

**“WRITE IN ENGLISH ON YOUR NOTEBOOK”**

Analysis of creative writing exercises in a Finnish EFL workbook

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Tiivistelmä – Abstract <p>Vaikka luovalla kirjoittamisella on tutkittu olevan paljon etuja vieraan ja toisen kielen oppimisessa, Perusopetuksen opetussuunnitelman perusteet (2004) ei tarjoa täsmällisiä ohjeita luovan kirjoittamisen opetukseen englannin kielen oppiaineessa. Täten luovan kirjoittamisen tehtävien suunnittelu on opettajien ja oppimateriaalien valmistajien vastuulla. Oppikirjat ovat edelleen hyvin laajasti käytettyjä oppimateriaaleja, joten niiden tutkiminen tarjoaa tietoa myös opetuksesta yleensä. Tutkielman päämääränä on selvittää luovan kirjoittamisen tehtävien esiintymistä yhdessä suomalaisessa englannin kielen tehtäväkirjassa. Tätä tutkittiin kahden tutkimuskysymyksen avulla, joista ensimmäinen koski luovan kirjoittamisen tehtävien osuutta kaikista tehtäväkirjan tehtävistä. Toisen tutkimuskysymyksen kautta pyrittiin selvittämään, miten luovan kirjoittamisen tehtävät liittyivät oppikirjan muuhun sisältöön.</p> <p>Tutkimuksessa käytetty aineisto kerättiin suomalaisesta seitsemännen luokan englannin kielen tehtäväkirjasta. Aineistoa tutkittiin tutkimuskysymysten kautta sekä määrällisesti että laadullisesti, mutta aineiston kategorisointi ja analyysi oli enimmäkseen laadullista. Tulokset osoittavat, että luovan kirjoittamisen tehtäviä on kyseisessä oppikirjassa vain niukasti enemmän verrattuna aikaisempiin tutkimuksiin ja että suurin osa näistä tehtävistä edusti ainekirjoitustehtäviä. Näistä valtaosa oli sijoitettu kirjan loppuun. Tutkielma osoittaa myös, että luovan kirjoittamisen tehtävissä oli selkeitä painopisteitä. Myös tehtävien esittämistä ja sijoittamista kirjassa kritisoitiin. Tutkimuksessa rohkaistaan jatkotutkimuksen tekemistä muun muassa luovan kirjoittamisen tehtävien käytöstä ja soveltamisesta itse opetustilanteissa. Oppilaiden henkilökohtaiset näkemykset luovasta kirjoittamisesta auttaisivat myös oppimateriaalisuunnittelussa.</p>	
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# 1 INTRODUCTION

As English has become a global lingua franca and an important tool in modern professional life, National Core Curriculum for Basic Education (2004) has set English as an A-language, in other words the second language to be studied after native language, to be taught in Finnish schools from elementary school onwards. Communication in English is often practiced in written form, partly due to the modern digital age, with social media as one of its most significant parts (Kivilahti and Kalaja, 2013: 90). Thus, writing skills in English are crucial. Of course, writing itself strengthens awareness of metalanguage, knowledge of grammar rules for example, and other areas of language skills in general (Kern, 2000: 176). However, teaching different writing styles in English is becoming increasingly more important (Kivilahti and Kalaja, 2013).

Even though the Finnish education system encourages teachers and learners to use creativity, textbooks and workbooks are still considered most important learning materials (Tarnanen et al, 2010). The majority of workbook exercises instruct to give an answer in a written form (Kivilahti and Kalaja, 2013: 94). Fortunately, many of the written exercises, such as e-mail or job application writing, do not offer a completed pattern for the task but demand pupils to use their own creativity. Although the practical benefits of traditional creative writing exercises, containing fiction and poetry, cannot be clearly seen, they contain many advantages compared to other language exercises. There are multiple studies concluded in the field of creative writing in EFL teaching and learning. However, due to the importance of textbooks in Finnish EFL education, the writing exercises in Finnish EFL textbooks needs to be studied further.

The aim of this study is to examine creative writing in Finnish EFL education. I will conclude a workbook analysis on how the writing exercises encourage pupils to use creativity in lower secondary school. For this study, I have chosen the 7<sup>th</sup> grade workbook by Sanoma Pro, the biggest learning material publisher in Finland (*Sanoma Pro*, n.d: n.p). I will show the number of creative writing exercises in relation to the other contents of the workbook and analyse how the exercises are presented. Therefore, this study may possibly help material designers in developing their tasks in a more creative direction.

The following two sections offer theoretical background for this study; Section 2 discusses writing in Finnish EFL education and in Section 3 I reflect the definition of creative writing as well present some studies focusing on creative writing in language education. I explain my research questions and hypotheses in the fourth section and discuss the methodology, alongside with materials, in the fifth section. The findings are shown and analysed in the sixth section. The study in its entirety is discussed and concluded in the last section.

## **2 WRITING IN FINNISH EFL CLASSES**

In Finland, English is studied as an A-language, which means that the vast majority of pupils begin their English studies in the elementary level of basic education (Tilastokeskus, 2012). Thus, by the seventh grade English has been studied for four years and the secondary school learning objectives are followed. As the Finnish education system tends not to divide language into different topics or areas but regards language as one unity, writing is not a specific subject in language education. Thus, writing is considered a skill or a learning strategy. However, the National Core Curriculum of Basic Education (2004: 141) sets, though not in detail, writing in English as one of the learning objectives.

### **2.1 National Core Curriculum for Basic Education**

Even though the new local curricula, based on the core curriculum renewed in 2014, will be prepared by the school year 2016-2017, this study focuses on the still current 2004 curriculum. For grades 7-9, different learning objectives in English as a subject are divided into three categories: language proficiency, cultural skills, and learning strategies. Language proficiency consists of more “traditional” language skills, such as oral communication skills and reading comprehension. Cultural skills refer to the understanding of both the target language culture and own culture in English. Learning strategies mean different working approaches and tools that help learning a new language. Subject areas, structures, and communication strategies to be taught in order for pupils to achieve these objectives are also specified in the National Core Curriculum (142).

The National Core Curriculum does not present the objectives of any category elaborately. Writing in English is mentioned briefly: “The pupils will learn to cope with somewhat more demanding informal conversational situations, also, and to relate, orally or in writing, everyday matters that also include some details” (2004:142). Writing is linked only to language proficiency, even though it can also be regarded as a cultural skill or a learning strategy. Creative writing, or even using one’s imagination in using different learning strategies, is not mentioned either. On the positive side, this gives the learning material designers considerable freedom to decide what kind of materials help to achieve the curriculum objectives.

## **2.2 Writing tasks in Finnish foreign and second language textbooks**

In the article based on their research on writing exercises in Finnish EFL and Swedish second language textbooks, Kivilahti and Kalaja (2013) give various benefits for writing in foreign and second language. They (2013: 90) state that written answers are permanent and can be planned as well as corrected. They also notice the lack of instruction regarding writing in the National Core Curriculum (2013: 91) and emphasize the importance of writing in the internet and social media use (90). Kivilahti and Kalaja studied both English and Swedish workbooks. The English workbooks had 600 writing exercises while the Swedish ones had 481 (Kivilahti and Kalaja, 2013: 94). They (2013: 95) analysed the tasks and divided them into four main categories: text, (sentences, compositions, and communicational exercises) grammar, information, (notes, abstracts, dictations, and information processing) and vocabulary.

Kivilahti and Kalaja (2013: 97) conclude that the writing tasks were mostly traditional; they lacked variation and the majority of the exercises focused on grammar. They also show that there were few composition exercises in the English workbooks (2013: 100). Thus, creative writing exercises such as story or poem writing were lacking. They also criticize the insufficient process writing instructions in composition exercises (2013: 101). Finally Kivilahti and Kalaja (2013: 110) criticize the fact that writing is presented as a way to learn other aspects in language, such as vocabulary and grammar, and not a target of learning itself. They suggest that writing techniques, such as process writing, should be taught from early on in foreign and second language learning (2013: 11). Asunmaa (2015: 25) came to a very

similar conclusion as Kivilahti and Kalaja (2013) in her study; she states the writing exercises in Finnish EFL schoolbooks follow uniform patterns. As Kivilahti and Kalaja's (2013) study resembles the one I conclude, I base my hypothesis partly on their findings; I assume that the results regarding the variation of creative writing exercises are compatible with their results on writing exercises in general.

### **2.3 Benefits of writing**

As aforementioned, Kivilahti and Kalaja (2013) name multiple advantages for writing in second and foreign language education. Writing is crucial in modern professional life where it is important to master writing CVs, job applications, reports, portfolios etcetera. Even though we read, and some of us even write, texts of different genres every day, Locke (2015: ix) argues that reading is emphasized too much in language learning. Therefore, pupils' writing skills are not at an adequately high level compared to reading skills. Locke also notes other benefits of writing in addition to the professional and practical ones. He states (2015: 1) that writing is a tool of self-expression and it helps people, especially children, in their identity forming. Locke notes that writing improves cognitive skills and helps to create new thought patterns (2015: 29-31). He also argues that writing, as a tool of communication, strengthens one's empathy for others: "When we write, we engage with the thoughts of others" (Locke, 2015: 72). Kivilahti and Kalaja (2013) argue alongside Locke (2015) that writing in different styles is one of the most important skills in second language learning. Therefore, as schoolbooks are still the most used learning materials, I argue that the writing exercises in EFL workbooks should show a great deal of variety and offer information on writing techniques.

Both Locke (2015: 74) and Kern (2000: 181) emphasize the fact that writing strengthens the knowledge of different genres. Kern (2000: 181) adds that writing in different genres fulfils communicative purposes. Kern also argues that writing in the second language improves first language writing, as information about genres, text styles, and registers in foreign language can be transferred to first language writing to some extent (2000: 177). Writing also gives pupils deeper understanding of different texts and their rhetorical moves (Kern, 2000: 185). Even though Kern (2000) names several benefits for teaching writing in second language, he

emphasizes the communicative and practical purposes of different kinds of writing, not discussing creative writing extensively. In the next section, I argue that creative writing, too, is a broad concept and that it has its practical benefits as well.

### 3 CREATIVE WRITING

It is not simple to give a clear definition to the term “creative writing.” Fiction writing and poetry can be easily defined as pieces of creative writing but there is disagreement on, for example, journal writing, biographical writing, and non-academic essay writing. In terms of creative writing exercises in second language learning, Kern’s definitions (2000: 191) are quite narrow; he does not include letter or journal writing, not to speak of grammar exercises, to creative writing. Maley (2009), on the other hand, disagrees with Kern and argues that in language learning, many kinds of exercises, such as the aforementioned letter and journal writing, can represent creative writing. He emphasizes that creative writing is about the playfulness of language and allowing pupils to express themselves freely: “CW texts draw more heavily on intuition, close observation, imagination and personal memories” (Maley, 2009). Donovan (2012) states that the term is subjective; one can regard very different kinds of texts as creative writing. Oxford Dictionary (online version), on the other hand, defines the term as such: “Writing, typically fiction or poetry, which displays imagination or invention (often contrasted with academic or journalistic writing)” (*Oxford Dictionaries* n.d.: n.p.).

The definition is also context-related; journalism is not traditionally considered creative writing. However, in this study it must be considered what counts as a creative writing exercise in Finnish EFL textbooks; textbook exercises instructing pupils to “make up” and write a news article certainly encourages pupils to use creativity in writing. Furthermore, I will not analyse the finished products but the exercises. Pupils may give different answers one exercise; an exercise like “make up your own sentences” can lead to continuous prose or poetry. For this study, I use the Oxford Dictionary definition of creative writing. Thus, if an exercise instruction contains a semantic choice that demands the writer to be creative or encourages creativity and using one’s imagination, I will analyse it as a creative writing exercise. So, if the exercise does not count as poetry, short story, letter, journal or essay writing, it has to contain phrases like “make up,” “imagine,” or “write your own” either in English or Finnish in order to be considered creative writing.



### **3.1 Creative writing in language education: theory, studies, and their findings**

There are several sources that support using creative writing both in first language and second language education. Kern (2000: 181) states that creative writing exercises often utilize process writing technique, which is a very useful writing skill in general. Even though Kern does not include letter writing in his definition of creative writing, he considers letter writing a very good exercise, as it teaches multiple skills and often represents a relatively authentic text (2000: 191). Kern (2000: 194) also argues that traditional creative writing, fiction and poetry, brings new perspectives into pupils' learning and helps them to express and process their emotions. Creative writing exercises often serve as refreshing breaks from analytical writing (Kern, 2000: 195) and are considered more enjoyable by the students (Ulaş et al, 2010: 148). Ulaş et al also (2010: 149) argue that creative writing improves writing skills in general. Bowkett (2010: 1) presents the same point and adds that creative writing helps pupils to organise their thoughts and learn about text structures. He also considers creative writing as a part of literacy as well as a way to develop it (2010: 2). Carter (2000: xviii) argues that going through pieces of own creative writing develops both self-reflection and giving feedback to others.

Studies show that creative writing has positive effects in various contexts. Lengelle et al (2013) studied the effects of creative writing course on students in work placement. They discovered that the students expressed themselves more verbally and were more open about their negative thoughts, as well as hopes and fears about the work placement (2013: 426). Therefore, Lengelle et al (2013: 426) concluded that creative writing exercises were beneficial for career learning. Urlaub (2011:103), too, studied university students and concluded that creative writing develops literacy and critical reading skills. He also argued that creative writing motivates students to study literature in second language further (2011:100) but emphasizes (104) that the environment for creative writing has to be supportive. Smith (2013), on the other hand, studied Japanese students learning English. She (2013: 12-14) discovered that creative writing can be used to combine form-focused and meaning-focused exercises; for example, writing poems in English could also be used to practice grammar as well as vocabulary. Smith's (2013) examples are one of the starting points of this study, as they show that creative writing is a larger unit than is typically thought. Smith's study (2013) is relatively new and it is, unfortunately, difficult to say whether the exercises she presented

in her article are actually being actively used. In fact, most of the aforementioned studies discuss the benefits of creative writing but do not reveal to what extent creative writing is used in second language education. I will discuss studies on that subject further in the next section and, later on, in my own analysis.

### **3.2 Research questions and hypotheses**

This present study is based on the following research questions:

1. What is the proportion of creative writing tasks in *Spotlight 7 Workbook* compared to all the other exercises?
2. How do the exercises connect to the other contents of the workbook?

Regarding the first question, the preliminary assumption is that, even with the wide definition chosen, the percentage of creativity-enhancing exercises is relatively low. This presumption is partly based on findings by Ulaş et al (2010) that showed the lack of creative writing exercises in Turkish language textbooks. I shall realize the second question by analysing whether the exercises aim to teach particular vocabulary or grammar item, focus on reading comprehension or if they are presented as independent composition titles. In the latter case, too, the presumption is that the exercises reflect the themes of the textbook chapters and that the number of independent composition titles is fewer than grammar -or vocabulary learning based exercises. This I base on Kivilahti and Kalaja's (2013) findings.

## **4 METHODS**

This section discusses the methods used to conduct the present study. First, the materials are presented and the reasons behind their choice for the research are discussed. Secondly, I will present the methods used in the data collection and analysis.

## 4.1 Materials

The data of the present study was collected from *Spotlight 7 Workbook*, Finnish EFL learning material for seventh graders written by Haapala et al. The first reason for choosing *Spotlight* is that the books are published by Sanoma Pro, the largest learning material publisher in Finland. Secondly, both the books were originally published in 2014 and the workbook was updated in 2015, so in terms of current Finnish EFL material they are relevant samples. The data is from the workbook but, as the workbook exercises are connected to the textbook chapters, the *Spotlight 7 Textbook* was also studied.

Both the *Spotlight 7 Textbook* and *Spotlight 7 Workbook* have six sections that are called ‘units’ in the *Spotlight* series. Textbook units consist of text chapters (A-chapters) and sub-chapters (B-chapters), comic strips, and non-writing exercises. The main themes of the units are both some of the “inner circle” countries of the English-speaking world by Kachru’s definition (2006: 10) (the USA, Canada, the United Kingdom, Australia, and South Africa) and Finland. The chapters discuss the characters, 13-year-old girls and boys, living in these countries. The sub-themes in the chapters include school, hobbies, fashion, and food. The workbook exercises follow the same themes.

The workbook units start with textbook chapter glossaries and are followed by *Log on* exercises that introduce the main chapter (e.g. 1A). After *Log on*, there are exercises that process the textbook chapters more specifically; many of them are vocabulary or reading comprehension exercises. Each unit also has a *Spotlight Plus* section, which contains a short text and tasks related to it. They are followed by *Grammar* sections, containing grammar information and exercises. After the grammar sections, there are *Listen* sections with listening comprehension exercises. Exercises related to B-chapters of the textbook unit are presented next. The units end with self-evaluations called *Spotlight on learning* sections. The workbook also has an independent work section, *Spotlight DIY*, in the last three pages. Glossaries and *Spotlight on learning* sections are not included in the analysis, as they do not contain any exercises.

## 4.2 Tools of analysis

A quantitative method was used to answer the first research question (see page 10): I calculated the percentage of creative writing exercises in relation to all the exercises in *Spotlight 7 Workbook*. In order to conduct the calculation, I separated creative writing exercises from other exercises, as stated before, by examining whether the exercise was story, poetry, journal, letter, or journal writing or whether it contained words such as “imagine,” “make up,” or “write your own.” However, the analysis, especially regarding the second research question, was mostly descriptive and was completed by using qualitative methods. I dealt with the second research question by defining different categories and sorting the creative writing exercises into those categories, in other words, using qualitative content analysis. Titscher et al (2000: 55) argue that traditional content analysis is quantitative in nature, focusing on only quantifiable aspects of text, but state that qualitative content analysis is basically analyzing the data from the point of view of categories. Thus, to answer the second research question, I created the following categories (a-d), examining whether the creative writing exercises represented a) vocabulary exercises (objective: to learn vocabulary connecting to the theme of the unit), b) grammar exercises (objective: to learn grammar items presented in the unit), c) reading comprehension exercises (objective: to deepen the understanding of the chapter), or d) independent composition titles.

The components of text to be categorized and analyzed are called units of analysis and they are defined by the researcher (Titscher et al, 2000: 56). Unlike traditional content analysis, qualitative content analysis does not analyze only the quantifiable aspects of text but categorizes units of analysis based on their content, context, and meaning. Thus, different patterns and larger items of text can be analyzed (Titscher et al, 2000: 64). Titscher et al (2000: 59) also argue that categories should be clearly defined and described by giving examples of the units of analysis. In this study, the units of analysis are workbook exercises. I will give examples of workbook exercises representing each category in my analysis of the results.

There was some overlap in categorizing and the distinction between different exercises was not always clear. The overlap occurred mostly in the last two categories, as even the independent composition titles connected to the themes of the textbook chapters and could be regarded as reading comprehension. The decisions regarding the “borderline cases” are

discussed in the following section, where I describe and give examples of the different exercises.

## 5 RESULTS

The results of this study are presented in this section. First, the results regarding the first research question are shown and discussed by comparing the results to previous research. Next, I analyse the results of the second research question and discuss each category more in detail by giving examples of different exercises. The conclusion and implications of the results are presented in the last section.

### 5.1 The proportion of creative writing exercises in *Spotlight 7 Workbook*

*Spotlight 7 Workbook* had 505 exercises in total. After the data collection and selection, out of those 505 exercises 88 were analysed as creative writing exercises. The percentage of creative writing exercises is thus 17.4 % (see Table 1). 56 exercises were embedded in the six workbook units and 32 were in the *DIY* section at the end of the book. The overall result is only slightly higher compared to previous research. Ulaş et al (2010: 152) concluded that the percentage of creative writing in seventh grade Turkish textbooks was only 14.7%, although it was unclear what they analyzed as creative writing exercises. Nevertheless, they show that the vast majority of all exercises were writing exercises and only a small part of them represented creative writing (Ulaş et al, 2010: 150). Asunmaa (2015: 19) showed that out of only writing exercises in a Finnish EFL workbook *Smart Moves 3*, the percentage of creative writing exercises was just 15%. However, even though Asunmaa used Kern's definition of creative writing narrower to the Oxford English Dictionary definition, the percentage of creative writing exercises in *Spotlight 9 Workbook* was as high as 30%, suggesting that the percentage is somewhat higher in other books of the *Spotlight* series as well, at least compared to workbooks by other publishers. The differences are not great, however. Unfortunately, Asunmaa does not show the total number of all the exercises (2015: 17), so it is difficult clearly define whether the books follow a similar pattern in this regard.

Even though the results are quite compatible with previous research by Ulaş and Asunmaa, I still expected lower results, as Kivilahti and Kalaja (2013) criticized the overly conventional nature of writing exercises in Finnish EFL textbooks. Another influential factor in the lack of creative writing exercises is that they do not have sample answers in teachers' materials and therefore, going through the exercises and checking the right answers is more time-consuming for the teachers than in the case of exercises with sample answers. However, the number of creative writing exercises itself does not reveal anything of the nature of the exercises. Kivilahti and Kalaja (2013: 110) argued that Finnish EFL textbooks had very little exercises that encouraged writing full texts. Even if the exercises semantically encourage pupils to use creativity in their writing, the answers must often be restricted to short sentences and using limited vocabulary and grammar items. So, regarding the second research question, the number of independent composition titles was not expected to be high.

Table 1 Creative writing exercises in total in Spotlight 7 Workbook

<i>Spotlight 7 Workbook</i> exercises in total	505
Creative writing exercises	88
%	17.4

## 5.2 Categorization of creative writing exercises

The results of the second research question did not come up to expectations either. Out of 88 creative writing exercises in *Spotlight 7 Workbook*, I analysed 21 (23.8%) exercises as **vocabulary** exercises (see Table 2). Most of them were situated in the *Log On* section or the parts of the workbook that process the textbook chapters. However, the *DIY* section also contained 5 exercises focusing on vocabulary. Overall, vocabulary exercises usually instructed pupils to use specifically words of the textbook chapters, glossaries, other exercises or some theme vocabulary (see example 1). The exercises often guided either writing short sentences or constructing own crossword puzzles (see Example 2).

- (1) **Jatka lauseita englanniksi sopivilla harrastussanoilla.** ‘Finish the sentences in English by using suitable hobby vocabulary’ (Haapala et al, 2015: 40).

1 I’m into \_\_\_\_\_

2 My friends are crazy about \_\_\_\_\_

3 My sister / brother is keen on \_\_\_\_\_

4 My mum / dad is interested in \_\_\_\_\_

- (2) **Laadi ristikko, jossa on Scrapbook Finland –tekstin sanoja.** ‘Make a crossword where there are words from the text Scrapbook Finland’ (Haapala et al, 2015: 35)

Making crosswords was almost left out from the analysis, as they typically represent form-focused exercises and instruct writing only single words. However, as making up an own crossword fit the definition of creative writing exercises instruct-wise, I decided to include them as well. Nevertheless, they are very restricted compared to the other creative writing exercises. There were also some difficulties in defining whether some exercises should have been analyzed as vocabulary exercises or composition titles. For example, in most units, there was an exercise which instructed to fill out a comic strip (see Example 3).

- (3) **Tee oma sarjakuvasi, jossa keskustellaan koulusta ja oppiaineista. Kirjoita englanniksi. Voit myös värittää sarjakuvasi.** ‘Make your own comic where school and subjects are discussed. Write in English. You can also colour your comic’ (Haapala et al, 2015: 87)

Even though the instructions tell the pupil to make a comic of their own, there is a comic with empty balloons right below the exercises instructions, suggesting quite clearly that the balloons should have captions. Thus, the exercise does not give as much creative freedom as the instruction of the exercise would first suggest. The comic itself offers a perspective too narrow to be analyzed as independent composition and, in addition, the vocabulary to be used in the comic is restricted in the instructions. Therefore, although there was more freedom in these kinds of exercises, they were still analyzed as vocabulary exercises instead of composition exercises. Overall, writing captions to the comic balloons exercises were one of the few vocabulary exercises that instructed pupils to write in continuous prose, in other

words cohesive and coherent pieces of creative writing. They also functioned as dialogue-exercises.

I categorized only 12 (13.6%) exercises out of 88 (see Table 2) as **grammar** exercises. All the grammar exercises were placed in the *Grammar* section of the workbook, making grammar exercises the only exercises that were placed to only one kind of section. Thus, categorization of grammar exercises was simple and there was no overlap with other categories. Grammar exercises were also marked with a capital G (for example, exercise G1). These, too, often instructed pupils to use particular words. However, the words always demonstrated the particular grammar item that was presented in the *Grammar* section. In Example 4, the words to be used are all verbs in their supine form:

- (4) **G5+ Kirjoita perfektikysymyksiä, joissa käytät seuraavia sanoja.** ‘Write questions in present perfect where you use the following words’ (Haapala et al, 2015: 92).

1 happened\_\_\_\_\_

2 remembered\_\_\_\_\_

3 heard\_\_\_\_\_

4 made\_\_\_\_\_

5 gone\_\_\_\_\_

The vast majority of grammar exercises instructed to write singular sentences or expressions; only two out of the 12 exercises encouraged pupils to write in continuous prose while using particular grammar items. Therefore, grammar exercises in *Spotlight 7 Workbook* do not represent Smith’s (2013) task types that aim at teaching grammar in the form of story or poetry writing. On one hand, it can be considered positive that there were not many creative writing exercises focusing on grammar. It is possible that this reflects the development of all language workbook exercises; it can be assumed that the number of form-focused grammar exercises is generally decreasing. On the other hand, it can be a sign of the still traditional design of grammar exercises and that the grammar exercises should still follow bound patterns and be easily checked.



The third category, **reading comprehension**, contained the lowest number of exercises. These exercises were situated in the chapter (e.g. A and B, see page 11) sections of the workbook. Only 6 (6.8%) exercises represented reading comprehension (see Table 2). There was also a great deal of overlap in these exercises: all the 6 exercises had elements of either vocabulary exercises or independent compositions. For example, one of the exercises instructed to use certain expressions and thus, it could have been analysed as a vocabulary exercise. I also categorized most of the letter writing exercises as independent compositions but some I analyzed as reading comprehension exercises. However, the exercises in this category tested the understanding of the textbook chapter and instructed to write about, for, or to the characters (Jack, Bryan, Sarah, Ronny, Naledi, or Avery) of textbook chapters (see example 5).

- (5) **Kirjoita Jackista englanniksi. Käytä lauseissasi tehtävän 2 ilmaisuja.** ‘Write about Jack in English. Use the expressions of exercise 2 in your clauses’ (Haapala et al, 2015: 12).

Nonetheless, the differences between reading comprehension exercises, vocabulary exercises, and composition exercises were not significant. During the data collection and selection, I considered excluding the reading comprehension category altogether and place all the exercises in three categories left. I considered also re-categorizing some of the vocabulary and composition exercises into the reading comprehension category, as they too followed the themes of the textbook chapters. However, I decided to keep the category, as the borderline reading comprehension exercises did not focus on vocabulary exercises per se and could not be analyzed as independent pieces either. I also decided to keep the borderline vocabulary and composition exercises in their original categories, as they did not focus on reading comprehension. Nevertheless, the categorization must be considered further in future research.

I placed 49 (55.6%) exercises to the **composition** category (see Table 2). The high number of composition exercises was arguably the most unexpected of all the results of this study, as Kivilahti and Kalaja (2013) state that the number of exercises that instruct writing full texts was very low in Finnish EFL schoolbooks. Granted, they studied all of the writing exercises in EFL schoolbooks. Nevertheless, considering the fact that the definition of creative writing used in this study includes a wide range of different exercises, I assumed the number of composition titles would be considerably lower. After the first time I categorized the

exercises, the proportion was as high as 61.4%. Repeating the categorization resulted in a somewhat lower percentage, as few of the exercises in the *DIY* section were re-analysed as vocabulary exercises. Of course, the composition category contains all the exercises that represent traditional creative writing and thus were easily analysed as such: e.g. stories and poems. Creating different sub-categories for the composition titles should be considered in future research, as the compositions represented a variety of different genres and text types, for example story-writing (see example 6), analytical essays, and sports or news reports (see example 7). However, the focus of this study was to examine the relationship between creative writing exercises to the other contents of the learning material and not the genres they represent. Many of these genres were discussed and regarded as creative writing by Maley (2009) and Donovan (2015). Letter writing, considered an extremely important skill by Kern (2000: 191), was also one of the most frequently occurred exercise types in this category.

(6) **Keksi kummitusjuttu. Kirjoita se englanniksi vihkoon (jos uskallat).** ‘Make up a ghost story. Write it in English on your notebook (if you dare)’ (Haapala et al, 2015: 132).

(7) **Kirjoita englanniksi vihkoon selostus jännittävästä urheilutapahtumasta, johon olet ottanut osaa, tai jota olet seurannut joko televisiosta tai paikan päällä.** ‘Write in English on your notebook a report about an exciting sports event which you yourself took part in, or saw on television or on the spot’ (Haapala et al., 2015: 68).

Similarly to vocabulary exercises, compositions were also placed in the *Log On*, chapter related sections, and *DIY* section of the workbook. In fact, 27 of 49 compositions were set in the *DIY* section. In other words, 55% of all compositions were in the end of the book. The main textbook units, therefore, contained each only three or four compositions on average. Furthermore, 2 of those three or four compositions within the units were in the last page of the unit before *Spotlight on learning* section. This section was called *Scrapbook*, the exercises of which processed some of the inner circle English-speaking countries. All of these exercises followed a similar pattern. In Example 8, the exercise instructs pupils to write about the United States of America:

(8) **Valitse yksi tai useampi projekti tai keksi oma aihe.** ‘Choose one or several projects or come up with your own topic’ (Haapala et al., 2015: 101)

- a. A city or a state in the USA
- b. A famous American actor, pop star, band or sportsperson
- c. A famous place or landmark in the USA
- d. The President of the United States

Technically, the instructions of these exercises do not ask pupils to write anything. However, “choosing a project” does not clearly define the execution of the exercise answer, so the answer could very well be given in a written form. In addition, as the instructions are ambiguous, the answers could represent even fiction. Thus, I analysed also these exercises as creative writing composition titles. Although the composition exercises overall were various in their topics and genres, the *Scrapbook* exercises lacked versatility in their instructions. However, due to the vagueness of the instructions, these exercises allow pupils to give diverse answers.

As stated before, 27 composition exercises were set in the *Spotlight DIY* –section in the three last pages of the workbook. Similarly to the *Scrapbook* exercises, some of the exercises did not specifically instruct pupils to write anything but could possibly be regarded as projects of other outcome, such as posters or presentations. Nevertheless, they fit the definition of creative writing in terms of “making up” or “imagining” the answer. The exercises in this section showed the most variation in their instructions and topics, though still related to the themes of the textbook. Even though composition exercises directed pupils to write longer and full texts, the instructions also encouraged pupils to use several different methods in order to complete the texts: drawings, photographs, research of background information, video recordings, and mind maps (see Examples 9 and 10). The *DIY* section also contained four titles that could be analysed as analytical essay titles. In other words, these exercises demanded a degree of self-reflection; describing oneself as well as one’s opinions and interests thoroughly and in detail (see Example 10).

- (9) **My home town // Etsi tai ota muutama kuva kotipaikkakunnastasi ja kirjoita niihin kuvatekstit englanniksi.** ‘Find a few pictures or take your own photographs of your home area. Write captions on them in English’ (Haapala et al, 2015: 208).

- (10) **This is me! // Kirjoita itsestäsi englanniksi. Pyydä opettajalta tehtäväpohja (Unit 1, TF) tai kirjoita vapaasti. Voit myös pyytää kaveriasi videoimaan sinua, kun kerrot kirjoituksesi avulla itsestäsi.** ‘Write about yourself in English. Ask the teacher for the exercise template or write freely. You can also ask a friend to film you while you tell about yourself with the help of your writing’ (Haapala et al, 2015: 208).

As the writing tasks in the *DIY* section were more elaborate, there were also instructions on how to carry the exercises through. These represent the instructions for process writing or process work: they encourage choosing the topic based on one’s own interests, planning the work, creating/producing, sharing the work for peer feedback, and evaluating as well as giving feedback oneself. So, process writing is taught and supported in *Spotlight 7 Workbook* to an extent. However, the *DIY* section is the only example where the process was given clear instructions encouraging pupils to divide their work on different stages. Other creative writing exercises did not contain instructions of this kind. Thus, it can be argued that the other exercises were not meant to be answered as thoroughly and carefully as the ones in *DIY* section. As the individual exercise instructions in *DIY* also contain several working phases and methods, it is clear that these exercises demanded more time and effort from the pupils.

Even though the composition exercises in the *DIY* section show a great deal of variety, the placement of these exercises in the last three pages is a controversial matter. Located in the very end of the book, *DIY* is practically separate from the workbook units. Of course, using these exercises in the classroom or active teaching depends on whether the teacher considers the materials outside the units as important as the exercises within the units. However, the term *DIY* already refers to ‘do it yourself.’ Therefore, it can be argued that *DIY* exercises are regarded as self-study and not something to be processed during class with the help of the teacher. It is also possible that they are intended for more advanced or active pupils in the classroom. On the other hand, some of the instructions encourage a very “hands-on” approach; these exercises may arguably be used in individualised teaching. Nevertheless, without having an access to the teachers’ material, it is difficult to say how these exercises should be used in teaching.

Table 2 Creative writing exercises in *Spotlight 7 Workbook* according to categories presented in section 5.2

Category	All	%
<b>A) Vocabulary</b>	21	23.8
<b>B) Grammar</b>	12	13.6
<b>C) Reading comprehension</b>	6	6.8
<b>D) Composition</b>	49	55.6
<b>Total</b>	88	100

## 6 CONCLUSION

The goal of the present study was to examine how creativity-enhancing exercises are presented in Finnish secondary school EFL learning material. Even though only one book was used in the data collection, the results reveal important information of creative writing exercises in *Spotlight 7* books from a major Finland-based publisher, as well as show the stress points of EFL education in relation to workbook exercises. The results can also prove to be useful for future learning material designers regarding the number, quality and presentation of creative writing exercises. Moreover, the results may possibly help future teachers in their lesson planning and teaching; with the help of the present study, the teachers know what kind of creative writing exercises this particular piece of learning material offers and can find extra material for the exercise types and areas that were not greatly emphasized in the studied workbook. Especially the lack of creative writing in grammar exercises and reading comprehension should be noted by the teachers.

However, the results showed that there are creativity-enhancing writing exercises in *Spotlight 7* and the majority of those exercises were composition titles, thus, encouraging pupils to write full texts and elaborate answers. Nevertheless, the results regarding the proportion of creative writing exercises were similar to previous studies stating the inadequate number of these exercises. In addition, as genre knowledge and the ability to produce various kinds of

texts is crucial, a greater emphasis should be put on the instructions of the even the creative writing exercises. Creative writing exercises, with their benefits to learning and writing skills in general, should be taught from the point of view of process writing and not just something separate from other language skills.

The categorization was vital in order to answer the second research question. Nevertheless, the categorization was at times problematic, as there was, to some extent, overlap between the exercises. As only four categories were used and the exercises showed a great deal of variety, there were many cases where the sorting out to only one category was challenging. This problem could have been solved by fabricating more categories, or alternatively, using categories used in some previous research. However, suitable categories regarding the research question were not found. Nonetheless, I explain reasons behind the categorization choices in the results and give examples of exercises sorted out into each category, including the challenging cases.

There is still much research to be done in this field of study. More Finnish EFL textbooks, and possibly non-Finnish textbooks in comparison, as well as other learning materials, should be studied from the point of view of creative writing in order to get a wider understanding of creative writing exercises in Finnish EFL material. In addition, it would be worth knowing if the teachers actually utilize creative writing exercises in their EFL teaching. Arguably, however, the most important aspect in EFL learning is the learners themselves; their views, attitudes, and perceptions on creative writing should be studied further.

In conclusion, the writing exercises in *Spotlight 7 Workbook* encourage using creativity to a larger extent than was first expected. However, there should be more variation in regards to the exercises that develop other language areas in than just writing itself. The results showed the areas in need of improvement and it would be beneficial to take them into consideration when planning future EFL materials.

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