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**VYUŽÍVANIE DETSKEJ LITERATÚRY NA HODINÁCH**  
**CUDZIEHO JAZYKA**  
(USING CHILDREN'S LITERATURE IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE  
CLASSES)

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Vedúci diplomovej práce:	PhDr. Lucia Winklerová, PhD.

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**Bc. Eva MAREKOVÁ**

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## Abstrakt

Hlavným cieľom tejto práce je analyzovať problematiku využívania detskej literatúry na hodinách anglického jazyka. Práca je rozdelená do dvoch veľkých celkov, t.j. teoretická a praktická časť. V teoretickej časti rozoberáme pojem detskej literatúry, jej stručný historický vývoj, témy i žánre charakteristické pre túto oblasť literatúry. Detská literatúra v školskom prostredí je ústrednou témou druhej kapitoly teoretickej časti. V nej definujeme žiakov 2. stupňa základných škôl ako našu cieľovú skupinu, zaoberáme sa tiež dôležitosťou detskej literatúry v procese vyučovania, rôznymi metódami používanými pri vyučovaní pomocou detskej literatúry a poukazujeme na výhody a nevýhody jej používania na hodinách anglického jazyka. Túto kapitolu uzatvárame rozborom školských knižníc ako významného zdroja informácií pre pedagógov a rovnako aj žiakov. V empirickej časti analyzujeme výsledky výskumu zameraného na úlohu detskej literatúry na hodinách anglického jazyka. Tú sme skúmali pomocou dotazníka, pozorovania, interview, podporného experimentu a obsahovou analýzou učebníc. V záverečnej kapitole praktickej časti konfrontujeme naše zistenia s názormi odborníkov, ktorí sa zaoberajú touto oblasťou didaktického pôsobenia na detského čitateľa.

**Kľúčové slová:** Detská literatúra. Hodiny anglického jazyka. Radosť. Záujem. Žiaci 2. stupňa základnej školy.

## **Abstract**

The main objective of this thesis is to analyze the issue of the using children's literature in English language classes. The thesis is divided into two extensive units, i.e. the theoretical and practical part. In the theoretical part we analyze the concept of children's literature, its brief historical outline, themes and genres characteristic for this field of literature. Children's literature in the school environment is the core theme of the second chapter of the theoretical part. Here we define the pupils of the lower secondary level of primary schools as our target group, we also deal with the importance of children's literature in the educational process, various methods used while teaching by means of children's literature and we highlight the advantages and disadvantages of using children's literature in English language classes. We conclude this chapter by analyzing the use of school libraries as a significant source of information for both the pedagogues and the pupils. In the empirical part we analyze the results of the research focused on the role of children's literature in English language classrooms. Investigations were carried out by questionnaire, observation, interview, supporting experiment and content analysis of textbooks. In the final chapter of the empirical part, we compare our findings with the opinions of professionals working in this field of the didactic influence on a child's reader.

**Key words:** Children's Literature. English Language Classes. Enjoyment. Interest. Pupils of Lower Secondary Level of Primary School.

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## List of Abbreviations and Symbols

% the percentage representation

N the number of responses

TB textbook

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## Introduction

Nowadays, the English language is an inherent part of the lives of almost every citizen living in states throughout the European Union. Intentions to unify included nations, simultaneously to strengthen their multiculturalism and multilingualism, lead to the fact that various innovative methods arise and facilitate a quality integration of citizens into this large community.

The English language is the most commonly used language all over the world and the Slovak Republic is not an exception in its use. We are also intent on preparing the youth of today using all the advantages that this alliance offers.

The majority of pupils come into an initial contact with the English language in primary school (the first foreign language compulsory from the third grade class). In this thesis, we will focus on an innovative method used to teach this international system of communication. This innovative technique includes using children's literature in English language classes. However, in this type of teaching children's literature is not an objective of the teaching process, but a means; the means for developing language skills and language as such.

The objective of our master thesis is to analyse the issue of the using children's literature in English language classrooms. By this thesis we intent to rivet attention to the importance of this issue due to its great impact on children's activity, fantasy, creativity and their overall interest in English language.

In the theoretical part we will use analytical and comparative processes of theoretical information.

To elaborate the empirical part of the thesis, we will apply quantitative-qualitative methods – mainly a questionnaire, then observation, interview, experiment, and content analysis.

The thesis consists of two extensive units, i.e. the theoretical and practical part. Its content results from the works of experts in this field of study and teaching practise, i.e. Obert, Scott, Tadlichová, Taylor, Ytreberg, Žemberová, etc.

The theoretical part is divided into two chapters. The first chapter deals with the concept of children's literature.

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The second chapter describes children's literature in the context of the school environment. The first subchapter defines our study group, i.e. children of older school age; their interests, favourite topics and also motivation closely related to the English language learning. The second subchapter deals with the importance of using children's literature in English language classes. It also specifies the literary genres used to teach English language. Teaching techniques and teaching aids used alongside children's literature are described here as well. This subchapter is closed by a list of advantages and disadvantages of using children's literature in English language classes. The third subchapter emphasizes the importance of school libraries as a resource for pedagogues and pupils.

The empirical part is divided into four chapters. In the first one we define the main objective of the thesis, and the sub-targets needed for meeting the main objective. Our assumptions are listed here as well.

In the other chapter we briefly describe the methods applied during our research.

The third chapter contains the analysis of a questionnaire and experiment that is used as a supporting method. Here we present the results of our research.

In the final chapter of the empirical part, we compare our findings with the opinions of professionals in this field of education.

Games, daydreaming, tales and stories (even though today mostly in an electronic form) are an everyday part of children's lives. We offer an insight into the use of children's literature in English language classes whereby children's everyday interests are transferred into the school environment where children spend the most of their days. Thus, "bridges are built" between the real world of children and their school world where they become pupils.

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# 1 The Concept of Children's Literature

The concept of children's literature embodies "good quality books for children from birth to adolescence, covering topics of relevance and interests to children of those ages, through prose and poetry, fiction and nonfiction" (Lynch-Brown – Tomlinson, 2005, in Chen, 2010). Pokrivčáková (2003, in Bobulová et al., 2003) specifies this type of literature as all the literary texts written for children up to the age of sixteen.

Besides, she states *the rudimentary attributes of children's literature*:

- Children's point of view (children's aspect);
- Short dynamic stories with no long descriptions or explanations;
- Clear moral determinations of characters – who is good and who is bad;
- Characters – animals, toys, children of their age – no adults, but partners;
- Simple sentences and concrete and strict diction;
- A story full of fantasy, imagination, play, nonsense, fun;
- Texts containing funny graphics, such as palindromes, letters of various sizes and colours, words substituted by small pictures, etc.;
- Popularity of expressive rhythms, rhymes, alliteration, paronomasia, onomatopoeia, anagram, acrostics, telestics, calambur, etc. (ibid.)

Apart from the above stated characteristics, children adore *illustrations* (coloured pictures and black and white drawings) that are an inseparable part of children's literature. Their main function is to attract children's attention and to support their curiosity. Children prefer pictures more than words, even older children.

According to Obert (1986), children's literature is based on interests, mental development, and the range of knowledge, abilities and needs of children. He also states that children's literature is specific by the fact that a child's mental individuality is taken into consideration.

In summary, children's literature is a literature written for children up to the age of sixteen, containing children's aspect, simple syntax, and flat, clearly determined characters that do not develop. Fantasy, imagination, play, fun and illustrations guarantee the successfulness of the particular kind of children's literature.

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## 1.1 Outline of Children's Literature History

For Bobulová (2003, p. 19), “it was not until the middle of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, (when the child finally became seen as a unique individual and attained sufficient importance in the family as well as in the society), that the real children's literature saw its beginnings.”

Until the 17<sup>th</sup> century, there was no clear concept of the child's place. Children were either declined and having many children was taken as a tragedy (in Ancient Times) or seen as little adults (in Middle Ages). This outrageous situation changed in 1760, when a child was accepted as a creature different from adults (Slezáková, 2006).

In the past (in Ancient Times and Middle Times) there was no literature aimed at children. Children were neglected by adults. Many myths and legends were passed by word of mouth, but they were intended for grown-ups (children's aspect was missing), even though children used to listen to them.

Later, in 1400s, books with a didactic character occurred. *Hornbooks* were “little wooden paddles on which were pasted lesson sheets” (Arbutnot, 1964, p. 31). Their aim was to educate children, not to entertain them.

In 16<sup>th</sup> century, *chapbooks* that were sold by pedlars for religious instruction came into existence. These very cheap little books contained romantic ballads, ballad tales and historic narratives (Žemberová, 2008).

There were many *adventure books* that attracted children as well; however, they were still just for adults. Those were, for instance, *Robinson Crusoe* (1719) by Daniel Defoe or *Gulliver's Travels* (1726) by Jonathan Swift (ibid.); the works that later became a part of children's literature.

The 18<sup>th</sup> century, specifically 1744, is supposed to be the real beginning of children's literature. In this year, John Newbery published his *Little Pretty Pocket Book* containing rhymes, stories, and games and it was “the first children's book that was written especially for the child's amusement, and not just for education” (Arbutnot, 1964, p. 22).

After this turning point, children's literature written primarily for children started to flourish. From a huge number of books that are worth reading, we mention some of the

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most famous ones: *Popular Stories*<sup>1</sup> by the Brothers Grimm; *Fairy Tales*<sup>2</sup> by Hans Christian Andersen; *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865) by Lewis Carroll; *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* (1876) and *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1884) by Mark Twain (Samuel Langhorne Clemens); *Treasure Island* (1883) by Robert Louis Stevenson; *The Jungle Book* (1894) by Rudyard Kipling; *Wind in the Willows* (1908) by Kenneth Grahame; *Winnie-the-Pooh* (1926) by Alan Alexander Milne; *Stuart Little* (1945) and *Charlotte's Web* (1952) by Elwyn Brooks White, and many others.<sup>3</sup>

In terms of the history of children's literature, there are three subcategories of children's literature:

1. Folk literature – e.g. legends, myths, ballads, songs, folk tales;
2. Non-intentional children's literature (works of adult literature that penetrated into children's literature) – e.g. *Robinson Crusoe*;
3. Intentional children's literature (written for children) – e.g. *Stuart Little* (Kopál, 1997).

In comparison with the past, the situation of the phenomenon called children's literature has changed so rapidly that nowadays it is read not only by children, but even by adults (e.g. *Harry Potter* by Joanne Kathleen Rowling), and it is very often used as a means of the teaching of various knowledge and skills.

## 1.2 Children's Aspect

Considering the literature written before Newbery's *Little Pretty Pocket Book*, it is an uncontested verity that children's aspect was excluded.

Yet, changes took place in 1740 and since that time authors have concentrated on children's point of view as well.

Whilst the author writes children's books, he needs to switch from his adult way of thinking to the mentality of a child. He has to assume how a child's world works, how they think and behave in particular situations; he has to put himself in a child's place and make use of his anticipation and empathy. Kopál (1984) claims that an author's

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<sup>1</sup> The work was translated into English in 1823.

<sup>2</sup> The work was translated into English in 1846.

<sup>3</sup> Inspired by a discourse of ŽEMBEROVÁ, 2008. For more information see ARBUTHNOT, M. H.: *Children and books*. 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition. Illinois: Scott, Foresman and Company Glenview, 1964. pp. 30-49.

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anticipation picture of a child's world determined by ontogenetic, emotional, mental, volitional, psychosocial development of child's subject is required.

In conclusion, the author of children's literature needs to be able to think like a child and an adult at the same time. He has to take into consideration not only a topic, but also vocabulary and syntax appropriate for a child's perception and place emphasis on fantasy, imagination, fun, and play that are characteristic to a child's world.

### **1.3 Themes of Children's Literature**

Quality children's literature that is capable of capturing children's attention should comprise some basic themes that are supposed to be *strong*.

Each book designed for children usually deals with *a struggle between good and evil*. It is characteristic that usually it is good that wins over evil. This theme shows children how they should behave and what they should prefer in their daily actions.

*A lack of security and hunger, adventure, love and friendship* represent the other themes. These stimulate children's eagerness to learn what will come next (Arbutnot, 1964).

Children love heroes that "have obstacles to overcome, conflicts to settle, and difficult goals to win" (ibid., p. 18). The life of the protagonists is very often full of obstacles which the characters have to cope with. The thrill associated with the fight for the protagonists' happiness is highly attractive to the young reader.

We emphasise that successful children's literature that may keep achieving acknowledgement for a long time should be written in a humorous and enjoyable way since children prefer amusing books to sorrowful or boring ones.

### **1.4 Genres of Children's Literature**

In general, we recognise three main literary types: poetry, prose, and drama.

In respect to children's literature, Phinn (2000, in Žemberová, 2008, p. 139) distinguishes these genres: "prose (various forms of stories, such as school, fantasy, adventure, humorous stories, folk and fairy tales, legends, myths, jokes, fables, science

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fiction, etc.), poetry (nursery rhymes, chants, tongue-twisters, limericks, riddles, songs and lyrics) and non-fiction (newspaper, letters, recipes, anecdotes, journals, advertisements, etc.).” We consider these main genres to be comprehensive enough as these are the genres that occur in English language lessons the most frequently.

Their presence in English language teaching is analysed minutely in Chapter 5.1.2.

In relation to the genre division, the characteristic feature of children’s literature – a syncretism of literary genres – needs to be explained. By the process of blending lyrico-epic, epico-lyric, and other genres come into existence. Šimonová (2004) names this process as a contamination of genres that are mixed and polluted; in other words, it is a genre combinatorics on the level of intertextual relations. To sum up and simplify at the same time, the elements of one genre penetrate into the other genre and thus it is rather demanding to determine the exact boundaries of the particular genres of children’s literature.



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## 2 Children's Literature in the School Environment

In this chapter we focus on the theoretical background of the role of children's literature in the lower secondary level of Slovak primary schools. We analyze the main components that impact the use of children's literature in English classrooms.

### 2.1 Pupils of Older School Age (11-16)

In Chapter 1 we defined children's literature as a literature primarily written for the children up to sixteen.

We consider the lower secondary level of primary schools to be the most appropriate sample for our research as there is a numerous range of children of different ages and at different developmental stages. The second level of primary schools consists of five grade classes, specifically from fifth up to ninth grade, i.e. children between the ages of ten and fifteen, or sixteen. Pokrivčáková (2009, p. 24) distinguishes four age groups of learners:

- "very young learners (children up to 7);
- young learners (pupils up to 10);
- teenagers and adolescents (learners of both lower and higher secondary levels);
- adult learners."

This division shows the variety of learners studying on the second level of this type of educational system. Learners of fifth and sixth grade classes are regarded as young learners with childlike mentality and behaviour, whereas learners of eighth up to ninth grade classes are regarded as teenagers, complicated personalities changing into adults. Learners of seventh grade classes pose the type of learners that are going through adolescence – it is their first contact with the world of adults (Obert, 1986).

Each age group demands an individual approach. Young learners prefer learning by means of pictures, real objects, dramatizations, role plays, riddles, motion games, stories, and many others. Frontal teaching or direct explanation of theoretical grammar is of little use with this age group.

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On the other hand, teenagers are young personalities full of contradictory emotions, confusion and uncertainty. They prefer the use of movies, songs, posters, work with interesting topics, problem-solving techniques, pair, group and team work (Pokrivčáková, 2009). Teenagers are not fond of presenting their thoughts individually in front of a whole class of schoolmates because they usually feel embarrassed and incompetent.

Even though each age group disposes of its peculiarities, some common features may be found, such as role plays and paired work, interesting topics, pictures, funny games, etc.

### **2.1.1 Pupils' Interests**

In our opinion, teaching children is a beautiful profession that represents more a vocation than just an occupation. Many times teachers feel exhausted due to their daily work with children as it is very demanding to occupy young learners nowadays. However, there are some unchanging factors that help teachers to prepare themselves adequately and prevent them from useless endeavour. Brewster et al. (1992, p. 14) summarizes four main elements of children's interests:

1. "A natural desire to communicate, still present after mother tongue acquisition.
2. Pleasure taken in playing with a new code:
  - from a phonological perspective (phonemes, rhythm, intonation);
  - from a lexical, and hence semantic, perspective. It is a source of satisfaction to rediscover the pleasure, derived as a small child when using new words to designate; hearing and saying horse, cat, dog to label the picture of a horse, cat or dog;
  - from a syntactical perspective.
3. Pleasure derived from learning and understanding:
  - the meanings;
  - the way the new language functions (the same as the pleasure a small child derives from finding out how a toy works).

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4. Pleasure derived from discovering, right from the first lessons, aspects of the other culture contained in the new language (songs, nursery rhymes, riddles, short stories, customs and various aspects of daily life).”

We focus the reader’s attention on the word occurring most frequently – *pleasure*. Pleasure should be the most important motivator used during lessons. Understanding children’s natural hunger for knowledge facilitates teachers’ use of various methods and approaches to children.

If they utilize children’s desire to communicate, pleasure from playing with unknown things, pleasure from learning and understanding and pleasure from discovering new language and aspects concerning playful and funny activities, their lessons will be highly attractive and motivating for children.

### **2.1.2 Pupils’ Favourite Topics**

If a teacher intends to prepare a catchy and enjoyable lesson, he or she should take into consideration the topics children like the most.

These are: *animals and the zoo; the body; the circus; dinosaurs; family and friends; famous people and their heroes; festivals; food, clothes and shopping; magic; monsters; motion pictures and TV; mummies; music; nature – e.g. volcanoes; outer space; places they live in – e.g. our street; sports and games; toys; weather; world records; etc.* (Brewster et al., 1992, Chen, 2010).

Regarding children of older school age (11-16), Obert (1986) differentiates between the topics attractive for boys and for girls. In his point of view, boys prefer *adventure, technology, and sports*, whereas girls prefer *themes about love and girlish matters*. The common features contain *adventure, detective and travel themes, nature, conquering the universe, or shipwrecking* where the desire for their independence is manifested. Yet, we have to remember that everything depends on individuals’ abilities, experience, interests, psycho-social background, and many other factors.

It is obvious that the range of children’s interests is huge and contains a number of topics which are appealing to adults as well.

The main protagonists of literary works become children’s heroes very often. Teachers may take use of it and implement this fact into the lesson.

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Brewster et al. (1992) suggests making a *topic web* (A general framework for planning a topic, see Appendix A) that is very handy for preparing various classroom activities. Concentrating on the topic-based lessons is efficient, as pupils' attention is engaged from the very beginning. "The key word is "engagement"; [therefore], activities designed for readers must not be artificial but opportunities to engage the student's minds, interests and feeling" (Castiglioni, 2008, in Boldišová, 2008, p. 16). The citation deals with reading skills, however, it can be applied to any learning activity because each activity must be composed in a way that engages all the pupils.

We would like to conclude this topic with the words of Gamble (2004, p. 755) who says: "Responding to literature is more than the sum of the parts. While students might talk confidently about point of view, narrative structure or cohesion, this is to no purpose if they are not moved, excited, delighted, challenged or changed by what they read." In the thesis, we highlight the importance of a suitable choice of literary text to teach English. The topic of the text and the text itself should be absorbing enough so that the pupils enjoy the lesson and are moved and delighted by its content.

### **2.1.3 Motivation**

Pupils' knowledge is not the only factor that influences the quality of learning process. There are many other factors, like the relationship between a teacher and pupils, their interests, their attitudes towards a subject, etc. One of the most important factors is a motivation. *Learning motivation* is defined as a system of motives for learning (Hendrich et al., 1988). These motives are the inner resources that activate a person's will to learn.

We dare say that without a motivation there would be no success in foreign language learning. Stranovská (2009) also claims that learning is not possible if there is an absence of a pupil's mental activity. This activity is based on the motivation that she divides into *intrinsic* and *extrinsic*. The former is more effective because this inner power forces a pupil to learn voluntarily and the learning is easier and quicker. On the other hand, the latter is based on the outer stimulations, such as praises, rewards, rebukes, and punishments. In schools this motivation generally prevails, but there is a possibility that outer stimulations help the transformation of extrinsic motivation into intrinsic motivation.

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As we mentioned above, while teaching pupils, the motivation is one of the most important items that needs to be included. The teacher is the one who is responsible for interesting and motivating lessons. Teachers should be aware of the fact that once a child has lost his/her motivation, it is extremely difficult to motivate him/her again.

We concur with Žemberová (2008, p. 135) who is convinced that: “Literature is a strong motivator, simply because children like both reading and listening to fairy tales, stories, nursery rhymes, etc. They have an intrinsic motivation to read or listen to literary texts.” Regarding foreign language learning, the intrinsic motivation is undoubtedly matchless to the extrinsic one.

Furthermore, owing to children’s literature a teacher is able to prevent children from creating *an affective filter*, a mental barrier firstly defined by Krashen. This filter “prevents learners from acquiring language even when appropriate input is available. ... A learner who is tense, anxious, or bored may ‘filter out’ input, making it unavailable for acquisition” (Lightbown – Spada, 2006, p. 37). Pedagogues should avoid the creation of such a barrier by the suitably chosen procedures during English classes – play and enjoyment, contact with reality and pupils’ activities are the best ways of preventing learners from creating an affective filter.

In the practical part of this thesis we ascertain teachers’ points of view as to whether pupils enjoy the lessons during which they are taught by means of children’s literature (see Chapter 5.1.2).

## **2.2 English Language Classes**

A whole-day sitting and receiving new facts is often very tedious. Passive listening to a teacher can lead children to interruption and restlessness. The best way to avoid these negative aspects is to involve pupils into the activities as much as possible so that they are active – “...through classroom activities, questioning and reasoning, dramatisation and role-play, songs and games and miming activities” (Cobb – Webster, 1984, in Brewster et al., 1992, p. 40). As far as we are concerned pupil activity is the key to success.

On the other hand, teachers should not force pupils to partake. Pupils should participate only if they feel comfortable with their active participation (ibid.). Some

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children do not perceive themselves as being “talented” enough and the foreign language classroom is very stressful for them. If a teacher insists that they take part even though they do not want to, it could raise the antipathy towards foreign languages.

In addition, pupils are not able to be active during the whole lesson. Hartánská (2004) is convinced that it is impossible for pupils to concentrate and be productive during the entire forty-five minutes of a foreign language lesson, therefore teachers should respect that and adjust the layout of their lesson plans according to this fact. On the basis of our own teaching experience, we associate with Hartánská’s views. It is difficult to keep children engaged during the whole lesson. The lessons need to be dynamic and the activities should change quite often. Children’s literature could be an efficient tool for keeping their attention. It may be applied anytime – at the beginning (to motivate learners), in the middle (to “return” them back to the class) or at the end of the lesson (to make the atmosphere relaxed or to conclude the lesson pleasantly).

### **2.2.1 Importance of Using Children’s Literature in English Classes**

Children’s lives resemble a dreamlike realm full of fantasy, fun, games, and stories of heroes capable of anything. Children live by reading and listening to fairy tales, stories, nursery rhymes, and that is why these impressive forms should also be used when learning the English language. It is a part of children’s lives, so why should we not make use of their power in classrooms as well.

“Most child learners are willing to try to use the language – even when their proficiency is quite limited” (Lightbown – Spada, 2006, p. 31). Provided teachers take advantage of these two closely related matters (the playful nature of children and their spontaneous willingness to communicate), they will be able to prepare very inspiring English lessons that children will relish.

We summarize the *four basic elements* that express the importance of its use in the classrooms, suggested by Žemberová (2008). These are *play, fun, imagination* and *fantasy*. This teaching approach enables us to develop children’s fantasy and imagination, and besides they fantasize in a harmless way. On the other hand, they learn about the real world through the activity they like the most – playing. Having fun during playing various games, singing songs, reciting nursery rhymes, or dramatizing their favourite stories, all of these induce the change of extrinsic motivation (typical for a

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school environment) to intrinsic motivation. Children learn, communicate in English, in other words, they use the language without being forced. They participate, because they really want to. "...it is actually the fun element that creates a desire to communicate, and while having fun during playing a game or completing some task as a part of the game, children have an opportunity for the real language use" (ibid., p. 137). To conclude, structured play with language should be used alongside play as such, and thus indirect learning takes place.

Kopál (1986) says that children of older school age face the flow of fantasy; it is not the reality they are engaged in. They are consumed by their thoughts about the future and they spend much time daydreaming. Thus, the key to success is to intertwine lessons with entertainment and thus English classes may become great fun and an information centre for them.

The quality and level of knowledge acquired during language learning depends on many aspects, such as activities used, particular literary texts, pedagogues' experience, and many others.

We assume that children's literature is able to develop all the language (reading, listening, speaking, and writing) and linguistic skills (grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation). Our assumption is confirmed by Dedinská (1978, p. 93, author's translation) who says that in reading and literary education many aspects are affected simultaneously – "pedagogical and the educational aspect, the acquisition of knowledge (reading – comprehension of text, speech cultivation) and the formation of a child's personality (the impact on the reader's psyche, aesthetic effect by literature, the development of speech culture, cultural outlook, etc.)".<sup>4</sup> While using children's literature in English classes, many children's sides are influenced and developed. This is why children's literature is very important in the educational process.

However, we consider it highly important to highlight Pokrivčáková's persuasion (2004, p. 292, author's translation) which we strongly agree with: "... the use of literary texts in foreign language teaching can be effective only if it is also adequately mastered methodically".<sup>5</sup> It is undeniable that methodically incorrect conduction of English lessons may cause more harm than good. The teacher should not only be creative, but

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<sup>4</sup> The original says: "vzdelávacia a výchovná stránka, osvojovanie (čítanie – pochopenie textu, rečová kultivácia) a formovanie detskej osobnosti (vplyv na čitateľovu psychiku, estetické pôsobenie literatúrou, rozvíjanie rečovej kultúry, kultúrneho rozhľadu atď.)".

<sup>5</sup> The original says: "... využívanie literárnych textov vo výučbe cudzieho jazyka môže byť efektívne len v prípade, že je i dostatočne metodicky zvládnuté."

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also be professionally and didactically experienced as it is rather difficult to satisfy the taste of all the pupils. However, if the pedagogue masters this, it can be a very good way to enliven every day lessons.

### **2.2.2 Literary Genres in English Classes**

According to Obert (1986), adolescents are mainly interested in answers to questions about life. They seek them in fiction, and that is why there is almost no poetry for this age group.

Kopál (1997, in Žemberová, 2008, p. 139) seconds Obert's statement by his argument: "Older children tend to turn from poetry and fairy tales towards legends, historical prose, biographies, short-stories, novellas, and novels. They like reading books describing the life of children (boys', girls', and school stories), adventure, science-fiction, humorous stories, travel books, encyclopaedias, information texts, etc."

Even though these two literary theorists are confident that adolescents prefer fiction and prose as such, many teachers use poetry more frequently. Our research conducted by means of a questionnaire showed that teachers prefer poetry to prose while teaching. The use of poetry provides great delight in English language learning. We are convinced it is due to its brevity, humour and motivational power, like songs, and tongue twisters. Most of the time, poetry occurs at the beginning of English classes, then teachers continue achieving the lessons' objectives by using textbooks or other means of practising language skills.

There are several explanations for this phenomenon. Firstly, the older school age group is comprised of young learners who still have not crossed the line between childhood and adolescence (to a sixth grade class). Secondly, even adolescents prefer lessons that are enlivened by tongue twisters, limericks, counting rhymes, riddles, or songs and jokes.

After studying the works of several authors, such as Chen (2010), Pokrivčáková (2006, 2009), or Žemberová (2008), we have selected these types and genres of children's literature that are the most appropriate ones for older school aged learners. Hence, we do not present lullabies, picture books, etc.



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### 2.2.2.1 Poetry

*Poetry* is a literary genre full of imagery, literary figures, rhythm, and rhyme. It is widely used in English classes because genres of poetry are short, catchy and often very funny. “Its repetitive nature and to a great extent the rhyme and rhythm present in poetry help children to learn and remember it better and in an easy and enjoyable way. They learn new vocabulary and remember it in chunks” (Žemberová, 2008, p. 139).

The most commonly used kinds of children’s literature are *limericks, counting rhymes, counting out rhymes, counting down rhymes, tongue twisters, riddles, chants, proverbs* and *sayings, jokes, charms, etc.*, in other words *nursery rhymes*.

Above all pronunciation and phonetic phenomena are trained while reciting tongue twisters and various rhymes. Due to their rhythm, the pupils train the correct word and sentence stress (Hendrich et al., 1988). All of the lyric kinds offer an efficient resource for practicing all four language skills, i.e. listening, speaking, reading, and writing; also vocabulary and pronunciation (it depends on the particular activity).

This set of children’s literature is concluded by *songs*. There are two main groups: traditional songs (e.g. London Bridge is Falling Down, Old MacDonald) and modern (popular) songs. Older children prefer modern songs because some of them find traditional songs to be childish or uninteresting (Brewster et al., 1992). We are convinced about the correctness of this opinion. On the basis of our own experience, we know that children love singing the songs in the classroom and, what is rather surprising, even the ninths feel comfortable when singing them aloud with their schoolmates. Songs enliven English lessons and children like them very much. Teachers may take a chance and use didactic songs focused on the revision of grammatical structures and the fixation of vocabulary (Hendrich et al., 1988). There are many ways of using songs, teachers just need to involve their creativity in it.

### 2.2.2.2 Prose

According to Pokrivčáková (2006), prose is opposite to poetry by its language and graphical organisation. Its basic components contain plot (story), theme, literary characters, conflict, setting, and point of view.

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Prose is also used in English learning frequently. There are lots of stories and tales suitable for this type of lessons.

According to the classification by Phinn described in Chapter 1.4, there are several genres of prose: *myths, fables, legends, various stories* (like fantasy, adventure, humorous, animal, school, etc.), *folk* and *fairytale*s, *science fiction* and many others.

In English language literature, fairytales are a part of folk tales. Stacy Camey (in Bobulová et al., 2003) distinguishes seven types of folk tales: *cumulative* (The House That Jack Built), *talking beast stories* (Puss in Boots), *drolls and humorous stories* (Jack and the Three Sillies), *realistic* (Blue Beard), *religious* (Noah's Ark), *romances* (Beauty and the Beast), and *tales of magic* commonly known as *fairytale*s (Sleeping Beauty).

Folk tales are tales orally passed on from generation to generation and their authors are not known. On the contrary, tales written by authors known to us are called *literary tales* (ibid.), for instance *animal modern tales* (Stuart Little and Charlotte's Web by Elwyn Brooks White), *fantasy modern tales* (Wonderful Wizard of Oz by Lyman Frank Baum), and so on.

Similarly to poetry, prose may be an instrument for practising all four language skills, i.e. listening, speaking, reading, and writing, and linguistic skills as well, i.e. vocabulary, pronunciation and also grammar.

The great advantage is reflected in children's previous knowledge of folk and fairy tales, because many of them belong to a global heritage and many Slovak and English folk and fairy tales are almost the same (Žemberová, 2008).

Teachers need to take into account learners' intellect, language knowledge stage, psychosocial background, interests, and other already mentioned aspects. Then, they need to choose appropriate kinds of children's literature and sequentially well-made activities, then the objectives of the lessons (to amuse learners, to develop their imagination and fantasy, and to teach them what is required) will be easily met.

### **2.2.3 Literature-based Techniques**

Considering the use of children's literature in English language learning, we will introduce Parkinson and Thomas' division (2000, in Boldišová, 2008) of literature-

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based techniques of teaching. They distinguish between *traditional* and *modern techniques of literature-based teaching*.

#### 2.2.3.1 Traditional Literature-based Techniques

The group of *traditional techniques* comprises three techniques: *rote learning and summary of content; reading aloud* and *translation*.

*Rote learning and summary of content* means “creating a time-line or summarizing the plot of a literary work, learning factual information of writer’s life and his historical, political and social background” (ibid., p. 11) and it is more effective when used with older learners.

*Reading aloud* is a well-known technique whose title is self-explanatory. Learners read sentence by sentence aloud. However, it should be used while teaching beginners; otherwise it would be a waste of learners’ time.

The last technique, *translation*, is closely related to the previous one. Translation and reading aloud often go hand in hand. When pupils read a text sentence by sentence, they translate these sentences afterwards. Undoubtedly, it would be better not to teach learners to translate into their mother tongue, because the current trends of foreign language learning require students to think in the foreign language while learning it.

#### 2.2.3.2 Modern Literature-based Techniques

The group of *modern literature-based techniques* consists of seven techniques: *reading for content and book discussion; personal response; graphic organizers; rewriting and creating own stories; dramatization; graphic arts* and *games and various funny activities*.

The main idea of the technique *reading for content and book discussion* resides in reading a story, its retelling and remembering the facts. Before and after reading, a discussion about the story takes place and thus learners practice their language use.

When the *personal response* technique is used in English lessons, pupils participate very actively. They take part in the next lesson preparation. Firstly, they choose the

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book they like and want to work with and then, in the next class, they study this material.

*Graphic organizers (webbing and mapping)* resemble the topic webs suggested by Brewster et al. (described in Chapter 2.1.2). These organizers help learners to visualize and understand the relationships between items on the topic web. “Webbing is a visual means of demonstrating relationships among story elements, e.g. character development, plot events, symbols, etc. Story map is, on the other hand, an illustration of the progress of the plot in a visual manner. The effect of graphic organizers is, therefore, mainly in the process, not necessarily in the product” (Chen, in Boldišová, 2008, p. 13).

The next technique, *rewriting and creating own stories*, stimulates pupils to be active. After they read a story, they write a new one on its basis. “Students can make up a new ending, write new episodes, rewrite the story from a different point of view, write a poem about the book, rewrite the story as a play, invent new characters, etc.” (ibid., p. 14).

In terms of *dramatization*, there are three forms: *role-plays* (children play assigned roles; in this case language use is based on improvisation), *story theatres* (a dramatisation of a certain part of a story that children are supposed to learn by heart and act out), and *puppet theatres* (children create their own puppets, playing this kind of theatre is less stressful for them as they can hide behind a puppet). By means of dramatisation, learners develop their vocabulary, pronunciation, grammar and spontaneous language performance. Due to a movement and a positive atmosphere without fear and tension, children fix their language skills in a very pleasant way (Hart’anská, 2004).

The technique *graphic arts* is an amusing teaching technique where children draw pictures or create collages of their favourite stories or any other favourite form of children’s literature.

The last, but not least, modern literature-based teaching technique contains *games and various funny activities* (e.g. Domino, Bingo, Pexeso). Games are a suitable variation of activities for children of ages up to sixteen. Playing games is a natural component of a child’s world. Brewster et al. (1992) asserts that the using games is a stimulating way to open or close a lesson, to punctuate a lesson, or to relieve tension

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after a test. Games may be used anytime when a teacher is convinced of its convenience.<sup>6</sup>

#### **2.2.4 Teaching Aids – Helping Hand for Children’s Literature**

We consider it important to focus on the issue of teaching aids in connection with using children’s literature. Teaching aids help to involve visual and auditory perceptions and support the acquisition of English language by children’s literature.

The using of *visual aids* supports the better understanding and, moreover, it helps to create a pleasant atmosphere and children’s desire to be a part of the task taking place in the classroom. Our experiment confirmed the power of the using of pictures while new information is explained. The pictures are capable of engaging all children in the class and every experienced teacher knows how difficult it is to involve all of them.

Brewster et al. (1992) recommends the use of visual aids, like pictures, charts, or puppets. The power of the use of these subjects is astonishing. It includes an entire complex of elements. If the teacher uses a picture, for instance, it will cultivate pupils’ artistic appreciation. On the other hand, if the teacher does not use a picture, it will develop pupils’ fantasy.

There are many forms of visual aids: real objects, e.g. food, clothes, toys, etc.; flash cards with pictures or words; posters; drawings drawn on the blackboard; magazines; etc. Creativity has no boundaries. A creative teacher is able to make use of anything, e.g. bringing a chocolate bar Figaro with a good-looking puppet on a cover to the class. The puppet may be the protagonist of a story which children are expected to make up. Afterwards the chocolate may be used as a reward for the pupils.

Children’s literature alongside picture provides many opportunities to prepare catchy and worthwhile English lessons.

During English lessons when a teacher and pupils are discussing a story or any other kind of children’s literature, visual aids are extremely beneficial. Furry toys, puppets, pictures of story characters, words replaced by pictures, and many other aids help to involve all the children into the activity.

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<sup>6</sup> For more information about the teaching approaches see: BOLDIŠOVÁ, J. *The Usage of Children’s Literature in Teaching English* : Bachelor Thesis. Nitra: UKF, 2008. pp. 10-16.

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*Audio, video and audiovisual aids* improve learners' listening skills. These are developed by means of CDs which usually accompany textbooks or motion pictures that are distributed on DVDs. Today's children are fond of pictures that move. Also computers and web pages are useful in English language learning.

Nowadays teachers have a plenty of opportunities to implement these teaching aids during English classes. In our opinion, children may learn while watching fairytales and animated cartoons (e.g. Finding Nemo, Ice Age, Charlotte's Web, etc.), or while listening to them recorded on an audio recording. The successfulness of this learning type depends on a teacher's strategy. Children may be asked to look for a particular grammar pattern, words, or anything else connected with the topic. Using audio, video and audiovisual aids enables the pupils to hear with the authentic accent and way of speaking of native speakers.

Elman et al. (1996, in Lightbown – Spada, 2006, p. 23) is convinced about the positive impact of teaching aids on pupils' foreign language learning: "When children hear a word or phrase in the context of a specific object, event, or person, an association is created in the child's mind between the word or phrase and what it represents. Thus, hearing a word brings to mind the object, and seeing the object brings to mind the word or phrase. Eventually any of the characteristics of the object or event may trigger the retrieval of the associated word or phrase from memory."

On the basis of our teaching practice, experiment and common knowledge, we agree with Elman and his colleagues. Teaching aids whereby learning is simplified to a large extent encourage children's performance and associations and thus their learning is unobtrusive and effective.

The current trends of human society press schools to innovate their previously used equipment and overhead projectors and tape-recorders has been superseded by data projectors, CD players, DVD recorders and computers. Even the traditional blackboard will soon be replaced by an interactive whiteboard.

We are convinced that while teaching using children's literature, the use of teaching aids plays a crucial role. These aids help to create associations and stimulate learners' minds.

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## 2.2.5 Advantages and Disadvantages of Using Children's Literature

Using children's literature in English language teaching has more advantages than disadvantages.

Apart from the advantages already mentioned (opportunities for children's activity, the development of children's fantasy, imagination, creativity, and the creation of intrinsic motivation – everything implemented by means of fun and play), there are many others.

Due to activities based on children's literature *all the language skills* may be practised at a stroke and thus *more senses are stimulated*.

*New vocabulary* is presented in a *meaningful and interesting context* (meaning from context).

Furthermore, it is *an authentic material* that provides a bridge between a child's life and the real world (as *a socializing element*).

It helps to *lower the affective filter* (to minimize stress and fear). Learners are learning without the feeling of being under pressure.

On the contrary, only a few disadvantages occur when dealing with its classroom use. Undeniably, *the correct choice of a particular kind of children's literature* is a great difficulty. The teacher who works with this material should be an experienced one, the one who is able to gauge the learners' language level properly in order to choose the text appropriate for their language level. If children do not know what they are reading, *if they do not understand* the text, if they find it too demanding, they feel lost and soon *they surrender*. This causes children's demotivation.

The other disadvantage co-occurs with the stories of speaking animals, flying dragons, hexing wizards, etc., that present the unreal picture of the world. Some young learners might face *difficulties distinguishing between fantasy and reality*.

However, the most influential problem related to the use of children's literature cannot be labelled as a disadvantage. It is *the lack of time* available – teachers are expected to fulfill mandatory subject curricula and this “playing” with language usually inhibits the educational process assigned by the Ministry of Education.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> The stated advantages and disadvantages are based on the discussion discussed during the seminar *Working with Children's Book* conducted by ŽEMBEROVÁ, 2008.

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The last, but not least, disadvantage we present is *the expense* of this type of teaching. If a school is not equipped with personal computers, overhead projectors or data projectors, it is very costly to use children's literature frequently. The duplication of the supplementary materials, for instance fairytales, poems, fables or anything else, and the purchase of proper flashcards burden the budget of a school or a particular pedagogue (the latter case occurs more often).

### **2.3 School Libraries – resources for teachers and learners**

The current life style imposes great requirements on our young generation. Science and technology produce a great deal of research results, inventions and innovations that are integrated into school curricula very quickly. School is a main resource of information for children as they spend the most part of their days there. The amount of required knowledge is being increased gradually and pupils are expected to master an extended range of curricula. Pupils learn constantly new, and very often useless, information that leads to their exhaustion and unconcern for anything connected with education. Thus, it is no surprise that they do not open a book or watch a documentary in their after-school time.

In this regard we see the resolution of this matter, in teaching as much information and in as funny a way as possible during English classrooms. However, what is even more important is to inspire pupils to read children's literature in their free time as it is able to cultivate and form their personalities (e.g. talkativeness or self-esteem), attitudes, insights, and interests.

The main school resource of this kind of education is situated in school libraries that "are important because they can instill a love for books and reading at an early age and encourage a culture of reading and subsequent patronage of libraries" (Walt, 2004, p. 813).

And why are these places with a great concentration of literary works required? Locke (1986, in Walt, 2004, p. 813) distinguishes three main purposes for providing them: "the need to provide books to support a rising rate of literacy, a desire to enhance cultural, social and intellectual development and welfare of children, a need to provide a



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variety of materials to meet the individual learning need of the child and the demands of children themselves.”

Scott and Ytreberg (1994, p. 5) supplement his thoughts by the words: “Pupils can take a book home, they can read it again and again, they can stop, think about the language and work it out.” We believe that teachers’ duty is to create bookish children who desire to read a lot of books eligible for their age group and due to reading expand their vocabulary growth, improve syntax, and language competence and performance in general.

We are confident of the importance of the existence of school libraries. These book centres are an available source for teachers who want to use children’s literature in their classes. Likewise, it is easier for them to point children in the direction of school libraries rather than to a book shop or a city library.

In Slovakia, almost each well-equipped school has its own school library at its disposal so that children have an opportunity for self-study. Nevertheless, not all the schools around the Slovak Republic have adequate funds for purchasing pieces of work written in English. Even though these books are not very expensive, the higher number of publications would be a drain for most of the schools. In addition, schools with a low number of pupils do not get any discount for buying literary works.

### **2.3.1 Book Fund of School Libraries**

The collection of children’s books that should occur in school libraries consists of books of all kinds, such as poetry, biography, historical fiction, fairy tales, and books that have passed the test of time. Moreover, these books should meet children’s needs and interests and include good design, competent writing, and attractive illustrations (Arbuthnot, 1964). We propose to provide school libraries also with the bilingual books accompanied by audio compact discs that ease foreign language learning, for instance the book *Zábavná výučba angličtiny: Rozprávky* by Darren Baker. Books from school libraries may be used either in English language classes or at home.

In school libraries there are also the books adjusted for children’s needs and competences.

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Nowadays, there is a tendency to simplify books written in English so that they may be accessible for a wider range of readers on various language levels. In other words, one work is available in several variants – there are 6 levels that are determined by the number of contained words.

A publishing house Longman uses this classification within the scope of its Penguin Readers collection: Level 1 = Beginner – 300 words (headwords); Level 2 = Elementary – 600 words; Level 3 = Pre-Intermediate – 1200 words; Level 4 = Intermediate – 1700 words; Level 5 = Upper Intermediate – 2300 words, and finally Level 6 = Advanced – 3000 words.<sup>8</sup>

Other very useful reading aids are bilingual books that are divided into two parts – one page is written in English and on the opposite page there is a the corresponding Slovak equivalent of a fairytale or another literary kind.

We consider both the simplified books and bilingual books to be very good resources that may be used either in English classrooms or at children's homes. In the classes teachers may extract a certain excerpt and use it to explain new grammar rules, to expand learners' vocabulary storage, to revise language skills, etc. Additionally, these books may be read by children at home.

It is crucial to motivate children to buy or borrow books written in English from the school library, so that children develop their language skills not only in English classrooms. As the lesson duration is limited, a teachers' obligation is to concentrate children's attention on this type of literature. After all, the foreign language learning does not finish after leaving the school gates. And the use of children's literature in English classes is a very good way of fulfilling this obligation.

However, we should not forget about teachers. The presence of a school library in a school could motivate them as well. It is easier for them to go to the school library and search for the appropriate materials than to visit the city library or search for the materials on the internet. A well-equipped school library is a good informational resource for both the teachers and the learners alike.

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<sup>8</sup> For more information see:  
<http://www.slovakventures.sk/components.asp?refSite=sv&refLang=sk&refMainCategory=Readers&refMainTitleID=14129>.

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In the empirical part of our master thesis, we investigated whether teachers have access to sufficient book resources that should be found in the school libraries. The situation of Slovak school libraries is presented in Chapter 5.1.2.

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### 3 Objectives and Hypotheses

In the theoretical part of this thesis we analysed the theoretical background of the use of children's literature in English classrooms. On the basis of this theoretical analysis, we formulated the main research objective and hypotheses of the thesis.

The objective of the thesis is to analyze the issue of using children's literature in English classrooms.

To meet the thesis objective it was required to define these sub-targets:

- To determine the frequency of the use of children's literature in English language classes.
- To detect the most frequent genres of children's literature used to teach English language.
- To find versatility in the use of children's literature in the scope of language and linguistic skills.
- To determine pupils' interests in English language classes based on literature-based techniques from a teacher's point of view.
- To identify factors affecting the use of children's literature in English language classes.
- To ascertain the most used teaching materials in English language classes.
- To check the availability of a school library to pupils and pedagogues.
- To detect the scope of the book stock.

The empirical part of the thesis focuses on the attempts to confirm or disprove these three major hypotheses drawn from the theoretical analysis of the role of using children's literature in English language classes:

1. We assume that teachers do not use children's literature in English language classrooms very frequently.
2. We assume that children are interested in lessons in which children's literature is used.
3. We assume that there are factors that hamper the use of children's literature in English language classrooms.

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## 4 Methodology

In the practical part of this thesis we deal with the role of children's literature in the acquisition of the English language. While conducting our research, we applied several methods to investigate the role of children's literature properly. By means of a questionnaire, observation, interview, (supporting) experiment, and content analysis, we aimed to confirm or disprove the hypothesis set in Chapter 3.

In February 2010, we started the first part of our research. For the duration of two weeks we observed the classes of a primary school Základná škola Juh 1054 in Vranov nad Topľou, Slovakia. The observation continued during our teaching practice in the same primary school. After this observation, we chose the groups that became our research samples. At the end of March 2010 we conducted the two-day experiment in the afore mentioned primary school in Vranov nad Topľou. Simultaneously we evaluated and analysed the post-tests that the pupils were asked to fulfil. The target group of the supporting experiment consisted of pupils of older school age (precisely 11-12-year old pupils) who were at a similar language level and the number of the pupils in the classes was identical.

In parallel with the supporting experiment, we composed a 13-question questionnaire that was distributed to 22 primary schools. The research was conducted in March and April 2010. Our target group included teachers of the English language teaching on the lower secondary level of Slovak primary schools.

On the basis of the questionnaire results, by content analysis we analysed the most frequently used coursebook. Here, our research sample consisted of the textbooks Projects by Tom Hutchinson. We analysed their content and the presence of children's literature.

The object of the research of this thesis was children's literature as such and its role in English language classrooms.

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## 5 Results

### 5.1 Analysis of Questionnaire

To elicit most information about the overall occurrence of children's literature in the English classroom and attitudes to its using, we used the quantitative research method – the questionnaire (see Appendix B).

On the basis of the intentional sampling, we singled out the teachers of English language on the second level of primary schools for our research. The research sample contained 56 respondents whose average age was 38 years old.

To ascertain the teachers' point of view, we addressed teachers teaching older school aged pupils at twenty-two Slovak primary schools. The English teachers who teach on the second level of the primary schools were chosen due to their daily contact with the pupils who this thesis focuses on.

The questionnaire distribution was conducted personally and via emails. The latter means was engaged in order to gain required answers from teachers all over Slovakia and thus enhance the objectivity of the research.

As stated above, the questionnaire research was conducted throughout the whole of Slovakia. We addressed a number of the primary schools. Below, the contacted schools engaged in the research are grouped according to Slovak higher territorial units: *Bratislava* - Základná škola s materskou školou, Hargašova 5, Bratislava – Záhorská Ves; *Nitra* – Základná škola Tulipánová 1, Nitra; Základná škola Škultétyho 1, Nitra; Základná škola Andreja Kmeťa, ul. M. R. Štefánika 34, Levice; Základná škola, Škultétyho 2326/11, Topoľčany; Základná škola, Hlavná 638, Veľký Cetín; *Trenčín* – Základná škola Východná 9, Trenčín; Základná škola, Ul. P. Dobšinského 5, Prievidza; *Žilina* – Základná škola s materskou školou Antona Bernoláka, Ul. S. Tomášika 1, Martin; *Banská Bystrica* – Základná škola Moskovská 2, Banská Bystrica; Základná škola, J. A. Komenského 4, Veľký Krtíš; Základná škola, M. R. Štefánika 17, Žiar nad Hronom; *Prešov* – Základná škola Mlynská 697/7, Stropkov; Základná škola Juh 1054, Vranov nad Topľou; Základná škola Bernoláková 1061, Vranov nad Topľou; Základná škola Lúčna, Námestie Jána Pavla II. 827/26, Vranov nad Topľou; Základná škola Sídliisko II., Vranov nad Topľou; Základná škola v materskou školou Továrne 173,

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Vranov nad Topľou; Základná škola Školská 558/1, Sečovská Polianka; and *Košice* – Základná škola Staničná 13, Košice; Základná škola Trebišovská 10, Košice; Základná škola, Ulica zeleného stromu, Rožňava.

The research was conducted in March and April 2010. We distributed 65 questionnaires; 56 completed questionnaires were returned. That represents 86.15% questionnaire returnability.

The respondents answered thirteen questions. In order to forestall monotony all types of the questions, i.e. open, closed and open-ended questions, occurred in the questionnaire. Another reason for their application was to find out the perceived attitudes of the experienced professionals from teaching experience.

The questionnaire was evaluated in whole numbers rounded to two decimal places and percentages. Successively the results were processed by the method of descriptive statistics.

By means of a questionnaire, we intended to meet the eight sub-targets that we set in Chapter 3.

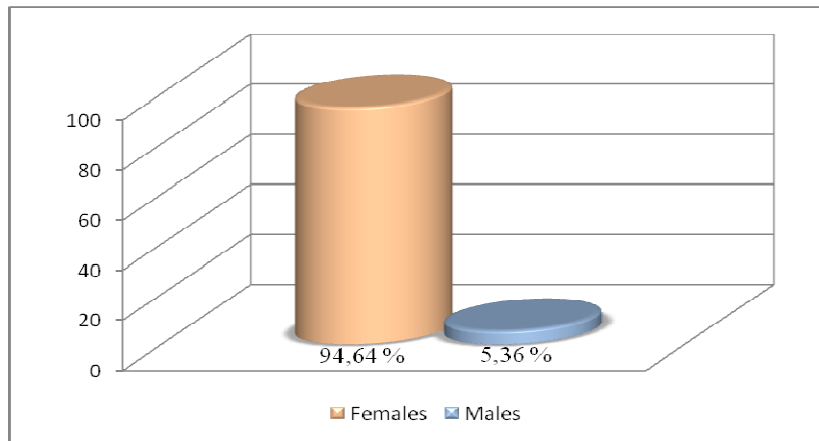
### 5.1.1 Analysis of Respondents' Demographic Data

The research sample consisted of 56 respondents. From the total number of respondents, there were 53 females who represent 94.64%, and 3 males who represent 5.36% of the respondents (see Table 1).

**Table 1 The Structure of the Respondents**

	The Gender of the Respondents	
	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>
Females	<b>53</b>	<b>94,64</b>
Males	<b>3</b>	<b>5,36</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>100</b>

Below, there is the graphic depiction of the gender participation in the research. As the reader may notice, females comprise the vast majority of the respondents (see Picture 1).



**Picture 1 The Graphic Depiction of the Respondents' Gender**

The average age of the female respondents was 38 years old, compared to the average age of males which was 28 years old. The average age of all the respondents was 38 years old (see Table 2).

**Table 2 The Age Structure of the Respondents**

	The Age of the Respondents			
	Females		Males	
	N	%	N	%
25	2	3,77	0	0
26	1	1,89	1	33,33
27	3	5,66	0	0
28	3	5,66	1	33,33
29	3	5,66	0	0
30	4	7,55	1	33,33
31	1	1,89	0	0
32	2	3,77	0	0
33	3	5,66	0	0
34	5	9,43	0	0
36	2	3,77	0	0
38	1	1,89	0	0
43	2	3,77	0	0
44	3	5,66	0	0
45	1	1,89	0	0
46	3	5,66	0	0
47	2	3,77	0	0
49	1	1,89	0	0
50	1	1,89	0	0
51	1	1,89	0	0
52	4	7,55	0	0
54	1	1,89	0	0
55	1	1,89	0	0
57	1	1,89	0	0
61	1	1,89	0	0
62	1	1,89	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>100</b>



We conclude the characteristics of the respondents' demographic data by the analysis of the length of the respondents' teaching experience. Due to the wide range of the addressed teachers who responded the questionnaire, the table size is rather big. We have submitted all the obtained information to provide a detailed overview.

11.32% of the respondents, that represents the highest percentage, have been teaching English language for 6 years. On average, the respondents have been teaching English language for 11 years (see Table 3).

**Table 3 The Length of the Respondents' Teaching Experience**

	The Number of Years of Teaching Experience			
	Females		Males	
	N	%	N	%
1	3	5,66	1	33,33
2	3	5,66	0	0
3	3	5,66	0	0
4	4	7,55	0	0
5	4	7,55	1	33,33
6	6	11,32	0	0
7	5	9,43	0	0
9	1	1,89	0	0
10	1	1,89	1	33,33
11	1	1,89	0	0
13	2	3,77	0	0
15	2	3,77	0	0
16	3	5,66	0	0
17	1	1,89	0	0
18	1	1,89	0	0
19	1	1,89	0	0
20	3	5,66	0	0
21	2	3,77	0	0
22	1	1,89	0	0
25	1	1,89	0	0
26	1	1,89	0	0
29	1	1,89	0	0
30	1	1,89	0	0
33	1	1,89	0	0
40	1	1,89	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>100</b>

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### 5.1.2 Analysis and Interpretation of Results

Before the carrying out our research, we stated the main objective of our research. This was to analyse the issue of using children's literature in English language classrooms on the lower secondary level of Slovak primary schools.

We defined eight sub-targets to meet the main objective of our thesis.

At first, we aimed to determine the frequency of the use of children's literature in English language classes. Out of 56 respondents, 60.71% answered that while teaching English language they use children's literature sometimes. Only 5.36% of the respondents use children's literature very often. Two respondents (3.57%) never use children's literature in English classes (see Table 4).

**Table 4 The Frequency of the Use of Children's Literature**

	<b>The Frequency of the Use of Children's Literature</b>	
	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>
very often	3	5,36
often	7	12,50
sometimes	34	60,71
almost never	10	17,86
never	2	3,57
<b>Total</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>100</b>

Our second sub-target aimed to detect the genres of children's literature that occur in English language teaching most frequently.

We are aware of the fact that there are many teachers with much teaching experience who have not had an opportunity to meet this innovative method while studying at university. Thus, we supposed that there would be some respondents who would not exactly know what particular genres belonged to children's literature. In order to avoid possible incorrect answers, we listed all the most important kinds of children's literature intentionally. Our assumption about the confusion of some English teachers was confirmed by the respondent who associated crosswords and pexeso with children's literature (her answer written in the option "others").

It is interesting that the two respondents who answered that they never used children's literature (see Table 4) circled several genres despite their negative answer.

On the basis of the respondents' answers we ascertained that songs are the most frequently used literary genre of children's literature in English classes. Up to 83.93% of the respondents stated songs are one of the several literary genres they use in their foreign language lessons. We deduce that the popularity of using songs originates from using a particular English language textbook (we will discuss it later – see Table 17).

Tongue twisters and animal tales are the second most popular literary genres. Both of them are used by 51.79% of the addressed respondents.

The third place of popularity is occupied by fairytales as 42.86% of the respondents enliven English lessons by using them.

Out of 56 respondents, only two respondents (3.57%) marked fantasy modern tales as a method they use to teach the English language. The least frequent used genres are sayings (7.14%), animal modern tales (7.14%) and poems (5.36%) (see Table 5).

**Table 5 Children's Literature Genres Used in English Language Classes**

	Children's Literature Genres	
	N	%
limericks	10	17,86
rhymes*	19	33,93
tongue twisters	29	51,79
songs	47	83,93
riddles	14	25
proverbs	8	14,29
sayings	4	7,14
jokes	20	35,71
animal tales	29	51,79
fantasy tales	10	17,86
folk tales	20	35,71
fairytales	24	42,86
animal modern tales	4	7,14
fantasy modern tales	2	3,57
others – poems	3	5,36

\* counting rhymes, counting out rhymes, counting down rhymes

After the respondents selected all the genres they use to teach English language, they specified the genres they use the most frequently and which linguistic phenomenon they teach with those particular genres. Songs, the most frequent genre are used to learn new vocabulary (37.50%), tongue twisters are used to practice pronunciation (35.71%),

and animal tales (19.64%) and fairytales (25%) are usually used to introduce and practise new vocabulary (see Table 6).

**Table 6 The Use of Particular Literary Genres**

Literary Genres	Use	N	%
Songs	<b>vocabulary</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>37,50</b>
	grammar	14	25
	pronunciation	10	17,86
	listening	2	3,57
	motivation	1	1,78
	word order	1	1,78
	reading	1	1,78
	slang	1	1,78
Tongue Twisters	<b>pronunciation</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>35,71</b>
	vocabulary	2	3,57
	grammar	1	1,78
	relaxed, pleasant atmosphere	1	1,78
Animal Tales	<b>vocabulary</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>19,64</b>
	grammar	10	17,86
	pronunciation	3	5,36
	listening	1	1,78
Fairytales	<b>vocabulary</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>25</b>
	grammar	9	16,07
	pronunciation	6	10,71
Rhymes	pronunciation	8	14,29
	vocabulary	8	14,29
	grammar	4	7,14
	warm-up	1	1,78
	before the start of games	1	1,78
Folktales	grammar	7	12,50
	vocabulary	6	10,71
	pronunciation	2	3,57
	speaking	1	1,78
Riddles	vocabulary	1	1,78
	listening	1	1,78
Jokes	pronunciation	1	1,78
	vocabulary	1	1,78
Proverbs, Sayings	pronunciation	2	3,57
	vocabulary	2	3,57
	grammar	1	1,78
Poems	vocabulary	2	3,57
	grammar	2	3,57
Limericks	vocabulary	1	1,78
Fables	vocabulary	1	1,79
Fantasy Tales	pronunciation	1	1,78

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The third task of our research was to determine pupils' interests in English language classes based on literature-based techniques. We were interested in teachers' point of view; we were interested in their opinions, how they perceive the role of children's literature in English language classes.

The respondents were asked whether they were able to notice the increased interest of pupils' in the lessons taught by any genres of children's literature. Up to 87.50% of the respondents were convinced about the pupils' enjoyment of this type of lessons.

We were astonished by the responses of four respondents (7.14%) who claimed that pupils do not enjoy the lessons based on using children's literature. However, in this respect, we find it important to emphasize that the great responsibility lies on the teacher, his or her attitude to the subject and learners and also on the appropriate methods chosen for the particular lesson.

One respondent (1.79%) emphasised that the enjoyment of such a lesson depends on a particular group she teaches (see Table 7).

Another respondent claims that the interest increase is obviously seen mainly with the weaker pupils, e.g. by means of the adventure book *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*.

**Table 7 Enjoyment of Lesson Based on Using Children's Literature**

	<b>The Children's Enjoyment of the Lesson</b>	
	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>
Yes	<b>49</b>	<b>87,50</b>
No	<b>4</b>	<b>7,14</b>
I cannot judge	<b>2</b>	<b>3,57</b>
Depends on a group	<b>1</b>	<b>1,79</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>100</b>

By means of the following two questionnaire items we intended to find the versatility of using children's literature in the scope of language and linguistic skills. At first, we asked whether the respondents thought the pupils were able to teach the required knowledge by children's literature. 85.71% of the respondents stated that they had experienced that the pupils were able to learn the required knowledge by children's literature. 3.57% of the respondents reckoned that the pupils could learn effectively this way only sometimes. 5.36% of the respondents were not able to create their own point of view (see Table 8).

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**Table 8 The Capability to Teach Required Knowledge**

	The Capability to Teach	
	N	%
Yes, they can	48	85,71
No, they cannot	3	5,36
Sometimes	2	3,57
I cannot judge	3	5,36
<b>Total</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>100</b>

Part of the above mentioned task was to find opinions on whether using children's literature is able to increase pupils' interest in the English language itself. Positive responses represented 89.28% out of all 56 addressed respondents.

There was an opinion (1.79%) that was rather unexpected for us. From the respondent's point of view, using children's literature is not able to increase pupils' interest in English language (see Table 9).

**Table 9 The Capability to Increase Pupils' Interest**

	The Capability to Increase Pupils' Interest	
	N	%
Yes, it can	50	89,28
No, it cannot	1	1,79
Depends on a group	1	1,79
I cannot judge	4	7,14
<b>Total</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>100</b>

We supplemented extra lines to the tables 7, 8 and 9, i.e. "depends on a group" and "sometimes". These options were not included in the questions, but we inserted them to the tables because the respondents answered this way.

The respondents were also given a space to express their ideas on how children's literature affects the learners. Up to 50% of the respondents did not answer the question which may be an indication for us that they are not aware of all the positives of using children's literature while teaching English language. On the other hand, 19.64% of the respondents claim using literary texts is able to motivate students and engage them into the lesson and also increase their interest. 7.14% of the respondents think that children's literature supports the development of vocabulary, 5.36% of the respondents see its

positive sides in the ability to develop communicative competence, grammar phenomena, and many other positive effects. However, there were not only positive reactions. There was a respondent (1.78%) who claimed that if a child has problems with the basic mastering of English, children's literature deepens his/her chaos and shows him/her what he/she does not know (see Table 10).

**Table 10 The Effects of Using Children's Literature**

<b>The respondents' responses</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>
Motivation and increase of pupils' interest	11	19,64
Development of vocabulary	4	7,14
Development of communicative competence	3	5,36
Development of grammar phenomena	3	5,36
Development of reading and speaking	2	3,57
Development of fantasy, creativity	2	3,57
Motivation to the further reading	2	3,57
Identification with the text	1	1,78
Enriching of a lesson	1	1,78
Positive relation to reading	1	1,78
Support self-confidence	1	1,78
Intensification of chaos	1	1,78
No answer	28	50

However, we were interested not only in the use of children's literature. On the basis of some previous short discussions with our acquaintances (teachers), we knew the use of children's literature faced some obstacles that hampered its using. Thus, we included a question dealing with this issue.

The respondents were allowed to put more than one answer. The evaluation of the questionnaire showed that 50% of the respondents struggle with the shortage of time.

A very interesting response was stated by 7.14% of the respondents who claimed that the pupils are not interested in this form of education. As mentioned above, everything depends on several aspects. Children's literature is a good teaching aid that provides many opportunities in foreign language teaching. The well-chosen activities are able to engage even the pupils with behavioural disorders. Even though it is a demanding side of the teachers' profession, it may be a big support for a teacher himself.

32.14% did not answer this question from which we may gather they do not face any serious obstructions which delights us (see Table 11).

**Table 11 The Reasons for Not Using Children's Literature in the Classrooms**

	The Reasons for Not Using Children's Literature	
	N	%
Lack of time (Low Allocation)	28	50
Inadequate material-technical equipment of school	10	17,68
Lack of children's interest	4	7,14
Others	5	8,93
No answer	18	32,14

When we were composing our questionnaire, we supposed that the main reason for not using children's literature to teach English was foreign language allocation decrease that originated in the new concept of Slovak education law (approved in May, 2008). Thus, the respondents were asked precisely to what extent decrease influenced their use of children's literature. However, the majority of the respondents (39.28%) responded that this decrease had no influence on using this method. Only 14.29% of the respondents admitted that before the school reform they used to use children's literature, but now they do not have enough time for it (see Table 12).

**Table 12 The Extent of Influence of Foreign Language Allocation Decrease**

	The Influence of Allocation Decrease	
	N	%
Very influenced	8	14,29
Rather influenced	13	23,21
Rather uninfluenced	22	39,28
No influence	10	17,86
No answer	3	5,36
<b>Total</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>100</b>

To ascertain the most used teaching materials in English language classes, we asked the respondents what teaching materials they prefer during teaching, textbooks or additional materials. As well as this, there was also free space for them to express why they use the particular material.

Up to 78.57% of the respondents indicated textbooks as their main teaching resource while teaching. 8.93% of the respondents used their own materials and 12.50% of the respondents usually combine the textbooks and extra materials (see Table 13).



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**Table 13 The Use of Particular Teaching Materials**

	Teaching Materials	
	N	%
Textbook	44	78,57
Own Extra materials	5	8,93
Combination	7	12,50
<b>Total</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>100</b>

Along with this matter, we summarised the reasons why the respondents use the chosen teaching aids predominantly.

As it is confirmed in Table 13, 78.57% of the contacted respondents use the textbook. There are two most frequently occurring answers why this situation is like this. 29.55% of the respondents think the textbooks are easily available for all pupils, meanwhile, on the other hand, copies of extra materials are costly and very often it is difficult to copy the required amount of extra materials.

Equally, 29.55% of the respondents are completely satisfied with the proficiency level of modern textbooks, specifically Projects by Tom Hutchinson. To give some examples, we chose these opinions: “The textbooks [Projects – author’s comment] are perfectly miscellaneous, all-around and logically elaborated.”; “They [Projects – author’s comment] are excellent, resourceful and brilliantly illustrated.”; or “In most cases, they provide sufficient materials.” (see Table 14)

**Table 14 The Reasons for Major Use of Textbooks**

	Textbooks*	
	N	%
Well-constructed textbook	13	29,55
Financial problems	1	2,27
Lack of time	5	11,36
Adherence of curriculum	3	6,82
Parents' requirements	5	11,36
Better availability	13	29,55
A sense of security	1	2,27
No answer	1	2,27

\* the total number of responses indicating the use of textbooks as prevailing was 44

Not all the addressed respondents use the textbooks the most frequently. 8.93% (see Table 13) of them prefer their own extra materials to textbooks. Several reasons occurred as an explanation. The respondents use them due to their variability, the ability to influence vocabulary growth; furthermore, the personally prepared extra materials take the pupils into consideration and are more interesting and playful for the pupils (see Table 15).

**Table 15 The Reasons for Major Use of Extra Materials**

	Extra Materials*	
	N	%
Variability	1	20
Take pupils into account	1	20
Vocabulary extension	1	20
More interesting, playful lessons	1	20
No answer	1	20

\* the total number of responses indicating using their own materials as prevailing was 5

Seven respondents (12.50%; see Table 13) combine both the types of teaching materials. The most common reason for that is the topic that is discussed in the English lesson (71.43%). The respondents combine them when necessary – when there are only a few exercises in a textbook (14.28%) or when the explanation in a textbook is too demanding for the pupils (14.28%) (see Table 16).

**Table 16 The Reasons for Combining the Teaching Materials**

	Combination of textbooks and extra materials*	
	N	%
Depends on a topic	5	71,43
Few exercises in a textbook	1	14,28
Complicated explanation in a TB	1	14,28

\* the total number of the responses indicating the combination of textbooks and extra materials was 7

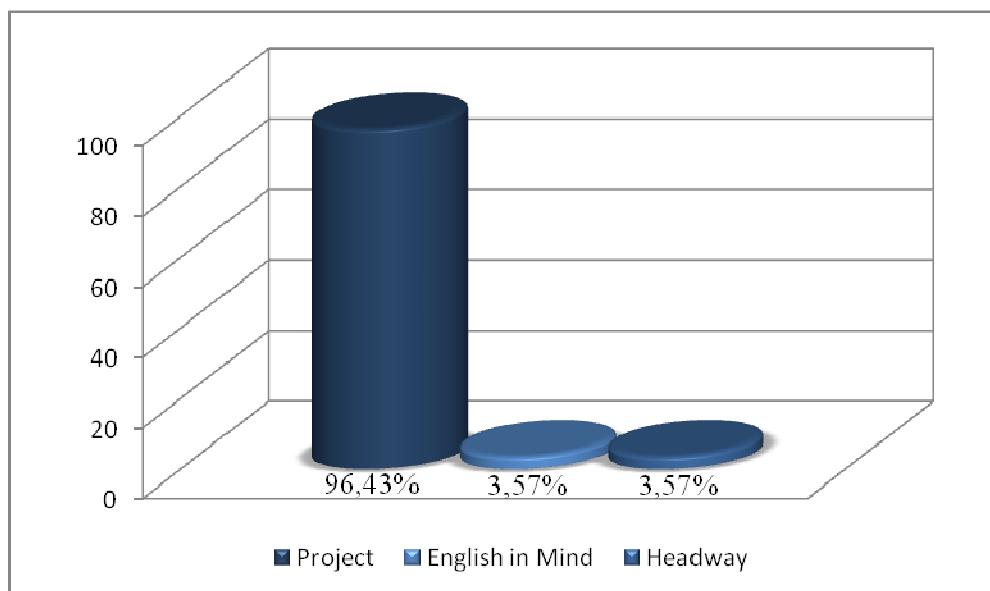
For the complex analysis of this issue, the respondents were asked which textbooks they used to teach English language. Undoubtedly, the textbooks created by Tom Hutchinson are the leader on the Slovak textbook market. Up to 96.43% of the

respondents use these textbooks. Two respondents (3.57%) also use the textbook called English in Mind and equally two respondents (3.57%) of the total number of 56 respondents use the textbook Headway. However, this textbook is not very characteristic for primary schools, rather for secondary schools <sup>9</sup> (see Table 17).

**Table 17 The Most Frequently Used Textbooks in Slovak Primary Schools**

	Textbooks	
	N	%
Project	54	96,43
English in Mind	2	3,57
Headway	2	3,57

For better projection of the great prevalence of Tom Hutchinson's Projects, we prepared the graph that depicts the overall success of this textbook. We need to emphasize that the research conducted by the questionnaire took place all over Slovakia, precisely in twenty-two primary schools, which means that the results are reliable and objective (see Picture 2).



**Picture 2 The Prevalence of the Textbook Project**

<sup>9</sup> For more information see: MAREKOVÁ, E. *Vplyv slovnej zásoby na ovládanie cudzieho jazyka, komunikácia a porozumenie kontextu.* : Bachelor Thesis. Nitra : UKF, 2008. p. 27.

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As Projects are the most frequently used textbooks in Slovakia, we briefly analysed their content. After the analysis, we may agree with the opinions of the respondents that we stated above (see the description of Table 14). These six-chapter textbooks consist of content that is up-to-date and catchy and is supported by beautiful, colourful pictures. Its trendy orientation is able to be seen in the inclusion of content and language integrated learning (CLIL) that is currently the topic number one in the sphere of foreign languages.

Regarding children's literature and its occurrence in the textbooks, the textbook cover itself promises cartoons, games and traditional songs and stories.

Each chapter of all the five Projects is concluded by a song, e.g. *Head, Shoulders, Knees and Toes* (Project 1, Chapter 6), *London Bridge is falling down* (Project 3, Chapter 4), or  *Holding out for a hero* (Project 4, Chapter 4).

Apart from the songs, some other genres of children's literature are present there.

The textbook Project 1 contains six songs, five episodes of the comics about *Mickie, Millie and Mut*, two rhymes and a fairytale (*The Emperor's New Clothes* by Hans Christian Andersen). We appreciate the presence of the comics in the textbook. They are funny and catchy; learners have an opportunity to read them and look at the pictures that facilitate their reading comprehension.

The textbook Project 2 contains seven songs (including Chapter Zero), six episodes of the same comics, two rhymes, two stories (*The Stone Soup* and *The Story of Chicken Licken* which resembles the animated fairytale movie *Chicken Little*) and an exercise dealing with the tongue twisters. However, they are sentences created by the author, not the traditional ones.

The textbook Project 3 also contains six songs at the end of each chapter, the exercise with the sentences resembling tongue twisters, a folktale *The Tailor of Swaffham* and fourteen episodes of the comics. Here there are two different comics. The first one is about a couple of rival detectives *Sweet Sue and Smart Alec*. The second one is called *Kids* and it is a story about Trish and her schoolmates.

The textbook Project 4 also consists of six songs, two stories (*King Arthur – the story of Medieval Knights* and *Robin Hood*) and, besides, there is a fable about an antelope, a monkey and a lion called *Friends*. Still the two comics dulcify the pupils' English learning. Yet, the rivals *Sweet Sue and Smart Alec* change from rivals to colleagues; the main protagonists of the comic *Kids* are different in this textbook.

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Even though there are six songs in Project 5, there are no longer any comics. On the other hand, new genres occur here, namely Charles Dickens's carol *A Christmas carol*, Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* and also two poems can be found here (*Geography Lesson* by Brian Patten and *I don't know what to do today* by Kenn Nesbitt).

Tom Hutchinson's textbooks are worthwhile resources that include not only grammar explanations and exercises to practise new grammar rules, but also lots of games, funny activities, creative pictures, cross-cultural and cross-curricular relations. However, even though its cover promises traditional stories and songs, only songs are included widely. The occurrence of the other genres of children's literature equals from medium to minimal. Despite it, we may conclude, that even though some teachers do not use extra materials (for instance extra materials including children's literature), their teaching includes the use of children's literature, albeit unintentionally and in a minimal amount.

To meet the last two sub-targets of this thesis, we checked the availability of a school library to pupils and pedagogues. In Chapter 2.3, we discussed the importance of the existence of a school library in each school. Its availability to the pupils and teachers is crucial in using children's literature in English classes, but also at the pupils' homes. The results of the questionnaire showed that 92.86% of the participated respondents teach in a school where the school library is a matter of course.

Only 7.14% of the respondents admitted there is no school library in the school they work at (see Table 18).

**Table 18 The Existence of School Libraries in Slovak Schools**

The Existence of School Libraries		
	N	%
Yes	52	92,86
No	4	7,14
<b>Total</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>100</b>

Below, we present the exact numbers gained from the respondents' responses about the range of book fund stored in school libraries of the participated primary schools.

The response “I don’t know” appeared the most commonly (19.64%). This implies that the respondents do not have any information about the school library and its scope of books written in English. 3.57% of the respondents did not answer the question at all.

The respondent (1.78%) who claimed their school library contained 85 books surprised us very pleasantly.

The average number of the books in the participating schools is 21 (see Table 19).

**Table 19 The Book Fund of the School Libraries of the Addressed Slovak Schools**

	Book Fund	
	N	%
0	4	7,14
2	1	1,78
3	1	1,78
4	1	1,78
5	2	3,57
7	2	3,57
10	8	14,29
15	1	1,78
20	6	10,71
22	1	1,78
27	1	1,78
31	1	1,78
32	2	3,57
40	1	1,78
50	6	10,71
85	1	1,78
<b>I do not know</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>19,64</b>
I do not know, but not much	4	7,14
No answer	2	3,57
<b>Total</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>100</b>

## 5.2 Analysis of Model Lessons (Supporting Experiment)

Owing to the questionnaire we learned that the pupils of the addressed teachers were able to learn by means of children’s literature (see Table 8). Even though these were the responses of experienced teachers, we decided to check the situation in the real English classrooms personally. Our effort was to gain insight into genuine teaching

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practice, into how the use of children's literature is capable of affecting children's ability to understand and acquire a new topic.

Before the conduction of the experiment, in February 2010 we spent a two-week period observing particular classes to find out to what extent children's literature is used in English language classes.

Unfortunately, the observation showed that teachers did not have enough time to include children's literature in their lesson plans (with reference to extra materials, not materials in textbooks). Even during our teaching practice that took place at the beginning of March 2010, they had many problems in meeting the determined educational program. The fact is that it is hardly possible to teach all the information which children are expected to acquire in the appointed time. If the teachers include children's literature in their English lessons, they do it at the expense of the curricula most of the time.

After the biweekly observations, we carried out the two-day experiment at the end of March 2010. Based on the intentional sampling we chose two equivalent groups at the very beginning of the experiment. Our research sample consisted of two equivalent classrooms 6.A and 6.B of the primary school Základná škola Juh 1054 in Vranov nad Topľou, the classes that fulfilled the certain conditions:

- learners of older school age;
- learners of a same age (11-12 year-old learners);
- similar knowledge level;
- the same number of learners in each class;
- authentic school environment.

Before administering the experiment, we had already taught one of these classes (specifically the class 6.A) during our teaching practice. We reassessed the situation of all the classes we had been teaching during the teaching practice and we chose class 6.A as the only suitable candidate. Moreover, the class deserved a reward for their previous cooperation, behaviour and effort. On the contrary, we needed a control class with almost identical features. An interview with one of the class teachers of these two classes verified their similar knowledge level (see Appendix C). She and her colleague, who also teaches the English language, share a common store of knowledge and usually discuss their pupils.

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When deciding where to carry out the experiment, we chose the authentic English classes rather than artificial ones because we intended to ascertain the situation in the real classroom, not in the artificial one. This experiment was aimed to gain teachers' points of view. Pedagogues are usually not allowed to decide who they will teach; they have to manage all the pupils in a particular class without any exception. In addition, it would be quite troublesome to organise such an artificial experimental environment.

Both the classes contained an equal number of pupils, precisely twenty-three pupils. Class 6.A represented an experimental group; class 6.B represented a control group. The learners had similar, almost the same, learning conditions – a forty-five minute lesson in English language and the same topic of lesson (the superlative form of adjectives). Only teaching aids and methods were distinct. Whereas control class 6.B was taught traditionally, the pupils of the experimental 6.A class were taught by means of children's literature.

Before starting the experiment we wondered if the pupils should be made aware of the main objective of our presence during the lesson and the concrete style of teaching. We decided not to divulge anything so that the pupils behaved as naturally as possible. We intended to avoid the Hawthorne effect; in other words, we did not want pupils to change their behaviour because of their participation in the experiment. The pupils were familiar with us from our previous teaching in their class, we were even aware of one another's names, and this fact helped us to strengthen the pupils' spontaneous behaviour. After some common English lessons, we got used to one another. For instance, their cooperation and involvement in the teaching process was rewarded with good points. Their English teacher introduced the system "three good points equals the mark A". We accepted and used this effective system and the pupils considered us to be professional teacher.

Apart from the attempt to gain a general overview of real teaching practice and the position of children's literature in it, we determined two main objectives of the model lessons:

- to compare the impact of teaching by using fairytales and traditional teaching on understanding the new curriculum (the superlative form of adjectives) by the pupils of our two research samples;
- to determine the learners' ability to apply the new grammar rule acquired by means of fairytales practically.



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Our hypothesis is an assumption that the pupils of the experimental group 6.A will achieve better results than the pupils of the control group 6.B.

Below we describe the process of the particular lessons and their results.

### **5.2.1 Preparatory Phase of Experimental Model Lessons**

Before the experiment itself, we compiled our experimental plan, in our case the lesson plans of the English foreign lessons in both the experimental and control group.

The present-day youth spend much time watching television or playing games on their computers and the traditional values are suppressed by these mass media. Children usually do not care about traditional fairytales of global heritage. Sadly, even if they cared about them, there would still be poor accessibility of these fairytales. Moreover, as Šimonová (2004, p. 15, author's translation) claims (in the other context though) "... escape to fantasy is a beautiful escape that is able to enrich [a child]."<sup>10</sup> Thus, for the experimental group we chose fairytales as a main aid for the motivation and explanation of the new topic. However, there was a risk that the learners would find them to be uninteresting or childish. We counted in some possible negative responses, but we used the fairytales on purpose in order to find out the genuine attitudes of the learners.

In both lesson plans of the model lessons we included paired work and group work to avoid a monotonous explanation and practice of the new curriculum and to strengthen an interactional nature of the lesson. Furthermore, we also deliberately included pupils' writing on the blackboard so that the pupils did not sit behind desks during the entire lesson.

We opened both the classes by discussion in order to awaken the pupils and motivate them for the participation in the following activities. The motivational phase in class 6.A contained a discussion about fairytales. On the contrary, in the control group we used the Slovak proverb as motivation to show them an example of real life. By the application of authentic material we intended to connect the school environment with reality.

Apart from the discussion, in the experimental group we made use of the demonstration of pictures, explanation, matching the jumbled pairs, writing on the

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<sup>10</sup> The Slovak original says: "...únik do fantázie je krásnym únikom, ktoré ho môže obohatiť."

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blackboard, reading the fairytale, searching for adjectives and sequential formation of the degrees of comparison.

In the control group, we used discussion, explanation, writing on the blackboard, reading the text and filling in an exercise about dogs. As this group was not taught amusingly, we assumed the lesson would be found boring. Yet, this was not confirmed.

There were many other ways of how to explain the new topic, but the ones we used we regard as the most suitable for the particular lesson topic – the superlative form of adjectives.

Both the research samples met the visual aids. There were not many of them during the teaching of the control group (only the exercise related to the dogs), yet they were useful for the pupils.

### **5.2.2 Experimental Group (6.A)**

The experimental group was taught using fairytales which we had applied for explanation of the superlative form of adjectives.

As we pointed out in Chapter 5.2.1, while preparing the lesson plan (see Appendix D), we debated for a while on whether the pupils would consider the particular fairytales used in the English class to be childish and uninteresting for them. This concern was based on the fact that the learners of the selected class were very close to crossing the above mentioned “border zone” between childhood and adolescence.

However, they liked it very much, although they were a little surprised. Approximately half the class answered the question on whether they liked fairytales with – that they did not like them very much because “there are no interesting ones nowadays”. They changed their minds after discussion about the traditional fairytales, like *Cinderella* or *Little Red Riding Hood*. We opened the language lesson with this discussion for motivating and engaging the learners into the lesson.

For enhancing the motivation we used pictures of fairytales that the children should have already known. These were the illustrations published in the collections of fairytales, specifically *Čarovný svet rozprávok* (The Magic World of Fairytales, author’s translation) and *Rozprávky po slovensky i po anglicky* (Fairytales in Slovak and in English, author’s translation) and two flashcards. We showed the illustrations to the

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pupils and they were supposed to say their titles. Then we wrote the English titles on the blackboard whereas the pupils wrote them into their exercise books.

The pupils were impressed by the pictures of the fairytales we presented them with. We chose these ones for them:

- *Alice's Adventure in Wonderland* (see Appendix E)
- *The Brave Tin Soldier* (see Appendix F)
- *The Little Mermaid* (see Appendix G)
- *Little Red Riding Hood* (see Appendix H)
- *Gulliver's Travels* (see Appendix I)
- *Puss in Boots* (see Appendix J)

They learned the English equivalents of the fairytales. Consequently we wrote adjectives related to the fairytales on the blackboard – strange, brave, sad, pretty, tall, and fast. In cooperation with the pupils we formulated the comparative forms (as they had already been explained the comparative form of adjectives) and then we explained to them the basic pattern of the superlative form, i.e. the + adjective + –est. We emphasized the differences in the spelling after adding the suffix –est, e.g. saddest, prettiest, and so on.

To practise and fixate this new grammar rule, the pupils worked in groups of five. They were distributed envelopes containing paper strips. On the paper strips there were all six discussed fairytales and six adjectives that they had been working with till that moment. Their task was to match the adjectives with the corresponding fairytale and write the superlative form of the adjectives. After they finished, we checked the correctness of the matched pairs and the pupils went to the blackboard to write the correct sentences.

While they were working on the exercise, we noticed they were discussing not only the content of the paper strips, but also the fairytales and whether they liked them and why they liked them. From their conversations we concluded that the most favourite fairytale of this classroom was *Puss in Boots*.

This activity was changed to one that cultivated not only the new grammar pattern, but the learners' reading skills as well. Moreover, they were about to practise it in the context that stimulates the creation of associations.

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The learners worked in pairs and their task was to read the excerpt from the fairytale *the Ugly Duckling* (see Appendix K), underline all the adjectives in the text and write their superlative forms. The group that found out the title of the fairytale as a first group was rewarded by the good point. Also the group that wrote all the adjectives correctly was rewarded by the good point.

Surprisingly, the pupils regarded the story as rather demanding, even though it was the excerpt from the collection of fairytales written for small children, namely *Rozprávky po slovensky i po anglicky* by Tadlechová (2006, pp. 19-23).

However, we think this is not a reason for teachers to simplify used literary texts. Every time the texts need to be a little more difficult, on a higher level, so that the pupils have opportunities to face obstacles in English language and learn new knowledge. Pedagogues should create such conditions due to which the learners have to work and play with language by means of challenging exercises. When the pupils learn new vocabulary in context or find out how the language works on their own, it is easier for them to remember it. In addition, by regular increase of language demands we will prevent children from stagnation. However, teachers should still be aware of the limit of this increase so as not to demotivate their learners.

When the work with the text finished, the learners were asked to finish the story of *the Ugly Duckling*. They did not have any problems with it; they even liked it very much. Then we summarized the basic rule of the superlative form of adjectives.

At the end of the lesson we saved a few minutes so that the pupils could fill in the anonymous post-test (see Appendix L) to check the success of their comprehension of the explained subject matter. It was a seven-sentence test to find out whether and what they memorized after the explanation and practice of the superlative through children's literature.

Even though forty-five minute lessons may seem to be long enough, the opposite is true. The use of fairytales interested the pupils so much, that there was very little time for filling in the post-test. We dare claim that using fairytales can be rather time-consuming.

The pupils included in the experimental sample learned not only the new curriculum, but new vocabulary as well (the titles of the traditional fairytales). They were not obliged to learn them by heart, so we do not consider it to be an overexertion

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of the pupils. On the contrary, it is highly probable that the pupils will take the initiative in trying to learn the titles for their own sake.

### **5.2.3 Control Group (6.B)**

In the control group, the model lesson (see Appendix M) was opened by the Slovak proverb “Všade dobre, doma najlepšie” (East or West, home is best!). Together with the pupils we discussed the Slovak adjective “dobre” (good), specifically the form and meaning of the third degree of this adjective. They were asked how they would create the third degree of any English adjective. After the explanation of the basic pattern of the superlative form, the pupils opened their students’ books and wrote the adjectives from the table into their exercise books (warm, wet, nice, and dry). We wrote them on the blackboard and together with the pupils, we created the comparative form and then the superlative form of the adjectives.

After this lesson phase, handouts were distributed to the learners with an exercise called Meet my dogs (see Appendix N). Their task was to fill in the gaps with the correct form of the superlative of eleven adjectives. We used this exercise to practise and fixate this new grammar rule. The pupils worked in pairs; the fastest pair who filled in all the gaps correctly got the point. After the common checking of the answers, the pupils wrote them on the blackboard. While completing this exercise, the children liked the pictures of the dogs the most. We greatly appreciated their quick comprehension of the rule as they had almost no problem in completing the exercise.

Twelve minutes before the lesson ended, we briefly summarized the grammar rule in cooperation with the pupils. After this summary, the pupils were asked to fill in the same anonymous post-test (see Appendix L) that the experimental group also had to fill in.

Despite our initial concerns, the children were not bored with this lesson structure. They were having fun, even though no playing was included.

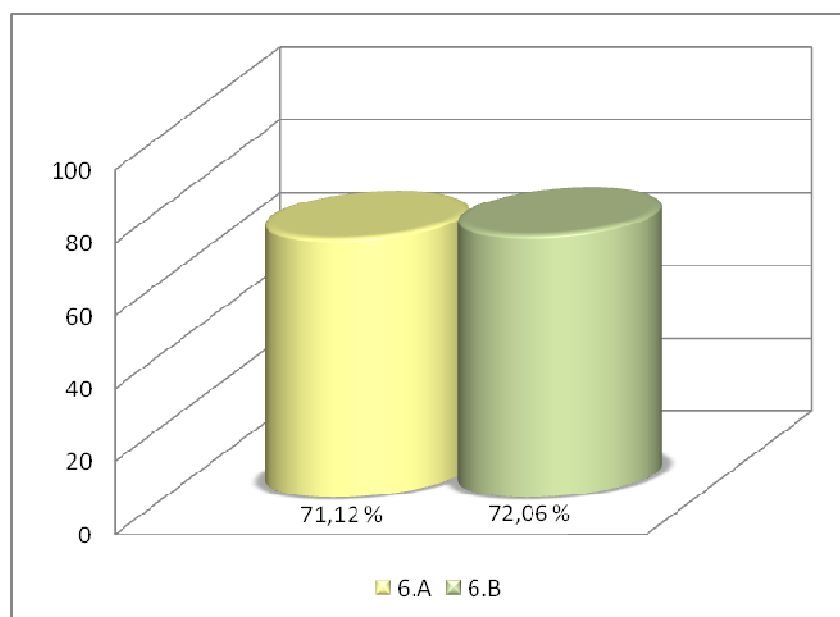
The results of the post-tests of both the experimental and control group are presented below.

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## 5.2.4 Evaluation and Conclusion

The main reason for implementing these model lessons was to gain personal experience and thus get a real picture of the effectiveness of children's literature in English classrooms. We do not dare generalize and form conclusions on the basis of two model lessons. On the other hand, they offer the insight into the issue of children's literature in practise. Moreover, it might be regarded as a proposal for the next, more extensive research in practice.

Every pupil of both the groups filled in the post-test which we then evaluated and summarized in the tables. Altogether there were forty-six of them, twenty-three in each group. Our assumption that the pupils of the experimental group, i.e. the group where we used children's literature, will achieve better results, was not confirmed. The analysis of the post-tests showed that the total successfulness of class 6.A's post-tests was 71.12%, whereas the total successfulness of class 6.B was 72.06%. It appears from it that class 6.B was more successful than class 6.A, although the difference between them is only 0.94% (see Picture 3). According to this minute difference we may proclaim that the use of children's literature in the experimental group did not have any significant impact on the acquired knowledge.



**Picture 3 The Total Successfulness of the Involved Groups**

The understanding of the basic grammar rule, i.e. the pattern of the superlative form of adjectives (*the + adjective + -est*), was the other aspect our attention was focused on. In this regard, 73.91% of the pupils of 6.A completely understood the superlative pattern. 17.39 % omitted the article *the* while filling in the test.

The complete understanding of 6.B represents 60.87%. 13.04% of the pupils were confused about the use of *the* as they used *the* while filling in one gap, and in the other one they forgot to write the article *the*.

8.70% in both the classes did not understand the pattern at all (see Table 20).

**Table 20 The Basic Grammar Rule Understanding**

		completely understood	partially understood		not understood	Total
			only <i>-est</i>	<i>the</i> sometimes missing		
6.A	N	17	4	0	2	23
	%	73,91	17,39	0	8,70	100
6.B	N	14	4	3	2	23
	%	60,87	17,39	13,04	8,70	100

We determined the criteria for the test evaluation as follows:

- the + the correct form of the adjective (e.g. the funniest) = 1 point
- the + the incorrect form (spelling mistake) of the adjective (e.g. the funnest) = 0,5 point
- the correct form of the adjective, but definite article *the* is missing (e.g. funniest) = 0,5 point
- missing the *the* article + the incorrect form of the adjective (e.g. funnest) = 0 point
- other mistakes = 0 points

Below, there are displayed all the results of the examined classes. It is very interesting that the number of the pupils who scored no points is equal in both the groups, i.e. two pupils.

In addition, even though class 6.B was more successful in the overall successfulness, the number of pupils whose successfulness was 100%, i.e. seven points, is greater in class 6.A – there were four of them, compared to two pupils from 6.B.

Class 6.A was more successful on the first two positions (the pupils who scored 7 and 6.5 points) than the pupils of 6.B.

Most pupils of 6.A scored 92.90% (6.5 points) in the post-test. There were seven of them, which represents 30.42% of the entire class.

The most common outcome of class 6.B was 85.70 % that was scored by eight pupils of this class. It means that 34.80% of the pupils scored 6 points in the post-test (see Table 21).

**Table 21 The Particular Scores Scored in the Post-Test**

Scoring results	6.A		6.B	
	N	%	N	%
7 (100 %)	4	17,39	2	8,70
6,5 (92,90 %)	7	30,43	5	21,74
6 (85,70 %)	3	13,04	8	34,78
5,5 (78,60 %)	0	0	1	4,34
5 (71,40 %)	2	8,70	1	4,34
4,5 (64,30 %)	0	0	0	0
4 (57,10 %)	1	4,34	0	0
3,5 (50 %)	0	0	0	0
3 (42,90 %)	2	8,70	2	8,70
2,5 (35,70 %)	1	4,34	2	8,70
2 (28,60 %)	0	0	0	0
1,5 (21,40 %)	0	0	0	0
1 (14,30 %)	0	0	0	0
0,5 (7,10 %)	1	4,34	0	0
0 (0 %)	2	8,70	2	8,70
<b>Total</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>100</b>

The most demanding aspect of the superlative form of adjectives is the doubling of consonants when the suffix *-est* is added to the root of the adjective. We summarized all the spelling mistakes.

The most common spelling mistake occurred in the adjective *sad*, i.e. one syllable adjective. Up to 81.81% of the pupils of 6.B did not double the consonant *d* in this adjective. Although class 6.A had the same spelling problem, the occurrence of this mistake represented only 42.86% of the entire class.



The total number of the applicable tests of the particular classes differs because not all the tests could be used (the tests of two pupils of 6.A and one pupil of 6.B were unusable as their answers were totally incorrect) (see Table 22).

**Table 22 The Most Common Spelling Mistakes**

Spelling mistakes	6.A *		6.B **	
	N	%	N	%
oldest	1	4,76	3	13,64
deepest	4	19,05	1	4,55
shortest	1	4,76	2	9,10
brightest	2	9,52	0	0
largest	0	0	2	9,10
sadest	9	42,86	18	81,81

\* the total number of the applicable tests is 21

\*\* the total number of the applicable tests is 22

The other complicated group of adjectives contains the adjectives which ended with the suffix *-y*, e.g. friendly, funny. 19.05% of the pupils of 6.A and 9.1% of the pupils of 6.B simply added the suffix *-est* to the root. However, it is not the correct answer (see Table 23).

**Table 23 The Mistakes of the Adjective "funny"**

Spelling mistakes	6.A *		6.B **	
	N	%	N	%
funnyest	4	19,05	2	9,1
funnist	1	4,76	1	4,55
funnest	2	9,52	0	0

\* the total number of the applicable tests is 21

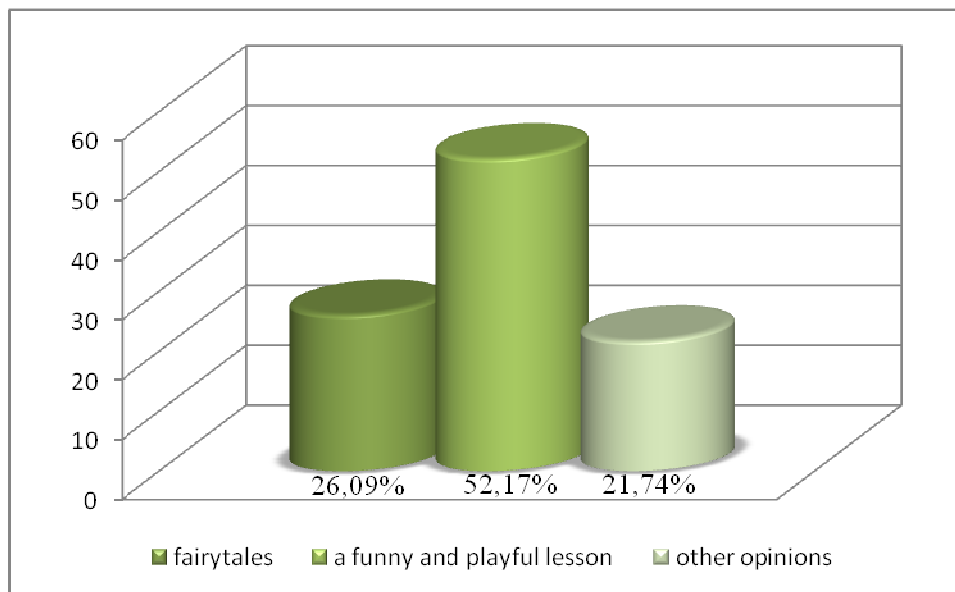
\*\* the total number of the applicable tests is 22

The experimental group 6.A was also asked to answer the question whether they liked the lesson and why they liked it. We did not offer them any alternative options from which they could choose. It was an open question and they were allowed to write anything. It was anonymous so that they could be really honest.

We are aware of the fact that the children were not very objective while assessing the lesson. They were happy that their teacher did not examine them and they were

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being taught by another teacher which was very exciting for them. In this respect, it was difficult to obtain the objective information. However, there were the pupils who perceived using fairytales consciously. 26.09% of the pupils (6 pupils) emphasised their positive attitude to the use of fairytales. We also venture to say that when they liked our style of teaching, they liked the idea of using fairytales because there is a possibility they thought we taught this way every time. 52.17% (12 pupils) assessed the English lesson as a funny and playful one (see Picture 4).



**Picture 4 The Children's Observations**

We chose some of their answers: “I liked the lesson because it was different to the others, it was very interesting.”; or “The lesson was interesting and funny, but I learned something as well.”; or “Students should have such lessons more often. ”; or “The lesson was funny. Mostly I liked the idea of using the books. And we have learned how to compare properly.”; or “I appreciate the nice way of the explanation of the comparison of adjectives.”; or “Yes, because it was a fairytale lesson and I like fairytales.”

What pleasantly surprised us was the opinion of the learner who liked the lesson because he or she understood the new curriculum. We are convinced that the good way of motivation is able to focus pupils’ attention on learning English with joy and also on reading children’s books in their free time.

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Even though the model lessons enabled us to gain insight into the ability of the use of children's literature to affect children's comprehension and acquirement of a new topic, they should not be taken as a reliable research method on the basis of which we would draw generally valid conclusions from.

Nevertheless, here are the conclusions closely related to our research realized by the model lessons.

In comparison with the control group where only 60.87% of the pupils understood the taught grammatical phenomenon completely, there were 73.91% of the pupils in the experimental sample who understood it completely and were able to apply it practically.

However, the experimental group 6.A reached 71.12% total success, compared to the control group 6.B whose total success was 72.06%. Even though the control group was slightly more successful, the values of the success of both the groups were almost identical.

On the basis of the comparison of the total success of both the research samples, we disprove our hypothesis that was the assumption that the pupils of the experimental group would achieve better results than the pupils of the control groups. The experimental change did not induce any differences in the particular research samples. We did not notice any significant impact of the use of fairytales on the knowledge of our research samples.

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## 6 Discussion

To achieve the main objective set for this thesis, we applied two methods – the questionnaire and experiment. The evaluation of the questionnaire and the test following the experiment drew several conclusions.

The pedagogues do not use children's literature very often. Up to 60.71% of the respondents use children's literature to teach English language just sometimes.

By the analysis of the questionnaire we learned that songs occur in English language classes the most frequently (83.93%). Their popularity is evident not only among teachers, but also among pupils. On the basis of the research conducted by a questionnaire in 2003, in *Teaching Language through Literature in the Young Learners' Classroom* Žemberová (2008) proves that precisely songs are the most popular form of children's literature among the pupils of the fifth to ninth grade classes (56.81%). These two researches, independent from each other, pointed out that songs are enjoyed by both sides (teachers and pupils).

Apart from songs, tongue twisters, animal stories and fairytales are the other favourite forms used by the respondents who participated in our research. As we discussed earlier, Kopál (1997, in Žemberová, 2008) claims that the reading taste of older children turns from poetry and fairytales to legends, historical prose, novellas, etc. It is interesting that in spite of this fact, teachers prefer to use exactly these genres of children's literature while teaching the pupils of older school age. (see the division of children's literature in Chapter 1.4)

If the teachers use children's literature in their teaching, they make use of all the literary genres. These may be applied to teach any language aspect. Mainly vocabulary and pronunciation are reinforced by them. The above analysed songs (37.50%) (as the most frequently used means) are used to learn and practise vocabulary, along with animal tales (19.64%) and fairytales (25%). Pronunciation is mainly trained through tongue twisters (35.71%). According to Hart'anská (2004) who summarised opinions of several authors (Rixon, 2002, Wright, 1995, Reilly – Ward, 1997, Cameron, 2001, Brewster et al., 2004), by stories (fairy tales and other tales) pupils revise and expand their vocabulary, grammar and other language issues and gradually these penetrates into their foreign language competence.

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However, we have to remember that children's literature occurs in the respondents' teaching just sometimes. If they use it, it is very often by means of the textbook. Sadly, we have to admit that our first stated hypothesis, that teachers do not use children's literature in English language classrooms very frequently was confirmed.

In this regard, it is sad to admit that it is undeniable that a well-organised lesson based on children's literature is amusing for most of the pupils (87.50%) and they have no opportunity to be taught this way. Taylor (2000, p. ix) who made an experiment with folktales with a group of Asian immigrant students of all ages and language levels claims: "... the folktales generated considerable interest and enthusiasm from my students; at the end of the course, they indicated that the folktales were their favourite part of the program." On the basis of our own short experiment with the use of fairytales to teach English language, we definitely share his point of view. 26.09% of the pupils of our experimental sample highlighted their positive attitude to using fairytales in the English class. 52.17% of the pupils appreciated the funny and playful nature of the class. Also Žemberová's research (op.cit.) from 2003 strengthens the opinions about the children's positive perception of the use of children's literature in English classes. Up to 70.67% of the teacher respondents responded that children's attitudes to its use is more positive than neutral (31.56%) or negative (0.89%). It is therefore bewildering that teachers do not use children's literature more often even though they know how much the pupils like this type of teaching.

We consider it important to bring to the reader's attention that the pupils' enjoyment of this type of learning is closely related to the ability of children's literature to increase pupils' interest in English language classes and English language as such. 89.28% of the addressed teachers reckon that the forms of children's literature have it at its disposal. McKay (1991, p. 198) makes a similar point: "For many students, literature can provide a key to motivating them to read in English. For all students, literature is an ideal vehicle for illustrating language use and for introduction to cultural assumptions."

85.71% of our research sample expressed that the use of children's literature can be an appropriate means by which the pupils are able to learn required knowledge. According to Taylor (2000), "folktales turned out to be well suited to the development of the language and cognitive skills at nearly every level." Due to our research results, we may apply his attitude to the use of all the children's literary genres.

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All the above presented ideas confirm our second hypothesis that children are interested in lessons in which children's literature is used. There was a possibility that the pupils may reject children's literature because of its childish character, but the research showed that the reverse is true.

In respect to the teaching materials, textbooks are preferred to using own extra materials. In English classes, 78.57% of the respondents use textbooks and 96.43% of them use specifically the students' book called Project. Tom Hutchinson reedited the previous edition of his textbooks and in 2008 and 2009 the third edition entered the book market. These textbooks are full of creative ideas, colours and musicality, they are well-constructed and thus it is no wonder that they are the leader of the textbook market. The only shame is that the majority of teachers stick to using textbooks and therefore do not use additional materials.

We are aware of the fact that pedagogues have to adhere to the curricula, that pupils have to learn the prescribed curriculum, but surely they can learn it not only through textbooks. English language does not belong to the group of subjects that have to acquire specific data, like for instance Biology. Language as such is a system that needs to be understood – the particular constant rules. Thus, if pupils do not learn the particular language phenomenon by textbook, but by another source, it is more helpful than harmful, e.g. the acquisition of past continuous by means of the whole lesson work with a song or fable. And although Projects contain songs to a large extent, the other genres of children's literature are not as frequent in the students' books as they could be. Our persuasions are shared by Kostelníková (2004) who in 2002 analysed the textbooks used in Slovakia (including Projects) and she maintains that these coursebooks do not contain sufficient amount of literary texts. In this respect, however, it is satisfactory that the teachers use exactly Projects and thus they use at least this amount of literary texts. Otherwise, the lack of time would not allow them to include literary texts, and children's literature as well, at all.

For instance, the only fairytale in Project 1 *The Emperor's New Clothes* is too small presence of the other forms of children's literature. As far as we are concerned, pupils would like to learn through fairytales or folk tales more often. The activities like filling in the missing words, searching for a particular grammar phenomenon, dramatisation of a part of a tale, pexeso or jeopardy based on a concrete tale would be able to involve

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and entertain all the pupils, because unexpectedly an English language lesson would turn to a play that is coincidentally in English language.

It is a fact that the eights and ninths do not take an interest in fairytales or folktales, but there are many stories highly attractive to them. Various historical and adventurous stories are able to capture their attention, such as Gulliver and his travelling around the unknown places or Robinson Crusoe's attempts to fight against his uneasy fate. It depends just on a teacher and his/her ability to motivate pupils.

Not even comics should be underrated. The combination of an absorbing story and visual stimulus is a great advantage that helps pupils to remember new vocabulary in connection with a picture. Moreover, it is an enjoyable and age adequate literary form.

We see the significance of using own extra materials mainly in its power to reduce a stereotype. The typical "open your books on the page" is superseded by an expectation and excitement from what they will see on the distributed handouts. In addition, if the extra material consists of the activities related to the fairytales or any other genre of children's literature, they learn by something that is a characteristic and inextricable part of their lives. It is easier for them to identify themselves with the text and to learn what they are expected to learn.

Regarding the dominance of the use of coursebooks, the teacher's role in this aspect is also worthy of being discussed. In the course of time the prevalence of using a textbook can cause that a teacher's creativity to stagnate, he/she grows lazy, uses the same lesson plans for years and the quality of his/her work declines. His/her work becomes monotonous and is later reflected to his/her attitude to a subject and pupils as well. The power of the change should not be underrated.

Our last, but not least, hypothesis dealt with the factors that hamper the use of children's literature in English language classrooms. By the analysis of the questionnaire we found some of them. Today's teachers have to face several obstacles. Mostly it is a struggle with the shortage of time (50%) that prevents them from using children's literature in their teaching to teach the pupils in an amusing way. Teachers have to fulfil plenty of requirements given by the Ministry of Education and a principal as well. It is not easy to be a good teacher, handle all the required administration, prepare and correct all the tests and essays and be creative and enthusiastic at the same time. Moreover, if a teacher works in a school that is not adequately equipped and has financial problems (17.68%), the use of children's literature is restrained. However, for

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the benefit of both ‘participating parties’ children’s literature should be a regular part of foreign language teaching to prevent monotony and stereotype and also to enliven English classes and strengthen the pupils’ opportunity to be engaged in the text and thus learn indirectly.

We regard the presence of a school library in a school as one of these influential factors. Even though 92.86% of the questionnaire respondents teach in a school with a school library, the scope of the available books is limited as the average number of these books is 21. We hope that this situation will be changed in the near future. The entry of the Slovak Republic to the European Union opened up an opportunity to draw support from its euro funds. Strangely, their support is used very rarely. The schools often argue that their financial resources are limited and thus they cannot afford much, for instance to widen the amount of children’s literature written in English in their school libraries. However, these excuses should be rapidly changed so that the pupils’ potential to learn and improve their ability to self-study could be supported, not suppressed. Sadly, the schools are not conscious of the importance of the availability of school libraries to pupils, but also to teachers for whom these places are a great resource for preparing their own extra materials. As Dike (1993, p. 750) asserts: “Today, school libraries are unfortunately not at the hearts of schools, and in some countries the value of children’s libraries is not sufficiently understood – which makes them vulnerable to cutbacks.” The schools should take into consideration the fact that it is easier for children to visit a school library and improve their language and linguistic skills in English than to visit a city library that is not available for all the pupils oftentimes, for instance the pupils living in the countryside.

All these discussed factors hampering the using children’s literature in English language teaching correlate with one another and impact on one another and also on the use of children’s literature.

## **6.1 Suggestions and Recommendations for Practice**

On the basis of the process of the research conduction and also of the results of the research, we would like to suggest several suggestions and recommendations for teaching practice.



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1. By means of adequately selected methods of using children's literature in English classes to increase children's interest in literature written in the English language.
  2. To include the use of children's literature as a playful form contributing to the live contact with real English language in the education curricula.
  3. To increase the interest of pedagogues themselves on this innovative method for teaching and developing language and linguistic skills.
  4. To innovate and enliven the work of a teacher by a teacher himself/herself so that he/she enjoys his/her profession.
  5. To launch a high-quality school library in each Slovak school with a sufficient book fund of the books written in the English language.
  6. To modernise the book fund of school libraries at regular intervals, focusing on the books written in English language, including the simplified books and bilingual books (analysed in Chapter 2.3.1).
  7. To improve the academic preparation of pedagogues in working with children's literature in English language classes so that they may be better prepared for the appropriate application of children's literature.
  8. To set up a teacher's obligation to create a portfolio full of his/her own additional materials, focusing on children's literature – games, activities, and exercises related to the various genres of children's literature.

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## Conclusion

The use of children's literature represents a helpful teaching aid, a teaching technique that is able to influence teaching process in many aspects. This innovative, amusing and motivating type of teaching and learning stimulates children to be active and engaged in the exercises being done in English language classes.

The objective of our master thesis was to analyse the issue of the using children's literature in English language classes; its role in teaching process.

Based on the research results, the pedagogues do not use children's literature very often. The reason for not using it is caused by several factors, mainly due to inadequate equipment of schools and lack of the time which does not allow teachers to implement forms of children's literature into their teaching. However, we are convinced children's literature should be included in English language teaching due to its positive effects on children's language and linguistic skills. The use of children's literature enriches not only children's imagination and creativity, but also develops their word stock, pronunciation, grammar, and all the language skills.

The most frequently used literary genres are songs, tongue twisters, animal tales and fairytales. The use of songs springs mainly from using the textbooks, "Projects" written and edited by Tom Hutchinson that contain an amount of songs placed at the end of each chapter. Even though these coursebooks contain an insufficient amount of children's literature, we have to admit they still support the use of children's literature by teachers.

In this thesis we mostly exalt using this literary way of teaching English language. Yet, it is based on the results we have come to. The use of children's literature is an enjoyable and stimulating way of teaching that increases pupils' interest in English language learning, in English language as such and also in reading books written in English and thus develop their skills. It also prevents the teaching process from becoming monotonous and stereotyped. In addition, children's literature is able to be an appropriate means by which the pupils are able to learn required knowledge.

From the analysis of the questionnaire and post-tests of the experiment carried out in the primary school it is evident that our objective was accomplished successfully.

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Moreover, we got an insight into English language classes and the role of children's literature in them.

As far as we are concerned, the use of children's literature (songs, tales, nursery rhymes) is beneficial not only for students, but for teachers as well. This chequered approach to teaching enlivens the work of teachers and, besides, prevents them from burning out. This is possible due to the constant creation of new, additional materials, modification of previously used materials and the alternation of various genres of children's literature. Hence, not only pupils should be an object of interest in this issue, but also teachers. We find it crucial to focus on teachers, by making their work more interesting and amusing for them, teaching outcomes will improve certainly. The quality of our school system does not depend just on a well-designed law, but mainly on the employees who form this system. Continuously, the pupils' point of view is studied and analysed. However, the question is whether pedagogues are motivated enough to work with children's literature or any other innovative method when they feel underestimated and inconsequential. And if they do their work with displeasure, 'the fight is lost in advance'. Thus, for further research we suggest focussing attention on the teachers and their attitudes and motivation in using children's literature to teach English language.

We would like to conclude our master thesis with the words of Kozičková (1994, in Obert, 2004, p. 41, author's translation): "Fairytale is like a little grain. If it falls into a humble heart, a glorious flower will grow from it. If it falls into a prideful one, it will perish."<sup>11</sup> Children's literature is a great means which includes many positive aspects that are useful in plenty of ways. It is up to pedagogues and pupils themselves how they will deal with this worthwhile tool while teaching and learning beautiful English language.

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<sup>11</sup> The original says: "Rozprávka je ako malé zrníčko. Keď padne do pokorného srdca, vyrastie z nej krásny kvet. Keď do pyšného, zahynie."

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## Résumé

Objektom výskumu tejto diplomovej práce je detská literatúra a jej postavenie vo vyučovanom procese cudzích jazykov, so zameraním na hodiny anglického jazyka detí na druhom stupni základných škôl. Cieľom našej práce je analyzovať problematiku využívania detskej literatúry na hodinách anglického jazyka.

Práca je rozdelená do dvoch rozsiahlych celkov, a to na časť teoretickú a empirickú. Teoretickú časť tvoria dve kapitoly. V prvej kapitole sa zaoberáme pojmom detská literatúra a jej základnými znakmi, ktoré ju robia špecifickou a rozdielnou od iných oblastí literatúry. Takisto stručne približujeme chronologické pozadie vývinu detskej literatúry, ktorá oficiálne vznikla až v roku 1744. Prelomovým bodom bolo vydanie prvej knihy, ktorá bola po prvýkrát venovaná zábave detského čitateľa. Išlo o knižku plnú riekaniek, príbehov a hier, ktorú napísal John Newsberry pod názvom *Little Pretty Pocket Book*. Spoločnosťou dlho odmietaná literatúra pre deti sa začala rozmáhať a dnes sa dokonca využíva aj počas vyučovania cudzích jazykov.

Prvú kapitolu uzatvárame rozborom detského aspektu, charakteristických črt detskej literatúry (napr. boj dobra a zla) a tiež rozborom klasifikácie žánrov, ktoré sa v detskej literatúre vyskytujú.

V druhej kapitole definujeme detskú literatúru v kontexte školy a školského prostredia. Kapitola obsahuje rozsiahlejšie členenie do troch podkapitol z dôvodu analýzy všetkých dôležitých aspektov.

Prvá podkapitola charakterizuje žiakov druhého stupňa základných škôl, ktorí tvoria cieľovú skupinu, na ktorú je táto práca zameraná. Cieľová skupina žiakov vo veku od 11 do 16 rokov bola vybraná zámerné pre rôznorodosť emocionálneho a fyziomického vývoja v tomto období. Táto skupina v sebe zahŕňa mladších žiakov, ktorých môžeme považovať za deti, ale patria tu aj žiaci, ktorí prechádzajú štádiom puberty, rôznymi vývinovými zmenami, ktoré vplývajú nielen na ich súkromný život, ale rovnako aj na postoj k škole, vyučovaciemu procesu, svojej budúcnosti; kompletne sa mení ich pohľad na svet.

V tejto podkapitole ďalej definujeme motiváciu, záujmy a témy, ktoré žiakov druhého stupňa zaujímajú, pretože tieto tri oblasti úzko súvisia s výberom primeranej formy a metódy pri využívaní detskej literatúry na hodinách anglického jazyka.

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V druhej podkapitole sa venujeme detskej literatúre na hodinách anglického jazyka. Analyzujeme dôležitosť jej využívania. Okrem rôznych literárnych žánrov detskej literatúry a jej využívania na hodinách anglického jazyka uvádzame aj techniky, ktoré sa v súvislosti s detskou literatúrou aplikujú vo výchovno-vzdelávacom procese. Popisujeme tu aj využívanie vizuálnych a audio pomôcok uľahčujúcich prácu s detskou literatúrou, ktoré napomáhajú žiakom vytvárať asociácie spojené s gramatickými javmi, slovnou zásobou či mnohými inými jazykovými javmi. Druhú podkapitolu uzatvárame výhodami a nevýhodami, ktoré sa v súvislosti s využívaním detskej literatúry na hodinách cudzieho jazyka objavujú.

V tretej podkapitole sa venujeme školským knižniciam, ktoré považujeme za významnú súčasť každej školy na Slovensku ako jednu z podporných možností pri vzdelávaní žiakov.

Empirickú časť otvárame zadefinovaním hlavného cieľa a čiastkových cieľov našej práce. Hlavným cieľom nášho výskumu bolo analyzovať problematiku využívania detskej literatúry na hodinách anglického jazyka. Pre splnenie tohto cieľa sme si stanovili pomocné čiastkové ciele:

- zistiť frekvenciu využívania detskej literatúry na hodinách anglického jazyka;
- zistiť najčastejšie používané žánre detskej literatúry na hodinách anglického jazyka;
- zistiť všestrannosť využitia detskej literatúry v rozsahu jazykových a lingvistických zručností;
- zistiť názory učiteľov na záujem zo strany žiakov o hodiny anglického jazyka, ktoré sú vyučované pomocou detskej literatúry;
- zistiť faktory ovplyvňujúce využívanie detskej literatúry na hodinách anglického jazyka;
- zistiť najvyužívanejšie učebné materiály na hodinách anglického jazyka;
- zistiť dostupnosť školských knižníc pre žiakov a pedagógov;
- zistiť knižný fond školských knižníc v oblasti kníh napísaných v anglickom jazyku.

Hypotézami práce sú tri predpoklady:

- Predpokladáme, že učitelia nepoužívajú detskú literatúru na hodinách anglického jazyka veľmi často.

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- Predpokladáme, že deti hodiny s použitím detskej literatúry bavia.
  - Predpokladáme, že existujú faktory, ktoré bránia využívaniu detskej literatúry na hodinách anglického jazyka.

V prvom rade sme využili 13-otázkový dotazník adresovaný učiteľom anglického jazyka vyučujúcich na druhom stupni základných škôl po celom Slovensku. Experimentom sme získali vlastnú skúsenosť s aplikovaním detskej literatúry na hodinách anglického jazyka. Pred experimentom sme absolvovali krátke pozorovanie a následné interview pre utvrdenie, že vybrané skupiny sú ekvivalentné a teda vhodné na uskutočnenie experimentu. Poslednou metódou bola obsahová analýza, pomocou ktorej sme analyzovali obsah učebníc Project, ktoré nám výsledky dotazníka určili za najpoužívanejšie pri vyučovanom procese.

Do výskumu prostredníctvom dotazníka sa zapojilo 56 respondentov z 22 základných škôl. Návratnosť dotazníka dosiahla 86,15%.

Výskumnú vzorku tvorilo 94,64% žien a 5,36% mužov, ktorých priemerný vek bol 38 rokov. Priemerná dĺžka praxe zúčastnených respondentov bola 11 rokov.

Pomocou prvej dotazníkovej položky sme zistili, že 60,71% respondentov využíva detskú literatúru na hodinách anglického jazyka len niekedy. Veľmi často ju využíva len 5,36% opýtaných.

Najvyužívanejšími žánrami detskej literatúry sú pesničky (83,93% respondentov), jazykolamy (51,79%), zvieracie príbehy (51,79%) a rozprávky (42,86%).

Pomocou pesničiek vyučujú respondenti hlavne slovnú zásobu (37,50%), kým pomocou jazykolamov precvičujú hlavne výslovnosť (35,71%). Posledné dve najpoužívanejšie žánre sa tiež používajú hlavne na rozširovanie a upevňovanie slovnej zásoby (zvieracie príbehy – 19,64%; rozprávky – 25%).

Zaujímali sme sa aj o to, či žiakov hodiny s detskou literatúrou bavia. Podľa názorov 87,50% respondentov ich hodiny s detskou literatúrou bavia. Zaujímavé bolo zistenie, že 7,14% respondentov nebadá u žiakov žiadne náznaky zábavy, práve naopak.

Až 85,71% oslovených respondentov si myslí, že sa žiaci pomocou detskej literatúry dokážu naučiť požadovanú vedomosť. 5,36% respondentov si myslí pravý opak a 3,57% tvrdí, že k tomu dochádza len niekedy.

Kladné účinky na zvyšovanie záujmu žiakov o anglický jazyk spozorovalo až 89,28% respondentov. 1,79% respondentov si myslí, že detská literatúra nedokáže

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zvýšiť záujem detí o anglický jazyk a tým prispieť k zlepšeniu ich jazykových kompetencií.

Na otvorenú otázku, aké má podľa nich detská literatúra na žiakov účinky, bola najčastejším argumentom motivácia žiakov a následný nárast záujmu žiakov (19,64%). Navyše podporuje rozvoj slovnej zásoby (7,14%), komunikačných schopností a gramatických javov (5,36%), čítania, rozprávania (3,57%), fantázie (3,57%) a mnohých iných aspektov. Jediným negatívnym ohlasom bol názor respondentky (1,78%), ktorá tvrdí, že detská literatúra prehľbuje chaos v hlavách slabších žiakov a ukáže im to, čo nevedia.

Uvedomujeme si, že povolanie učiteľov je náročné a dennodenne musia zápasiť s mnohými faktormi, ktoré im znepríjemňujú prácu a ich chuť vzdelávať a vychovávať budúcu generáciu. Preto považujeme detskú literatúru za vhodný prostriedok oživenia vyučovacieho procesu nielen pre žiakov, ale aj pre samotných učiteľov. Snažili sme sa zistiť, či majú dostatočný priestor na využívanie tejto inovatívnej metódy vyučovania. 50% respondentov uviedlo ako dôvod nevyužívania detskej literatúry nedostatok času. Na druhom mieste je nedostatočné materiálno-technické zabezpečenie školy (17,68%), s čím sa spája finančne náročné kopírovanie akýchkoľvek podporných materiálov. 7,14% uviedlo ako dôvod nezáujem žiakov o túto formu výučby. Podľa nich sa u žiakov 8. a 9. ročníka vyskytuje značný nezáujem o akúkoľvek literatúru.

39,28% výskumnej vzorky uviedlo, že zmena hodinových dotácií ich využívanie detskej literatúry skôr neovplyvnila. Z toho vyplýva, že ak používali detskú literatúru pred školskou reformou, používajú ju doteraz, ak ju nepoužívali, nepoužívajú ju ani teraz. Naproti tomu 14,29% opýtaných uznalo, že zníženie hodinových dotácií prvého cudzieho jazyka v prospech druhého, veľmi ovplyvnilo ich súčasné nevyužívanie detskej literatúry.

Vzhľadom na fakt, že sa učitelia často musia pridržiavať učebných plánov a dodržiavať ich včasné splnenie, bol vysoký predpoklad, že väčšina učiteľov používa na hodinách cudzieho jazyka len učebnicu. Výsledky analýzy dotazníka nám tento predpoklad potvrdili, pretože až 78,57% respondentov využíva len učebnicu s odôvodnením, že je veľmi kvalitná a dobre zostavená, 8,93% používa skôr vlastné materiály pre ich variabilitu a ohľad na individuálne potreby žiakov. Kombináciu učebnice a vlastných materiálov volí 12,50% opýtaných.

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V oblasti vyučovania anglického jazyka má jednoznačnú prevahu (96,43%) učebnica Project, ktorú zostavil Tom Hutchinson. Obsahová analýza učebnice ukázala, že detská literatúra v nej obsiahnutá síce je, ale okrem pesničiek, ktoré tam sú zastúpené v značnom množstve, sa v učebnici veľa ďalších foriem detskej literatúry nenachádza. Môžeme ale povedať, že hoci väčšina respondentov nevyužíva detskú literatúru zámerne, využíva ju aspoň minimálne a to prostredníctvom učebnice.

Časť nášho výskumu tvorili školské knižnice, ich výskyt na základných školách, a takisto množstvo kníh napísaných v anglickom jazyku, ktoré sa v týchto knižniciach nachádzajú. 92,86% opýtaných respondentov pracuje na škole, ktorá disponuje školskou knižnicou, hoci rozsah jej knižného fondu už nie je taký potešujúci. Prekvapujúce bolo zistenie, že až 19,64% respondentov nevie, koľko kníh má ich školská knižnica. Najčastejšie sa objavujúcou odpoveďou bolo 10 kusov, čo predstavuje 14,29%. Povzbudil nás aspoň jeden respondent, ktorý uviedol, že ich školská knižnica má k dispozícii až 85 knižných titulov. Priemerné množstvo kníh nachádzajúcich sa v školských knižniciach oslovených škôl napísaných v anglickom jazyku je 21.

Prvá hypotéza, ktorá predpokladá nie veľmi časté využívanie detskej literatúry počas vyučovania sa nám potvrdila. Učitelia ju využívajú len niekedy a aj to prostredníctvom učebnice, ktorá ich má obsiahnuté vo svojom obsahu.

Podľa názorov 87,50% respondentov sme zistili, že žiaci obľubujú hodiny s využívaním detskej literatúry vo vyučovacom procese. Týmto zistením sme potvrdili druhú hypotézu, že žiakov takéto hodiny bavia. Bola tu hrozba, že deti pubertálneho veku budú detskú literatúru odmietať. Vhodnými metódami sa ale ich záujem dá zvýšiť (ale aj znížiť), čo je znakom, že sú v období formovateľnosti ich ľudskej i vzdelávacej stránky.

Hypotéza zaoberajúca sa existenciou faktorov brániacich využívaniu detskej literatúry sa potvrdila, pričom najčastejšie uvádzanými faktormi brániacimi využívaniu foriem detskej literatúry na hodinách anglického jazyka boli nedostatočné materiálo-technické zabezpečenie školy, nedostatok času, povinnosť pedagógov dodržiavať učebné plány a osnovy a upäté držanie sa učebnice.

Na základe výsledkov, ktoré sme pri zbere dotazníkov mali k dispozícii, sme zrealizovali podporný experiment. Naším úmyslom bolo získanie vlastnej skúsenosti z reálneho školského prostredia.

Pre experiment sme si určili ciele:



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- porovnať vplyv vyučovania prostredníctvom detskej knihy a klasického vyučovania na pochopenie nového učiva, t.j. superlatívu prídavných mien, u žiakov nami vybraných dvoch výskumných vzoriek;
  - zistiť schopnosť žiakov prakticky využiť novonadobudnuté vedomosti.

Na základe pozorovania a rozhovoru sme si vybrali experimentálnu a kontrolnú skupinu, v ktorých sme odučili pre žiakov nové učivo – superlatív prídavných mien. V kontrolnej skupine sme učili klasickým spôsobom, t.j. vysvetlili sme nové učivo a precvičovali pomocou cvičení. V experimentálnej skupine sme využili klasické rozprávky, prostredníctvom ktorých sa žiaci naučili nielen nový gramatický jav, ale takisto aj anglické ekvivalenty rozprávok ich detstva.

V závere oboch hodín žiaci vyplnili anonymný post-test, ktorý sme vyhodnotili a spracovali do tabuliek. Žiaci oboch výskumných vzoriek dokázali aplikovať nové učivo aj v praxi. S minimálnym rozdielom bola kontrolná skupina úspešnejšia z hľadiska celkovej úspešnosti (72,06%, v porovnaní s experimentálnou skupinou, ktorá dosiahla celkovú úspešnosť 71,12%). Zaujímavé ale je, že pri zmene hľadiska hodnotenia bola úspešnejšia experimentálna skupina. Úplne pochopenie nového učiva v experimentálnej skupine dosiahlo 73,91% žiakov, kým v kontrolnej skupine ich bolo len 60,78%.

Výsledky post-testov hovoriacich o celkovej úspešnosti výskumných vzoriek vyvracajú nami stanovenú hypotézu, že žiaci experimentálnej skupiny dosiahnu lepšie výsledky ako žiaci skupiny kontrolnej.

Uvedomujeme si, že dve hodiny nie sú dostatočné na vytváranie akýchkoľvek dôveryhodných záverov. Myslíme si ale, že toto je dobrý začiatok a podklad pre ďalšie, tentokrát detailnejšie, skúmanie danej problematiky v praxi.

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## List of Resources

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## Appendices

Appendix A: The Topic Web

Appendix B: The Questionnaire

Appendix C: The Interview

Appendix D: The Lesson Plan of the Experimental Group

Appendix E: Alice's Adventure in Wonderland

Appendix F: The Brave Tin Soldier

Appendix G: The Little Mermaid

Appendix H: Little Red Riding Hood

Appendix I: Gulliver's Travels

Appendix J: Puss in Boots

Appendix K: The Ugly Duckling

Appendix L: The Post-test

Appendix M: The Lesson Plan of the Control Group

Appendix N: Meet my dogs