

WRITING TASKS IN EFL TEACHING  
Analysis of the writing tasks in Finnish schoolbooks

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Tiivistelmä – Abstract <p>Perusopetuksen opetussuunnitelman perusteet (2004) englannin kielen kirjoitustaidon osalta jättävät vastuun kirjoitustehtävien suunnittelusta opettajille ja kirjantekijöille. Oppimateriaaleja tutkimalla voidaan saavuttaa tietoa englannin kielen opetuksesta Suomessa. Tutkielma pyrkii selvittämään, minkä tyyppistä kirjoitustaitoa opetetaan suomalaisissa englannin kielen oppimateriaaleissa ja tutkimus keskittyy kirjoitustehtävien painopisteiden tutkimiseen kahden kysymyksen kautta. Ensiksi tutkittiin kirjoitustehtävien sijoittumista muotoa painottavien ja sisältöä painottavien tehtävien väliselle akselille, ja toiseksi selvitettiin, minkälaisia kirjoittamisen taitoja tehtävät harjoittavat.</p> <p>Aineisto kerättiin kahdesta yhdeksännen luokan englannin kielen oppimateriaalista. Aineisto luokiteltiin teoriapohjan mukaisiin kategorioihin ja analysoitiin kahden tutkimuskysymyksen avulla. Tulokseksi saatiin, että oppikirjojen kirjoitustehtävät keskittyvät tehtävätyypeiltään sekä tekstin muotoa harjoittaviin että sisältöä tukeviin tehtäviin, painottaen hieman tekstin muotoa. Kirjoittamisen taitojen suhteen kirjoitustehtävät tutkituissa oppimateriaalissa harjoittavat pääasiassa oppilaan tekstin sisällön tuottamisen taitoja sekä kirjoittamisen prosessia.</p> <p>Tutkielma osoittaa, että vaikka oppimateriaalien kirjoitustehtävistä löytyy monipuolisuutta, on niissä havaittavissa selkeitä painopisteitä. Tutkimuksessa ehdotetaan, että jatkotutkimus on aiheellista muun muassa vaihtoehtoisten materiaalien kirjoitustehtävien osalta, jotta saavutettaisiin laajempi kuva suomalaisesta englannin kielen kirjoittamisen opetuksesta. Myös oppilaiden kokemukset erityyppisten kirjoitustehtävien hyödyllisyydestä voisivat olla apuna oppimateriaalien suunnittelussa.</p>	
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## 1 Introduction

English language has become the lingua franca in the globalizing world. As a result, English language is studied in classrooms all over the world and knowing English has become an important characteristic of a successful career. Learning writing skills in a foreign language is central since writing is a way to communicate, a tool for working and a way to express one's intellect. In order to succeed in a foreign language, one needs to be able to write various types of texts such as job applications and evaluative essays. Therefore, it is important that various writing skills are introduced and studied in writing classes.

The writing tasks in school environments can differ in relation to what types of text the students practice. In addition, different types of writing tasks practice different skills related to writing. Designing the materials for EFL writing classes sets the frames for the level of writing competence the students can acquire during their studies. Therefore, learning materials play a significant role in EFL writing teaching, and by studying the writing tasks in EFL learning materials, knowledge on EFL writing teaching can be increased. Although writing tasks in general have been the subject of various studies, there is still a need for a more detailed account of what types of writing tasks exist in EFL materials.

The present study aims to describe part of the EFL writing teaching in Finnish schools. Two EFL workbooks are studied, in order to find out what types of writing skills and texts are practiced in classrooms. The studied workbooks are published by the two largest learning material producers in Finland and thus they represent Finnish EFL teaching well. The present study will show what areas of writing skills are stressed in Finnish EFL education. As a result, the present study can help material designers to create versatile writing tasks for English books and perhaps change the focus area of the exercises.

The next chapter presents the theoretical framework for the present study and after that, the methodology of the present study is explained. Later on, the findings are presented. The entire study is discussed and concluded in the final chapter.

## **2 English writing teaching in Finnish secondary schools**

In Finland, English language is studied as an A-level language, which means that studying English begins already in elementary school. In most cases, English study begins in the third grade as the first foreign language (A1). Therefore, in the beginning of the ninth grade English has been studied for at least six years. Finnish basic education is typically not formed based on various courses focusing on separate language issues, so English language lessons focus on the language as a whole. Finnish National Core Curriculum for Basic Education (2004), published by the National Board of Education, sets learning objectives for each grade which forms the frames for English language teaching.

### **2.1 The use of textbooks in Finnish classrooms**

Teaching materials create the learning environment in which the teachers and students act (Tarnanen, Luukka, Pöyhönen, Huhta 2010). Tarnanen et al. (2010) studied the materials used in Finnish secondary schools and found that about 90 per cent of foreign language teachers who participated in the study (n=324) considered the schoolbooks as the most important learning material. The study found that 98 per cent of the respondents used a textbook often in FL classroom and 95 percent of the respondents answered that they used exercise books often in FL teaching. Slides and handouts followed the schoolbooks in the list of most often used materials. Slides were used by 77 per cent of the respondents and 57 per cent used handouts often in foreign language classrooms. The third biggest group was found to be audio and picture materials provided in the schoolbooks, which, according to Tarnanen et al. (2010), 90 per cent of the respondents used often.

The study by Tarnanen et al. (2010) also revealed that teachers feel that the textbooks include all the necessary issues that need to be taught in classrooms. In addition, teachers assume that by using the textbooks, the quality of language teaching is optimal and the demands of the core curriculum are met.

As can be understood by looking at Tarnanen et al.'s results, the textbooks are the most important piece of material in the foreign language classroom and the teaching relies heavily on them. Therefore, by studying the EFL textbooks, information about how English is taught in Finnish comprehensive schools can be gained. Since the textbooks are the main teaching material, it is important to study what kind of writing skills are practiced in Finnish EFL course materials.

## **2.2 Finnish National Core Curriculum for Basic Education (2004)**

The learning objectives for English language learning in secondary school (grades 7 to 9) are presented first generally and then more specifically in the National Core Curriculum for Basic Education (2004), focusing on different areas of language skills. These include, cultural skills, reading, and writing skills, listening comprehension and learning strategies. The overall learning objectives for English language in secondary school are divided into language proficiency, cultural skills and learning strategies. In relation to writing skills, students are expected to learn to relate, orally and in writing, everyday matters with some details. As for structures, students will understand the main principles of syntax and conjunctive structures, which are important in writing texts. According to the Core Curriculum for Basic Education, good writing skills, in the ninth grade, mean reaching level A2.2 of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages. On this level, the student is able to write short text on events and personal experiences, for example, letters, notes, applications, and phone messages. Generally, students should be able to act according to the demands of the target language culture.

The learning objectives in the National Core Curriculum for Basic Education (2004) are somewhat vague. They do not determine in detail the concrete writing skills needed in order to achieve these goals and therefore it is up to the teachers and textbook designers to decide how to approach these objectives. Hence, it is not obvious, based on the core curriculum, what types of writing exercises there should be in Finnish EFL schoolbooks and what kinds of writing skills they improve.

### **3 Writing tasks**

Writing tasks in general have been a focus of various studies (for example, Harmer (2004) and Hedge (2008)). In order to find out what EFL writing teaching is like in Finland, the function of writing tasks should be studied. The functions of writing tasks have been analyzed by Hyland (2003) and Kern (2002) since their categories suit the present study well. Together they provide a view into the function and the purpose of writing tasks.

#### **3.1 Hyland's task types**

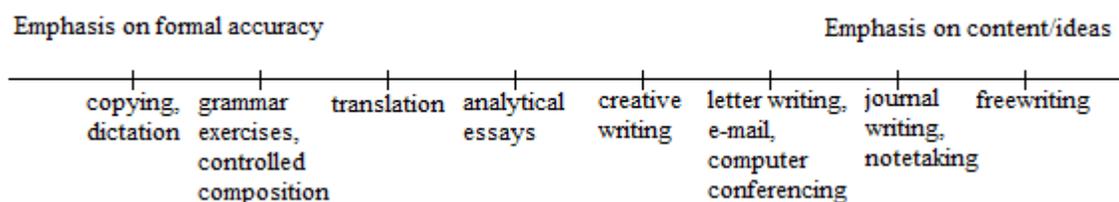
Hyland (2003:112) states that tasks are fundamental in learning to write. According to him, tasks help students to develop an understanding of texts and writing skills. Even though texts are important as writing materials, the tasks students actually do by themselves are even more significant in teaching writing, (Hyland 2003:112).

Hyland (2003) introduces five different skills that the student needs in order to create effective texts: content, system, process, genre, and context. The student needs knowledge of the subjects of which to write about and what to include in a text (content), knowledge of the language forms he or she needs in order to deliver a message (system), knowledge of revising and drafting (process), knowledge of communicative purposes (genre) and knowledge of reader's expectations (context). Hyland (2003:114-115) categorizes writing tasks according to the areas of skills they are designed to improve.

In addition, Hyland (2003:113) divides writing tasks in two different categories. Real-world tasks are tasks that are based on communicative goals and delivering a message. On the contrary, pedagogic tasks focus on developing the pupil's composing skills or genre knowledge. Hyland emphasizes that the tasks should be based on the text the student needs to write and the student should be able to see the link between pedagogic tasks and real-world tasks.

### 3.2 Kern's task types

Kern (2002:191-192) introduces the most common types of writing activities used in foreign language classrooms. Kern (2002:191-192) places the task types on a continuum, one end representing tasks that emphasize formal writing and the form of a language, and the other end representing tasks that emphasize the content and ideas of the text. The task types categorized from form-focused to content-focused are copying and dictation, grammar exercises, controlled composition, translation, analytical essays, creative writing, letter writing (includes email, and computer conferencing), journal writing and note taking, and free writing. Figure 3.1 presents the continuum, the left end representing form-focused tasks and on the right are content-focused tasks.



*Figure 3.1 Continuum of writing tasks by Kern (2002:191)*

According to Kern (2002:191), the tasks that beginners tend to get to practice can be found on the left end of the continuum and tasks that are more creative can be completed with structured instructions. Each category has its own demands on students' language proficiency.

According to Kern (2002:191-196) copying, dictation and grammar exercises, as well as controlled composition, focus on grammar, vocabulary and the mechanics of writing. Analytical essays involve various elements, among them knowledge of genres. Creative writing gives students the possibility to express emotions and play with language. In early stages of language learning, it is important to give the students constraints to make the tasks less demanding. Letter writing tasks have a communicative goal and are therefore motivational writing tasks. Kern (2002:192-193) suggests that real pen pals can even support cultural enrichment. In addition, letter writing includes various functions for

language use. For example, greeting, asking questions, explaining, expressing agreement or disagreement, and clarifying. According to Kern (2002:191-196) journal writing is a tool for the students to write about their daily encounters and reflect on their learning. Free writing is a writing task in which the students are asked to write about a topic without stopping to think about new ideas and not to worry about the forms.

The function and purpose of the writing tasks in Finnish textbooks describes the EFL writing teaching in Finland. The Finnish National Core Curriculum for basic education (Finnish National Board of Education, 2004) sets a pupil's ability to act according to the demands of the target language culture as one of the objectives of basic education English learning. Since the core curriculum does not give detailed instructions on how EFL writing should be taught, the book designers have quite an effect on the method of introducing EFL writing in the school environment.

The categorizations introduced above are general level classifications of writing tasks and applicable in the Finnish school environment. Kern's (2002:191-192) categorization focuses on the writing tasks' relations to the use of English writing skills outside classroom context, whereas Hyland's (2003:113) categorization is based on the writing skills the tasks are designed to develop. Both these views on writing tasks are stressed in the present study.

## 4 Research questions and hypotheses

The research questions of the present study are the following:

1. How do the writing tasks in Finnish EFL schoolbooks for ninth-graders place on the continuum from form-focused to content-focused tasks?
2. What areas of writing skills do the writing tasks develop?

In relation to the first research question, the presumption is that writing tasks in Finnish EFL schoolbooks vary regarding the types of the tasks and the skills the tasks develop. This presumption is based on the National Curriculum for Basic Education's (National Board of Education, 2004) learning objectives that mention pupil's ability to act according to the target language culture as the goal for EFL teaching. Logically, in order to act according to the versatile situations of the target language culture, a pupil needs to be able to access diverse writing tasks when learning English. As for the second question, it can be presumed that the tasks develop various writing skills, since all of them, according to Hyland (2003) are important in writing learning.

## 5 Methods

In this section, the methods that were used to conduct the present study are discussed. The focus of the first section is on the EFL materials and the reasons why those exact textbooks were chosen to be studied here. After the materials are discussed, the categorizations that were used in the present study are explained.

### 5.1 Materials

The present study explores the writing exercises in two Finnish EFL schoolbooks. The books are *Spotlight 9 Workbook* by Haapala, Kangaspunta, Lehtonen, Peuraniemi, Semi and Westlake (2014), and *Smart Moves 3 Exercises* by Folland, Huohvanainen, Nieminen and Vaakanainen (2014a). These books were chosen because they are published by the two biggest learning material publishers in Finland, Sanoma Pro and Otava. These workbooks were published in 2014 so they represent the latest ideas in Finnish EFL teaching and therefore act as relevant research subjects. Both books have various language tasks that are organized according to the chapters in the matching textbooks. Most of the tasks in EFL exercise books require writing skills to some extent. In the present study, a task is considered a writing task if the pupil is expected to write larger entities than only one sentence.

#### 5.1.1 Spotlight 9: Fact and fiction Workbook

*Spotlight 9 Workbook* consists of six sections. The first section (pages 9-225) consists of the tasks related to the six units that are presented in the textbook. Each unit has its own theme, for example, school environment, wildlife, and working life. Each unit has various tasks based on the textbook chapters and on one or two grammar points.

After the units, there is a *read more* – section for two pages (224-225). This section has tasks for the extra texts provided in the textbook. *Read more* is followed by *Spotlight extra* –pages (pages 226-227). These pages provide four tasks for each unit. In an *extra* section,

the tasks are more demanding and time consuming than in the unit section; the tasks in this section can be described as small projects because they require some search for information or creating presentations on various subjects. The fourth section is *Spotlight on writing* (pages 228-231). On these pages, students find instructions for different types of written texts, such as writing about oneself, writing e-mails, analyzing the pros and cons of an issue, describing working life, writing letters-to-editor and other texts where one expresses opinions, and short stories. The last two sections are *revision* and the *key for revision* (pages 232-245). Revision consists of tasks based on the vocabulary and grammar issues presented in the units.

The present study focuses on the first four sections: units, read more, Spotlight extra and Spotlight on writing. The revision is excluded since there are no tasks that would meet the present study's definition of a writing task.

### **5.1.2 Smart Moves 3 Exercises**

Smart Moves 3 Exercises by Folland, Huohvanainen, Nieminen and Vaakanainen (2014a) consists of four parts. The first section (pages 6-267) consists of tasks that are related to the texts in Smart Moves 3 Texts (Folland, Huohvanainen, Nieminen and Vaakanainen 2014b). Smart Moves 3 contains three *courses* and each course has a theme that is carried throughout the texts, for example, environment and media. Each course has seven to ten texts and altogether there are 24 texts in the textbook.

The second section, after the tasks based on the texts, is called *Grammar Extra* (pages 268-279). This section has short summaries and tasks on the grammar points presented in the exercise book. This section is revision on the most important grammar points that have emerged in the texts. The third section (pages 280-289) is called "*Test Yourself*". This section has several collections of grammar tasks that act as exam-like tests. The purpose of this section is to help the pupil to practice for exams. The final section of Smart Moves 3 Exercises (Folland et al. 2014) is the key for "*Grammar Extra*" and "*Test Yourself*" – sections.

In the present study, only the first section is studied. The second and the third section are considered revision and, as in Spotlight 9 Workbook, these two sections did not include any tasks that would be considered as writing tasks in the present study.

## **5.2 Categorizations**

In order to study the task types, Kern's (2002:191-192) list of the most common task types was applied. Kern's (2002:191-192) categories form a difference between the writing tasks that practice writing through the practice of language skills, for example, translation exercises, grammar exercises, and copying tasks, and the writing tasks in which the focus is on the final product and the function of the written piece, for example, creative writing tasks and letter writing exercises. The categories are presented here from the most form-focused tasks to the most content-focused tasks. The categories are copying, dictation; grammar exercises, controlled composition; translation; analytical essays; creative writing; letter writing (includes e-mail and computer conferencing); journal writing and note taking; and free writing.

To study the writing skills the tasks develop, Hyland's (2003:113) categorization of the five areas of writing skills was applied. Hyland (2003:114-115) lists the most commonly used types of writing tasks according to their pedagogic functions and that listing was used when analyzing the materials. It was possible, and even probable, that one task practiced more than one skill. The five areas of writing skills are content, system, process, genre, and context.

The analysis was descriptive and was completed with qualitative information. These categorizations are discussed separately in the result section and are compared to see whether there are any links between them. The hypothesis is that the results will be linked to each other since Kern's (2002) task types can be categorized according to Hyland's (2003) categorization.

Hyland's (2003) category is originally created for writing courses (Hyland 2003). In Finland, the writing tasks are integrated in the basic education of English, since the basic education is not usually in course form. Despite the origin of the categorization, it is a general classification and hence applicable in the Finnish EFL environment. In addition, both categorizations include categories for even more advanced level of writing skills than the ninth-grader level but still they can be applied in the Finnish EFL classroom environment due to their generality. When considering Kern's (2002) task types, it can be estimated that analytical essays might be a complex category, since the essays written in the ninth grade might not be very analytical. In addition, the length of the written pieces is quite short and therefore the categorizing is made based on the elements the instructions emphasize. For example, if the instructions ask the pupil to write a short text about the pros and cons of some phenomenon, for example, global warming, the task can be considered analytical writing although the final product would not necessary count as an essay.

## 6 Results

In this chapter, the results of the present study are discussed. Both of the studied schoolbooks are first discussed separately in relation to Kern's (2002) and Hyland's (2003) categorizations. Possible differences and similarities between the research subjects are discussed in the next chapter.

### 6.1 Spotlight 9: Fact and fiction Workbook

Spotlight 9: Fact and fiction Workbook has 70 writing exercises overall. The first section, tasks related to the units of the textbook, has 37 writing tasks total and the second section, read more, had two writing tasks. Extra - section had nineteen writing tasks whereas the final section, spotlight on writing, had twelve writing tasks. Spotlight 9 is first discussed in relation to the categorization by Kern (2002).

The first category on Kern's (2002) continuum is **copying and dictation**, which is the most form-focused type of writing tasks. In the book, there were no writing tasks that fit to this category. The second category is **grammar and controlled composition**, and three of the writing tasks (4%) could be recognized to fit to this category. The writing tasks were considered controlled composition tasks if the instructions gave specific rules for the form of the written piece. In the book, the instructions in this category guided the pupil to use certain structures and expressions in the written piece. The third form-focused group was **translation** tasks. In the book, there were no translation tasks that would have suited the present study's definition of a writing task.

**Analytical essay** was one of the two largest categories in the book. Twenty-one writing tasks (30%) suited this category. Writing tasks that required describing and analyzing some phenomenon or subject analytically were recognized into this category. Since the writing tasks in the ninth grade are relatively short, they could not be recognized as essays in the academic sense. The focus in this category was on the purpose of the writing tasks, which

was to analyze certain objects and write about them analytically. Typical instructions for the writing tasks in this category were, for example, “describe your own school history and analyze the Finnish school system” and “in what kinds of situations is the work of a citizen journalist particularly important”.

The other of the two largest categories was **creative writing**, which also had 21 writing tasks (30%). The tasks in this category allowed the students more freedom in their writing than the tasks in the previous categories. In creative writing tasks, the instructions did not give details about what the written piece should be like, but gave only a subject and perhaps a genre that the written piece should be about. The instructions in this category were quite versatile, for example, “what do you think about...”, “write a story about...”, and “create an advertisement”.

Three writing tasks (4%) were categorized as **letter writing**. These three tasks were in the spotlight on writing – section. The instructions for these two tasks were quite detailed with structured steps for how to write an email, for example, “start with a greeting”, “introduce yourself”, “express your interest in...”, and “finish your message politely”. Three tasks could be categorized as **notetaking**. One of the tasks was to search for information about a subject and two were about interviewing a classmate and taking notes. There were no tasks that could have been categorized as **freewriting**.

Outside of these categories, two additional categories were found. These categories had altogether nineteen tasks (27%). One of them was about writing descriptions for certain terms, like, “Write explanations for the following words in English: granny, weekend, hangover, memory”. There were six tasks of this type. The other group was lists; thirteen of the writing tasks in Spotlight instructed the pupil to make a list of certain things. A list was considered as a writing task in the present study, since the points on a list are somehow connected together and quite many of these tasks required whole sentences. Table 6.1 represents the writing tasks in Spotlight 9 according to Kern’s (2002) categories.

Table 6.1 Writing tasks in Spotlight 9: Fact & Fiction Workbook (Haapala et al. 2014) according to Kern's (2002) categories

Category	All	Units	Read more	Extra	Spotlight on writing	%
Copying	0	0	0	0	0	0
Grammar and controlled composition	3	3	0	0	0	4
Translation	0	0	0	0	0	0
Analytical essay	21	8	0	9	4	30
Creative writing	21	10	2	4	5	30
Letter writing	3	0	0	0	3	4
Journal writing and notetaking	3	1	0	2	0	4
Freewriting	0	0	0	0	0	0
Others	19	15	0	4	0	27
<b>Total</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>99*</b>

\*Percentages may not total 100 due to rounding

The writing tasks in Spotlight were also categorized according to Hyland's (2003) five categories of writing skills. In this categorization, one task could be considered to practice more than one writing skill. Overall, 64 of the writing tasks (91%) focused on the **content** of the written piece. If the instructions gave a topic and, for example, some questions that needed to be addressed in the written piece, the task was seen to practice the pupil's content skills.

The second writing skill in Hyland's (2003) category is **system** skills. Twelve tasks (17%) practiced this skill. Tasks that gave some structures or advice on the form of the written piece were categorized in this category. In this category, the instructions were, for example, "write a story using the following expressions". The writing section, Spotlight on writing, gave the pupil examples of the structures such as an email and a letter to the editor. Therefore, nine task out of twelve (75%) in this section practiced the pupil's system skills.

Twenty-three writing tasks (32%) were analyzed to practice the pupil's **process** writing skills. Typically, these tasks advised the pupil to look for more information on something, to interview someone or to make lists and notes on the details of a certain subject. In addition, project tasks were analyzed to practice the pupil's process writing skills, since a project has various stages.

The fourth writing skill in Hyland's (2003) category is **genre** knowledge. A task was seen to practice a pupil's skills on genres if the genre of the written piece was mentioned. Sixteen tasks (22%) in the workbook were considered to fit to this category. The genres in the tasks were, for example, e-mail, presentation, story and letter to the editor.

Finally, the last writing skill, according to Hyland (2003), is knowledge on the **context** of the text. To fit to this category, the instructions of writing tasks needed to mention an audience for the written piece. Typical audience was the teacher, other classmates, the receiver of an e-mail or a letter or the public. Fifteen (21%) of the writing tasks were analyzed to practice context skills. Table 6.2 presents the writing tasks categorized according to Hyland's (2003) categories.

*Table 6.2 Writing tasks in Spotlight 9: Fact & Fiction Workbook (Haapala et al. 2014) according to Hyland's (2003) categories on writing skills*

Category	All	Units	Read more	Extra	Spotlight on writing	%
<b>Content</b>	64	31	2	19	12	91
<b>System</b>	12	3	0	0	9	17
<b>Process</b>	23	11	0	12	0	32
<b>Genre</b>	16	6	0	10	6	22
<b>Context</b>	15	2	0	7	6	21

## 6.2 Smart Moves 3 Exercises

Smart Moves 3 Exercises had altogether 39 writing tasks. All of these tasks were found in the first section, which had tasks that were related to the texts in the textbook. The writing tasks in Smart Moves 3 are first presented according to Kern's (2002) categorization of writing tasks and later on discussed in relation to Hyland's (2003) categorization of writing skills.

Similarity to Spotlight, no writing tasks could be categorized as **copying and dictation**, which is the most form-focused category of Kern's (2002) task types, were not found. The second category, **grammar and controlled composition**, had six writing tasks, which is 15% of all writing tasks. These tasks instructed the pupil to write a text that had certain structures in it. The typical instructions in this category advised the pupil to write, for

example, “a conversation that had two greetings, three questions, and four answers”. One task was categorized as a **translation** exercise. There was a short paragraph in a Finnish dialect and the pupil was asked to translate the paragraph into English.

Seventeen tasks (44%) were analyzed as **analytical essays**. Similarly to Spotlight, the concept of an essay was extended here to include all writing tasks that required analytical evaluation on a certain phenomenon or subject. The typical instructions in this category instructed the students to evaluate the pros and cons of a certain phenomenon, for example, “Write about 150 words about your dream hobby. What is the hobby? Where can you do it? What kind of equipment do you need? How much money does your hobby take?” and “Describe what the world is like through the eyes of the rich and the poor. Should everyone have the same amount of property? Does money make you happy? Does poverty make you unhappy?”

Six tasks (15%) were categorized as **creative writing**. These tasks instructed the students to write quite freely about, for example, some situation or feeling. Some of the writing tasks categorized as creative writing had pictures and the pupil was advised to write about what is happening in the picture using their own imagination, for example, “tell about the pictures” and “what is happening in the pictures?”.

In the book, there were no tasks that could have been considered as **letter writing**. Six tasks (15%) included note taking, and usually the notes were taken on interviews on other students. The tasks were, for example, to keep a diary on one’s use of energy for a week. The students were advised to write down what vehicles and what electronic appliances they used during the week, and to ask classmates about their consumption of energy. As in Spotlight, no tasks were categorized as **freewriting**.

Three tasks (8%) did not fit any of these categories. Similarly to Spotlight, they could have been categorized as lists and word explanation tasks. There was one explanation task and two tasks that instructed the pupil to create a list on a certain issue. Table 6.3 presents the writing tasks in Smart Moves 3 according to Kern’s (2002) categories.

Table 6.3 Writing tasks in Smart Moves 3 Exercises (Folland et al. 2014) according to Kern's (2002) categories

Category	All	Courses	%
Copying	0	0	0
Grammar and controlled composition	6	6	15
Translation	1	1	3
Analytical essay	17	17	44
Creative writing	6	6	15
Letter writing	0	0	0
Journal writing and notetaking	6	6	15
Freewriting	0	0	0
Others	3	3	8
Total	39	39	100

The tasks in Smart Moves 3 were also analyzed according to Hyland's (2003) five areas of writing skills. As in Spotlight, one task could be recognized to practice more than one skill. Firstly, a task was seen to practice the pupil's **content** skills if the instructions told the pupil in some detail what to write about. Thirty-seven of the writing tasks (99%) were analyzed to practice the pupil's content skills.

Secondly, six of the writing tasks (15%) in the book were seen to practice the pupil's **system** skills. A writing task that practices system skills was recognized if the task gave certain phrases or syntaxes the pupil needed to use in the written piece. The instructions for a task that practiced system skills were typically "write the text using as many of these words as possible".

Thirdly, 21 of the writing tasks (53%) in the workbook practiced writing as **process**. If the instructions advised the pupil to do some pre-writing tasks, the task was considered to practice the pupil's process skills. Typical tasks that were considered to practice process skills instructed the pupil, for example, to search for information or take notes based on an interview.

The fourth writing skill in Hyland's (2003) categorization is **genre** knowledge. In the workbook, sixteen writing tasks (41%) practiced genre skills. In these tasks, the genre of

the written piece was given in the instructions. Genres mentioned in the tasks were, for example, news report, story, and short essay.

Finally, the last of Hyland's (2003) categories is **context** skills. A task that gave information of the audience of the written piece was considered a task that practices context skills. Typical audience in this workbook was other classmates to whom the presentations were due to present. Table 6.4 shows the writing tasks categorized according to Hyland's (2003) categories.

*Table 6.4 Writing tasks in Smart Moves 3 Exercises (Folland et al. 2014) according to Hyland's (2003) categories on writing skills*

Category	All	%
<b>Content</b>	37	95
<b>System</b>	6	15
<b>Process</b>	21	53
<b>Genre</b>	16	41
<b>Context</b>	12	30

## **7 Discussion and conclusion**

In this chapter, the results of the present study are discussed in relation to the research questions and previous studies. After the results are analyzed, the present study is discussed according to its strengths and limitations. Finally, suggestions for future research are presented.

### **7.1 Placing the tasks on the continuum from form-focused to content-focused tasks**

In order to answer the first research question, the findings in both workbooks studied need to be taken into account. In Kern's (2002) categorization, eight categories place on a continuum from form-focused tasks (such as copying and grammar tasks) to more content-focused tasks (such as journal writing and freewriting). Altogether 87 tasks were categorized into these eight categories. When the writing tasks in the studied workbooks are placed on this continuum, it can be said that the stress is in the middle of the continuum or slightly in form-focused tasks. Fifty-five of the writing tasks in this categorization were categorized into copying and dictation, grammar and controlled composition, translation and analytical essays, which are the four most form-focused of the categorization. The four most content-focused categories had 39 writing tasks, which is 44 percent of categorized writing tasks. Fifty-nine percent of all categorized writing tasks were either analytical or creative, which highlights the fact that most of the tasks were in the middle of the continuum.

When the writing tasks were categorized according to Kern's categorization, the majority of the writing tasks in both workbooks had a stress on analytical tasks. In *Spotlight*, 30 percent of the writing tasks could be categorized as analytical essays and in *Smart Moves*, 44 percent of the writing tasks fit this category, which is together 35 percent of all the studied writing tasks. Another category that stands out, especially in *Spotlight*, is creative writing tasks (25 percent of all analyzed writing tasks), since 30 percent of the writing tasks in *Spotlight* were analyzed as creative writing. On the other hand, in *Smart Moves*, 15

percent of the tasks were categorized as creative writing. In this workbook, also two other categories (grammar and controlled composition, and note taking) were as popular as creative writing. None of the tasks was categorized in either of the extremes, copying and dictation, or freewriting.

Spotlight had altogether seventy writing tasks whereas in Smart Moves, thirty-nine writing tasks were recognized. In Spotlight, three categories did not have any tasks: copying and dictation, translation, and freewriting. While in Smart Moves 3, the three non-existing categories were otherwise the same but instead of lacking translation tasks, the workbook did not have any letter writing tasks. It is noteworthy that altogether a mere three writing tasks in the subset practiced letter writing, even when written one-to-one communication can be said to be based on letter and notes. The lack of letter writing tasks, including e-mail, was surprising, since e-mail could be considered an important way of communicating in working life.

## **7.2 Areas of writing skills developed**

To answer to the second research question, the results need to be summarized according to Hyland's (2003) areas of writing skills. The skills are content knowledge, system knowledge, process knowledge, genre knowledge, and context knowledge. By looking at the results, it could be stated that content knowledge and process writing skills are stressed in Finnish EFL writing teaching.

Firstly, ninety-three percent of the studied writing tasks practiced the pupil's content skills, which is the vast majority of the writing tasks. Secondly, forty percent of the writing tasks developed the pupil's process writing skills. Thirdly, twenty-nine percent of the writing tasks were analyzed to practice the pupil's knowledge on different genres and text-types. Fourthly, twenty-five percent of the tasks trained the pupil's skills to consider the readers' expectations and the context of the text. Finally, seventeen percent of the writing tasks exercised the pupil's system skills.

To summarize, it can be stated that content skills are seen as the most important writing skill in Finnish EFL teaching. Pre-writing tasks that aid in the practice of pupil's process writing skills including interviewing, making lists, and searching for additional information, were popular in the materials. Knowledge on the reader's expectations and the context of the written piece were practiced only in 17 percent of the writing tasks, which is less than in every fifth task. Practicing content knowledge could be integrated almost in every writing task by giving the pupil details on the imagined audience of the written piece.

When the two workbooks are compared, some similarities and differences can be found. Both books had similar emphasis on the practiced skills, context skills being practiced in over ninety percent of the writing tasks in both workbooks. In *Smart Moves*, the percentages in all writing skills are slightly larger than in *Spotlight*. This means that the writing tasks in *Smart Moves* practiced various skills simultaneously although many of the tasks in *Spotlight* also practiced more than just one writing skill. The larger percentages can be also explained by the smaller amount of writing tasks in *Smart Moves* (39) than in *Spotlight* (70). With a smaller subset of tasks, one task has a larger effect on the percentages than when the subset of tasks is large.

In the light of these results, it can be stated that the Finnish EFL teaching gives students skills to write analytic text and creative descriptions of events and everyday matters. The writing skills of Finnish students consist mainly of knowledge on the content and the writing processes. On the other hand, according to the results of the present study, Finnish EFL writers may lack the ability to write well-constructed e-mails, letters and other communicative texts.

### **7.3 Implications**

The results of the present study provide knowledge on EFL writing teaching, and the skills and text types practiced in Finland. The results can be helpful for both teachers and book designers when planning lessons and providing materials for EFL writing. In addition, the results also show the EFL teaching's stress points in relation to the writing skills and the

functions of writing tasks. The results also revealed what areas of writing learning are not covered that extensively and thus the results of this study can be beneficial when creating the core curriculum. In addition, the results of my study can be a useful tool when planning the education: when teachers know what areas of writing skills the books stress, they can choose extra materials to support the areas the book does not cover that inclusively.

By looking at the results, it could be stated that the writing tasks in both workbooks are quite similar. Even though there was a difference in the amount of writing tasks, the task types and practiced skills had similar characteristics. If the results are studied in the context of the Finnish National Core Curriculum for Basic Education (2004), it is somewhat surprising that there are not considerable differences in the writing tasks. The Finnish National Core Curriculum for Basic Education (2004) does not give instructions on how EFL writing teaching should be executed and therefore there could be more varying between different materials.

In the present study, the categorizations help to answer the research questions. The writing tasks were analyzed only with one category for each question and therefore the present study does not consider other possible categories and characteristics that can be found outside these categorizations. For example, several tasks did not meet the requirements of any of Kern's (2002) categories. These tasks represented lists and word explanations, which could be added to the categorizations of writing tasks in general. In the results, reasons of the researcher's choices on categorizing are given and the researcher provides examples of the tasks placed in each category in order to make repeating the study possible.

The results are generalizable in the Finnish context since the two biggest learning materials publishers in Finland published the two workbooks studied. Since there are also other published learning materials and the teachers use other sources in side with the workbooks (Tarnainen et al. 2010), the results of the present study do not apply in all cases.

The writing tasks in Finnish EFL teaching could still be studied further. For example, the teacher's guide for Smart Moves (Folland, T., Huohvanainen, T., Nieminen, A., &

Vaakanainen, M. 2014c) instructs that the teacher can decide whether the writing tasks are assigned. Therefore, it would be interesting to study how many writing tasks of these books are actually done in EFL classrooms. Also other materials than workbooks used in EFL writing teaching could be studied to find out, for example, what kinds of materials the teacher provides for the students. Other interesting viewpoints would be the use of authentic materials in writing teaching and the effects of the generalizing use of technology in classrooms on EFL writing. In addition, the students' perceptions and attitudes on writing tasks could be studied. For example, it would be helpful for the materials designers and teachers to know what types writing tasks the students feel important and beneficial for their language learning.

To conclude, the writing tasks in Finnish EFL workbooks are varying and practice writing skills diversely. Still, some emphasis on certain tasks and text types were found in the present study. The results revealed some areas where improvement would be in order. The results of the present can be useful when planning future EFL teaching and teaching materials.

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