislikes, and ways of expression.

Teachers are conscious with their praise. They give positive feedback and encourage young learners to try, to improve from their own level.

Teachers incline to meet every young learner in class and work on young learners’ individual growth. According to young learners’ needs and competence, teachers differentiate the instruction and assessment.

Teachers are trying to become a good model for young learners, academically, socially and morally. They allow “laughing” but forbid “laughing at”; encourage young learners to learn from and support each other.

Teachers assign some minor jobs to young learners as extra attention; for example, distributing handouts, wiping the whiteboard, or collecting homework.

Teachers promote good behaviors and manners, such as being polite, helpful, and kind. They never set a top student as a role model.

Trained in a research-based education, teachers in service continue learning: content, pedagogical and technological knowledge.

### 向芬兰的英语老师学习
### 自尊很重要！
### 对中国英语老师的启示与建议

| 1 | 尊重学生，平等待人：给他们选择，而非命令。 | 老师们备受尊敬，但他们从不做班上权威的统治者。老师和学生关系平等：他们相互称呼对方的名字，彼此尊重。 |
| 2 | 像关心自己的孩子一样关心学生。如果很难做到，那起码关心他们的感受。 | 老师们真诚地关怀学生，不仅在学习中，还有其他方面。他们照顾学生轻学习者的感受，防止他们感到丢脸、沮丧或是难过。 |
| 3 | 每个人都有优势。鼓励学生与自己比较，而非他人。 | 老师们实践优势教学法(strength pedagogy)，积极教学法(positive pedagogy)，以留心发展并培养学生的优点。学生之间的竞争在芬兰教室鲜有存在。相反，学生们被鼓励去培养和发展自己的优势。 |
| 4 | 对学生越了解，越能照顾他们并帮助他们成长。 | 老师们将对学生的了解作为重要的资源，这其中包括学生的性格、爱好，家庭情况，好恶和表达方式。 |
| 5 | 赞赏并鼓励学生的尝试，努力和进步，而非他们的智力。 | 老师们有意识地给出的表扬与赞美。他们用积极的反馈鼓励学生去尝试，去在自己的基础上提高。 |
| 6 | 为学生提供平等的机会，与此同时，运用差异化的教学和评估。 | 老师们致力于在课堂上关注到每一个学生并致力于每个人的个人成长。他们根据学生的需求和能力，区别教学和评估。 |
| 7 | 以身作则很强大，从自己做起，营造一个互助和谐的学习氛围。 | 老师们努力教学生的好榜样，不仅在学术方面，还有社交和道德方面。他们允许笑声，但禁止嘲笑；鼓励学生相互学习和相互支持。 |
| 8 | 课堂助学工作可能有益于培养学生的自尊心。 | 老师们将一些简单的课堂工作分配给学生作为额外的关注，例如，分发讲义，擦黑板，收集家庭作业等。 |
| 9 | 如果要树立典型，请榜样的行为举止，而非考试成绩。 | 老师们提倡良好的行为举止，例如彬彬有礼，乐于助人，为人善良。他们并不设立三好学生。 |
| 10 | 教学需要终身学习，持续关注学术研究成果。 | 老师们拥有研究型教育的背景，他们在岗位上也不断学习，包括专业知识，教学知识和信息技术。 |